



## **UNITED BY HOPE – Part 6**

### **Exalting Jesus in an Election**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open it to 1 Peter 2, where we will consider together how to exalt Jesus in an election. In our journey verse by verse through 1 Peter, we now find ourselves, two weeks before our presidential election, in a passage in God’s Word on politics and how Christians relate to government.

It’s no secret that we live in tense days in our country. As the church in our country, we’re in a very serious time. We desperately need to hear from God and definitely not from me. Which is why I want to be crystal clear that my aim today is not to share my political opinions, preferences, convictions or calculations, because that’s not my job as a pastor with God’s Word in front of me. My job as a pastor is to show you what God clearly and directly says in His Word about how to exalt Jesus, not a political platform or party or candidate, in an election. I sincerely want to help you exalt Jesus during these days according to God’s Word.

For those of you who are not Christians, I’ve heard many of you share discouragement and disappointment about ways you see and hear churches and pastors interact with politics, to the point where you may even find yourself drawn to Jesus but pushed away by the church. If that’s you, I invite you to please stay with me here. My aim is to so exalt Jesus in the next few minutes that you might be captivated by Him and drawn to trust Him with your life. That’s what I’m going for. Maybe the best way I can put it is to say I’m really concerned about our country right now, but I’m more concerned about where you are going to be a billion years from now.

So God, please help me to exalt Jesus alone. Please help me to be faithful to Your Word, not pandering in any way to the applause of people or politicians, but to proclaim Your words so Jesus might be exalted in Your church in our day, that people might know and enjoy Him for all eternity. Amen.

I should also add that some, I think many of you, don’t want to think about the election right now. You’re weary and tired—I get that. So am I. Yet God’s Word we’re about to see has so many applications that I believe will nourish your soul well beyond the election, and I pray it will draw you closer to Jesus amidst the myriad of other things that are going on in your life right now.

So 1 Peter 2. Let me remind you as a church that we’re memorizing 1 Peter 1 together, being through verse 12 now. Keep up with that memorization, hiding God’s Word in your heart. We’ll pick up today in 1 Peter 2:13, where we read these words from God:

*<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

As we read this passage, keep in mind that we've actually studied it before as a church together. I'm going to give you some reminders of what we've seen before, then we're going to build on those today. We've seen that as followers of Jesus we're submissive citizens of a government. What does verse 13 say? We're "subject," according to God, for His sake, "to every human institution." It goes on to mention emperors as supreme leaders and governors. We're subject to human institutions like the government.

This means that unless the government is directing us to disobey God, then we submit to them. This is part of why we're gathered like we are right now, with limited seating and people in masks. It's because we believe our government, specifically in the state of Virginia, has given guidelines for the good of people. We're willing to follow those guidelines. That's why at this point we're still waiting to gather in Montgomery County, Maryland. We're inclined by God's Word to submit to government whenever we can.

We believe it's wise, in order to care for each other, to have appropriate protocols in place, including—at least at this point—everything from registering to doing temperature checks and spraying in between services. Even if many of us feel great physically even if many of us are not at risk as far as we know, we're willing to make sacrifices and take precautions for the sake of people, including groups of people who are more at risk in our church, in our community or in our city.

I would ask you to be praying in particular for William, a friend of mine and a brother in Christ, who has faithfully led worship in MBC Latino for a long time, who has been in the hospital for multiple weeks and who by God's grace just came out, but he has had serious complications due to COVID. I would ask you to pray for the family of Pastor Peñaloza, a Hispanic pastor at Ekklesia Church in Reston whom we've partnered together with in ministry, who just died of COVID.

As we pray, we will say we are glad to lay aside some of our preferences for the good of others, which is the purpose of government. We've seen how 1 Peter teaches that government is instituted by God for two purposes. First, government is sent by God to punish those who do evil—in other words, to restrain evil. Second, the government is to praise those who do good, to promote good. These are the basic functions of government according to God in 1 Peter 2. In any country, a government is designed by God to restrain evil and promote good, and we are to be submissive citizens of a government that is doing that.

Then ultimately, on a higher level and as we've seen before, we are free servants of God. We're told in 1 Peter 2:16, "*Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.*" So we're free servants. You might think that's an oxymoron, but that's actually the

beauty of verse 16. True freedom is found in serving God. This makes sense when you think about it. After all, Who is God? He's your Creator Who loves you and has made you. He knows and desires what is best for your life. So the most full and free way to live is as His servants. This means we are free servants of God, so our ultimate identity as Christians is not as citizens of a country but as servants of God. That changes everything about how we view an election and live in it.

