

SERMON: October 14, 2018 Pray for Those in Authority  
TEXT: 1 Timothy 2:1-7  
SUBJECT: Remembering God first  
THEME: Our first citizenship is in heaven.  
PURPOSE: That we would have honesty and integrity in our political discussions.  
PICTURE: Wesley quote

We have two interesting perspectives that I want to look at today – that of the Apostle Paul in the first letter to Timothy, and that of John Wesley during the British election of 1774. Both of them, I believe, can help us through our current political turmoil!

When this letter was written to Timothy, things were not good. Hostility against Christianity was rising; local communities and leaders were persecuting the believers, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to follow Jesus.

And yet, in the midst of this kind of persecution, we find these words:

***I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.***

Why would we pray for those who are persecuting us? For kings and mayors and politicians and all of those in authority over us, especially when they are misusing their power to bring us harm?

This sounds like a weak-willed life, just letting people walk all over you, accepting any injustice that comes your way. Was Paul telling us to become doormats and to simply accept whatever the government does to us?

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Over the years many people have interpreted this passage like this. “Just accept what happens and roll with it. God put them there, so you have to put up with it.”

I don’t believe that this is what Paul means here. To pray for someone does not mean that you agree with them, and it doesn’t mean that you pray and do nothing else. As we saw last week when Paul spoke of praying for people and anointing them with oil, prayer is always to be coupled with action!

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I can pray for the city council of Marco Island in many different ways. I can pray for wisdom. I can pray for courage. I can pray that they would listen to the will of the people instead of special interests. I don’t have to pray, “Dear Lord, may all of our elected leaders on Marco get everything they want and lots of ice cream, amen.”

To pray for someone is not to just ask God for good things to happen to them. It could be to ask that they are brought to a decision point where they have to face their actions. I'm not going to pray evil on anybody, but I can pray for pivotal moments.

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Paul had been unjustly imprisoned, beaten, torn from his friends, lost everything – and yet he saw that this world is not eternal. What we do in this world has eternal consequences, but this isn't heaven yet! So Paul had compassion upon even those who were persecuting him, and asked those whom he loved to view others from a heavenly point of view. Even the Emperor needed Jesus! And Jesus even loved Caesar.

So how can I pray evil against someone whom Jesus loves? I should pray for their salvation, their influence, what God can do through them.

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Now, let's look at John Wesley –

In 1774 there was a general election coming up in Britain. At that time England was technically a democracy, but, it was a very corrupt system.

Very few people had the right to vote. If you were a woman, tough luck. No vote for you.

If you were a man, it was possible that you MIGHT have a vote, but since only 3% of the people had that right, it was highly unlikely. Those who could vote were the wealthy who owned land and were already involved with the corrupt government, and they were unlikely to elect someone who would reform society and cause them to lose money, power, and position.

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In my studies on this, I cannot find any evidence that John Wesley himself had the right to vote! We take it so much for granted now, but it hasn't always been that way. And the election that was coming up in Britain in 1774 was critical, because it set up the current Prime Minister Lord North against Henry Seymour Conway, and Lord North was responsible for the government actions which led to the colonies revolting a few years later.

While Pastor Wesley himself may not have had a vote, there were some Methodists in England who did. So John took it upon himself to speak to them and to give them his advice.

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John was a strong supporter of the king and the British constitution. He felt that they were the best form of governance in the world, and that this so-called “liberty” being promoted in the colonies was, at the time, not true freedom. He pointed to the fact that slavery in America was, in his opinion, the vilest form of slavery ever to exist in human history, and that its only existence was for the economic benefit of the slave-owners. John Wesley condemned this, saying that “no benefit is worth any injustice made to receive it”. To make money off of the exploitation of others was sin.

As a result, John and other Methodist pastors were beaten, condemned, and even other pastors preached sermons against him, stating that he was preaching something contrary to God’s will.

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So the election of 1774 was a critical election, and violence and hate talk and the spreading of lies and rumors and gossip was rampant. Homes and families were torn apart; friends refused to speak to one another; all sides were angry and hostile and considered the others to be ignorant, close-minded, and a danger to true leadership.

Don’t you love it when I preach on irrelevant subjects that have no connection to our own world?

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To tell you the truth, I have been nervous about preaching this sermon. The reason is, people usually don’t listen to hear what God might be saying through their pastor; they usually listen to hear if the pastor agrees with what they already decided in their minds is the truth.

And the other unfortunate fact is that pastors often stir up the flames even more by becoming partisan themselves and preaching a political viewpoint rather than the Gospel.

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How should we as Christians address politics? We cannot deny that it is a thorn in our world today. Should pastors and churches just retreat to a “sweet by and by” theology that completely ignores the realities of today’s world, or should we get directly involved with using our power and authority to make a difference?

John Wesley thought and prayed long and hard about this, and then he called together all of those Methodists that he knew had the power of a vote, and he gave them these instructions:



"I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them, 1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy: 2. To speak no evil of the person they voted against: And, 3. To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side."

— John Wesley, October 6, 1774

<https://bobbiblogger.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/wesley.jpg>

Although Wesley may have had some very strong opinions about Prime Minister North and his policies towards the poor, what did John say about him?

Nothing. He went back to the root of our free will – ***you choose to support the one that you believe is most closely aligned with God's heart.***

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John encouraged the men of his day not to vote for someone because that candidate would make life easier for them. Don't vote for the person who says that they will bring more wealth your way. In truth, they most likely will not; and secondly, we should never become wealthy at the expense of those who are least able to speak for themselves. The exploitation of the poor and children and women was horrendous in those days, and John worked to get laws changed so that people could be free.