As servants of God, our ultimate allegiance is to God, not the American government and definitely not to a political party in the American government. As servants of God, our ultimate concern is not to save America with all of its earthly benefits; our ultimate concern is to exalt Jesus regardless of what happens to America. As servants of God, our ultimate passion is not the survival of this nation; our ultimate passion is the spread of the gospel in all nations.

Without question, we are extremely thankful for the United States and all the freedoms and benefits that are afforded here. We're extremely thankful for all, including many in our church family, who protect and preserve these freedoms and who work in government. We want to steward these freedoms and benefits for God's glory and others' good while we're here. Yet God's Word clearly tells us the United States is not our ultimate country. Remember 1 Peter 2:11? We are sojourners and exiles here.

So non-Christian friend, let me make this clear. When we invite you to follow Jesus with us, we're inviting you to live for another country, a heavenly one. It's not a country that will one day fall, but a country that will never, ever, ever fall for all eternity.

At the same time as we're on our way to that country, we are sojourners, exiles and submissive citizens of this country. So then how do we exalt Jesus in an election in this country? According to God's Word, here are four ways we can do this. I'm going to show you how these ways come from 1 Peter 2, not from me. This is not me talking; it's God speaking.

## **1. We exalt Jesus in an election by taking evil seriously and avoiding it.**

We've already seen that 1 Peter 2 is clear: government restrains evil by punishing those who do evil and by protecting people against evil. We also see here in verse 16 that followers of evil avoid evil in our lives. This verse talks about the temptation to cover up evil, to hide it or to minimize it. This is why I use this language of taking evil seriously and avoiding it, because I see temptations in an election to treat evil lightly, to minimize, overlook or cover over it—or even engage in it in different ways.

This is where I do want to sound an alarm today that our country is in serious danger of evil on so many different sides. God's Word sounds this alarm for us. Just yesterday, our 31-day Prayer Guide for our country involved praying through Romans 1, a passage that shouts the seriousness of sin.

Now, before I give specific examples of taking evil seriously, let me say one other thing. Even as we address the seriousness of sin and evil, that which is not good according to God, I know I am talking to people, including myself, who have sinned and who will continue sinning. We have also been sinned against and will be sinned against in a fallen world filled with evil. So as we consider the seriousness of sin

and evil—and this is personal to each of us, specifically to everyone who has trusted in Jesus—I want to remind you that you are forgiven by God Himself Who has wiped your slate clean and made you a new creation. When God sees you, He sees the spotless righteousness of Jesus.

All the more so for those of you who have been sinned against or violated in evil ways, I want to remind you today in a fresh way of the God Who alone is able to heal you deeply and restore you beautifully in this evil fallen world. I emphasize this, because I fear that when we start talking about issues like abortion or sexuality, our rhetoric can be so charged with red meat for the crowd, when real people's hearts are really hurting. Real people who have had abortions, who now hate abortions, but still feel scars from the past. Real people who struggle with their sexual preference—please do not hear the church saying, “You're an outcast, alone in that struggle.” You are not. We are with you.

We all struggle in different ways, so even as we talk about that which is sin or evil in this fallen world, we do so with tenderness toward people—in light of the past, in light of scars and struggles in the present, in light of the fact that we all must take heed lest we fall in the future. As we consider what God's Word says about evil, I would ask you to listen more soberly as we consider sin.

How do we exalt Jesus by taking seriously evil amidst issues in an election? We exalt Jesus by taking seriously the life of a child in a mother's womb. We abhor abortion. We hate what is happening to children across our country. It is not an option for followers of Jesus to say that abortion is okay or not a big deal. Abortion is an extremely serious deal of genocidal proportions. We love children in the womb and we love the moms who carry them, which means we take seriously the evil practice of abortion in an election in our country—including all the evils in the world that lead to a woman considering or having an abortion.

In addition we take seriously the evil distortion of God's good and beautiful design for males and females made in His image across our country. We hate the havoc our culture is wreaking, causing so many people to think God messed up when He made you, that you were born in the wrong body which is just not true. God loves you as the boy or girl, the man or woman He made you to be. By the way, we also hate the way Christians have sometimes responded in very unloving ways to you.

Similarly, we take seriously the sinful redefinition of marriage that God has designed from the beginning of creation, for one man and one woman to join in covenantal union together. According to God, any other definition of marriage is not good.