John said to vote for the person you deem most worthy – who values humility, compassion, and works for true justice.

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Pretty radical words, aren't they? But the hardest part of John Wesley's admonitions come next –

***SPEAK NO EVIL OF THE PERSON YOU ARE VOTING AGAINST.***

Wow – is that even possible?

A study that I saw recently stated that we are currently in the most negative-attack campaign season that we have every experienced in recent history. The majority of the ads are not based upon the virtues and beliefs of a particular candidate or referendum; they are designed to attack the opposition and spread fear.

Johns says “Don’t do this!” Speak no evil against the opposition! I believe it’s because that’s the tactic of Satan, not Jesus!

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The enemy wants for us to be suspicious, angry, and hostile to each other. Jesus wants for us to be compassionate, loving, and gracious to each other. That’s how He treated the people that were persecuting Him, and that’s how He defeated the devil. He calls us to follow *His* example, not Satan’s!

But it’s so hard! When lies are being spread about the candidate or the resolution that I support, my human reaction is to fire right back and to show how bad the other side is! But in the end, it causes more division and pain.

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I want to stop for a minute and tell you what I hope is the end result of our worship today – I am not here to change anybody’s opinion of who they should vote for or what resolutions they should vote “Yes’ on –

What I want for us is to adopt the kind of perspective that John Wesley and the apostle Paul found in their own situations – the ability to step back and ask, “What would God have me to do right here?”

I want for us to remember that no earthly kingdom or nation is going to be represented in heaven. This is all temporary. You are not going to be a Democrat or a Republican or an Independent in heaven. You are not going to be Lithuanian or American or Episcopal or male or female. We are not going to be Raiders fans or Jets fans.

All of those things will pass away. The best description I’ve heard of it is that God’s presence is light, and when we are in the presence of such pure, brilliant light, we aren’t even going to want to look at anything else! They won’t matter to us!

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My goal for today is that I myself and all of us will listen to God’s Spirit. I pray that He would convict me and all of us of our temporary loyalties, and that we would see things from His perspective. I pray that we would be less concerned with the Republican or Democratic perspective, and more concerned with bringing hope and healing to the world around us.

This is what we find in the rest of our passage from Timothy –

***God...wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all people.***

In the end, only Jesus matters. And only people's relationship with Jesus matters. Government is good, if it seeks to create a nation where people are treated the way that God wants for us to be treated. Where justice and compassion work together, and people are more concerned for the rights of others than they are with claiming their rights for themselves.

This is what it will be like in heaven. That's when we will have true peace. That's when we will have true liberty. That's when we can truly pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

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I don't want to make anyone mad today, but I do want for us all to ask the uncomfortable question, ***"Does the way I live and the way I vote help others to know Christ better, or am I just living and voting for myself and people already like me?"***

I want to look at the third part of John Wesley's admonition to voters –

***Take care that your spirit is not sharpened against those that voted on the other side.***

I was asking our group on Wednesday when the phenomenon of "trash-talking" came into play in professional sports.

Do you know what I'm talking about? "Trash-talking" is belittling or insulting your opponent, whether on the field or off the field, to get them upset so that they will make mistakes in the game. It's deliberately trying to get inside your opponent's head to cause them to mess up.

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One of our group was saying that he noticed it becoming prevalent in the 1970's in professional basketball – saying things that only the guy you are defending can hear, talking about his mother, his wife, his girlfriend – that kind of thing.

But it has spread, hasn't it? Now almost every game or sporting event has a pre-game news conference where someone talks bad about the other team.

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And it's in politics – so when Father John tells us to not "sharpen our spirits against those who voted differently", what do you think he is telling us?

(TAKE ANSWERS)

Satan is trying to get us to believe that if someone disagrees with us, then they must hate us. I disagree with the choices that my children made many times – does that mean that I hate them?

Let's take a poll – what are these things called?



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My wife disagrees with me on whether they are called “lightning bugs” or “fireflies” – should we go to war about this?

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We can disagree without being ugly about it. I don't need to be rude or uncivil to you if we don't agree on something, and you don't need to condemn me if I have a different opinion.

But what we do need to do is to make the cause of Christ more important than our own particular politics. In the end, we do not trust in horses or chariots, as Psalm 20 says. Our trust is in the Lord.

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I pray for you during this election season, and I ask that you pray for me. Let's be less concerned with winning people to our side of the argument, and more concerned with being kind to each other. Don't underestimate the power of kindness to change someone's opinion.

I know that this is a very raw time for us. We have households divided; we have friends who won't speak to each other. Let us, as believers, try to follow John Wesley's rules, and make a difference.

We're not going to convince everybody, especially those who are most vocal. But maybe that's not whom we need to convince.

Maybe by our humility and by acting as people of peace, we will influence those who are watching from the sidelines. Those who aren't sure whom they believe yet, and are looking for something more than partisan politics.

Your grace and compassion during a political debate could be what God uses to bring someone on the fringes closer to Him. The world needs to see more Christians exhibiting grace under pressure, not shouting at each other.

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Paul said that he wanted to be a true and faithful teacher to the Gentiles. His Jewish friends said that he was betraying the cause – going to those dirty, despicable people. They were Gentiles! They can't be redeemed!

And Paul said, "My service to Christ is more important than my political beliefs."

Let us pray –

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**2** I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— **2** for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. **3** This is good, and pleases God our Savior, **4** who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. **5** For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, **6** who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. **7** And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.