We also consider other issues. We take seriously the dignity and equality of every single person made in the image of God, which means we detest any and every expression or evidence of racism. We take seriously the oppression of the poor and the weak. We take seriously the persecution of people for their faith, including any attempts by government to restrict the liberty of Christians, churches, ministries or other people of faith from living according to their faith. We take seriously these and so many other political issues. One of the challenges that any list of issues is inevitably selective. There are so many

issues we could mention. So get to know all the political issues at stake in this election, then take seriously evil in any of them according to God's Word.

Similarly, we must take evil seriously in the lives of political leaders according to God's Word. We take seriously unrepentant sexual immorality in political leaders. We take seriously boastful pride and arrogance in political leaders. We take seriously vulgarity and dishonesty in political leaders. We take seriously name-calling and strife-stirring in political leaders. When we hear a leader objectify and sexualize women, ranking them and degrading them with X-rated terminology with no repentance, we do not say, "It's no big deal. Get over it." The way men talk about women is a huge deal and we don't get over it. We do not say that a leader's character or words are minor or unimportant or irrelevant.

We take seriously who a leader is, particularly when that leader has influence to affect an entire country. As followers of Jesus, we do not and cannot look past any of these things that are clear in God's Word. It is tragic, amidst the church in our day—even in attempts by Christians on different sides—to promote a particular party or candidate, seeing at any point a minimization or evil, even an overlooking of evil.

Brothers and sisters, we do not exalt Jesus by minimizing or overlooking the reason for which He died. The cross of Jesus is a declaration to the world that sin is infinitely serious. It cost Jesus His life. Sin kills. Evil destroys. All the sins and evil we just listed lead to death—eternal death. This is why we must never, ever, ever treat sin lightly in others, or in us. Even as we vote, making decisions between sinful candidates, we can still exalt Jesus in an election by taking sin seriously, never minimizing it and by avoiding it in our lives.

This means we avoid in our lives any and all semblances of strife-stirring or name-calling. We avoid pride in our own hearts. We flee sexual immorality in our own lives. It is hypocrisy to feign concern over sexual trends in our culture when Christians in the church are engaged in all sorts of sexual thinking, desiring and acting outside of marriage, including the majority of men engrossed in pornography. How do we exalt Jesus in an election? By taking evil seriously—around us and in us—and avoiding it. That's one way, according to 1 Peter 2.

## **2. We exalt Jesus in an election by promoting good continually—and doing it.**

. First Peter 2:15 says, "*This is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.*" The will of God is to do good in the country where you live. You promote good in your country and do good in your lives as the church.

So let's take all the things we just mentioned and look at them positively. Let's promote the preciousness of life in the womb and volunteer at pregnancy care centers. Let's foster children in need—either to restore them to their parents or adopt them into our homes. Let's spend time at the NICU in the hospital with kids who don't have parents to care for them. Let's spend time with single parents or in low income communities where kids have far fewer opportunities.

Indeed, let's care for children in the womb, but let's not ignore them once they're out of the womb. Let's be for all of life, not just the first nine months of it. Let's be for women with unwanted pregnancies, walking right there beside them. If the zeal from so many in the church on abortion legislation and judicial appointments would also be matched by a zeal to love children and women in our communities and cities, we could change the climate of abortion in our country.

And yes, let's promote God's good design for sexuality, so when a brother or sister in Christ struggles with same-sex attraction, let's not isolate or ignore them. Let's love and share life with one another. Let's promote God's good design for marriage. Let's live it out as husbands, laying down our lives to serve our wives. Let's live it out as wives, joyfully following husbands' sacrificial leadership. Let's show the picture and the power of the gospel in marriage. What God has designed is so much better than anything this world could ever create.

Let's resist any and every expression of racism, standing boldly on behalf of anyone affected by it. As the people of God, let's care for the poor and provide for the sojourner. Let's live with sexual purity, integrity, humility and honesty. Let's relate to other people—in person and on social media—with kindness, gentleness, tenderness, patience, sympathy and selflessness. With speech that is gracious, fair, encouraging, edifying, never slanderous, always seasoned with salt, that's building up everyone who hears us. Let's exalt Jesus, not just by talking about good, but by doing it.

This is where I want to praise God again for His grace in you as a McLean Bible Church family. Instead of debating and disagreeing about when and how to gather for an hour a week during a pandemic, as a church family, you have spent multiple thousands of hours distributing over five million pounds of food across the city in a pandemic, all with the gospel in hand. Many people have come to faith in Jesus as a result. This is how we exalt Jesus in an election, by promoting good continually and doing it.

### **3. We exalt Jesus in an election by honoring everyone, especially leaders.**

First Peter 2:17 couldn't be any clearer: "*Honor everyone.*" Everyone. Let's just think about who that includes. Honor the child in the womb and the mom who carries him or her. Honor the orphan and the widow, the poor and the oppressed. Honor the immigrant and the refugee. Everyone. Honor them all, God says. Honor includes law enforcement officers who daily risk their lives to restrain evil, protect people from it and to promote good, including many in our church family who do this. We honor them.

Now, who else does "honoring everyone" include? It includes honoring your enemy. They're included in everyone. It includes honoring your critic. It includes honoring your political opponent. They're all in the "everyone." Then the Bible says—just to make sure there are no exceptions—"*Honor the emperor.*" Honor the President, no matter who it is. Honor each candidate for President. They're both included in "everyone." Honor them with the way you speak about them and think about them as image bearers of God, with the way you pray for them and respect them. That's what this word "honor" means—to regard highly and respect.

You say, “Well, how can I honor and respect this person when they believe this or do that or promote this or support that? Surely that’s not what this verse means.” Brothers and sisters, this verse actually means more than that. Peter wrote this command from God in a day when Nero was likely the emperor. For little background on Nero, he was so paranoid about plots to assassinate him that he had his stepbrother killed, then he had his mother killed, then he had his wife killed. Then when fires raged across Rome, Nero falsely accused Christians of starting them, leading to massive persecution of followers of Jesus. They were crucified, sewn into wild beast skins, fed to dogs, burned on poles to light up the city at night. This is the same emperor who hung Peter upside down on a cross for following Jesus.

The Bible says, “Honor him.” In other words, even if you disagree with a leader’s character, choices, actions, policies, are to honor him or her. Treat them with respect. If this command applied to God’s people in Rome then, it applies to brothers and sisters in North Korea, Sudan and Iran today. It most certainly applies to you and me in the United States. In obedience to God, we exalt Jesus in an election by honoring everyone. Our honor should be evident, especially among leaders.

#### **4. We exalt Jesus in an election by loving the church and bending over backward to maintain unity together.**

First Peter 2:17 says, “*Love the brotherhood.*” Isn’t that interesting? In the middle of this passage that specifically deals with how Christians relate to government, God says, “*Love the brotherhood*”—a specific reference to the church, to brothers and sisters in Christ. Love them. I added this language of “bending over backwards to maintain unity together” in light of the clear command in Ephesians 4:3 to be eager to “*maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” We are eager to do that.

So why is this important for Christians to do in relation to government and politics in the world? Well, remember what Jesus taught in John 13:35: “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” The world, including the country around you, will know you are followers of Jesus if you love one another. That’s what will make your identity in Jesus as the church evident to the country around you—your love for each other.

Then four chapters later, Jesus prays for us, and listen to what He prays for specifically in John 17:20-21: “*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word*”—through the word of His disciples—“*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*”

Did you hear that purpose? So that our unity in the church doesn’t just say something about us to the world; our unity says something about God to the world. Our unity says something about the gospel to the world. Our unity makes clear to the world that God the Father sent Jesus to save all those who believe in Him from their sin. In other words, people’s eternity is dependent on seeing unity in the church. If

they're going to see a clear picture of Jesus and His love, then they must see unity in the church. This is very serious—not just for our good, but for other people's salvation.

So in an election, when there is so much political division and tension, we exalt Jesus by not letting that division and tension creep into the church. Do not divide the church over political positions, convictions or calculations that are not clear and direct in God's Word. This is why we have said at McLean Bible Church that we will not divide among our members over their votes. Remember the rope illustration a few weeks ago? We will not divide from one another over voting, and our pastors—including me—will not tell people to vote for this candidate or that party.

Why not? Are we afraid to do so? Well, I guess in a sense I am, but maybe not in the way you would think. "*Fear God,*" 1 Peter 2:17 says. Yes, I fear calling you to do something that I cannot show you clearly and directly in God's Word He has called you to do. I fear calling you to do anything that God has not specifically called you to do. I am afraid of putting words in God's mouth that He has not spoken.

Now, that doesn't mean I'm silent. No, I have full confidence calling you to oppose abortion and defend the lives of children in the womb, because God makes His work in the womb clear in Psalm 139. You cannot follow Jesus as a member of this church and advocate for abortion. I have full confidence to call you to promote a biblical understanding of sexuality and marriage, because God makes His definitions of male and female and marriage clear in Genesis 1 and 2 and throughout the rest of the Bible. You cannot follow Jesus as a member of this church and disregard God's Word in these ways.

I have full confidence calling you to care for the oppressed, the poor, the orphan, the widow and the sojourner, because God says these things numerous times to His people in His Word. You cannot follow Jesus as a member of this church and be calloused toward the oppressed, the poor, the orphan, the widow or the sojourner. I have full confidence calling you to never affirm or overlook sexual immorality, boastful pride, vulgarity, dishonesty, name-calling and strife-stirring—in your life or others' lives—because God has said throughout His Word that all of those things are deadly.

So then, how do you vote? For this candidate, for that candidate, for a third candidate, for no candidate? I don't have a verse that answers that question for you. Different genuine followers of Jesus will therefore come to different conclusions on the answer to that question. Assuming you are applying God's Word as prayerfully, wisely and faithfully as you know how to your political decisions, then we will not break fellowship in Christ over these decisions.

Now, as soon as I say that I realize some people think we should break fellowship in Christ over voting. Some people think, "I cannot be in the same church with someone who votes for Biden." Other people think, "I cannot be in the same church with someone who votes for Trump." If you think either of these things, then I say this as thoughtfully and compassionately as I know how: McLean Bible Church may not be the right church for you, because we are not going to divide over the vote here. If you think I or other pastors in this church should promote a political candidate or party, and you think this is worth dividing the church over, then I'm sincerely sad about that, because I treasure our fellowship together in



Jesus. But at the same time, I'm truly happy for you to be in another church. As long as that church is preaching the gospel, we don't begrudge you in any way. I am sincerely hopeful we will both be able to live for the spread of the gospel to people who don't know Jesus across our city and beyond our city, albeit from separate congregations in this world. That's fine and good.

Certainly not every Christian in Metro Washington, DC, needs to be at McLean Bible Church. We're not in competition with other Bible-believing gospel-preaching churches in this city. We want to see all kinds of churches thriving for the spread of the gospel to people who need Jesus. I'm most happy that one day we're going to be in heaven together forever. But mark it down for McLean Bible Church: We do not align with a political candidate or party here, and our fellowship together in Christ does not hinge on your vote.

Now, let me be clear. I'm not saying that in this church you can't or shouldn't have very strong opinions, even convictions, about how Christians vote. Based on Romans 14:5, I would actually encourage you to have strong convictions and even to share them with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet much like we see in Romans 14 and 15, there's a way for followers of Jesus to hold tightly to Him and to His Word while disagreeing, even strongly, about convictions we have in this world. Individually, we will all steward our vote and our voice according to our convictions, as men and women who are accountable to God and His Word. Some of us will even campaign or work for political parties or candidates according to our convictions, which is right and good. But let us be clear about the banner that brings us together as the church. McLean Bible Church is not for the Republican Party; McLean Bible Church is not for the Democratic Party. McLean Bible Church is for the Bible, which means McLean Bible Church is not for Trump and McLean Bible Church is not for Biden. McLean Bible Church is for Jesus alone. We want that to be clear for every member of this church; we want that to be clear to a watching world. We want to shout to the world, "As the church, we are for a far greater, higher, better King."

Non-Christian friends, we're for the King Who died on the cross for sin. We all deserve judgment before God for our sin. But Jesus, God in the flesh, has come and lived a sinless, perfect life. Though He had no sin for which to die, He chose to die on a cross to save you and me from our sin. He showed His kingship, not by being elected, but by being executed. Then three days after He died, He rose from the grave. Ladies and gentlemen, 39 U.S. Presidents have lived, led and died; their bodies are all still in the grave. But not our King. He's alive. He walked out of the tomb, He ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father, and one day soon, the Father is going to say, "It's time, not for Your election; it's time for Your exaltation." Then Jesus is going to rise from His seat, a trumpet is going to boom from the sky and Jesus is going to come back.

All the nations of the earth—including the United States—are all going to crumble. Every eye will see that Jesus is the King. So brothers and sisters in Christ, we are ultimately not for a presidential candidate; we are ultimately for the providential President over all presidents, King over all kings, and Lord over all lords. We are for Jesus Christ, period. We're a holy nation, living as citizens in this temporary

nation, which means we live and die proclaiming His glory, His beauty and His supremacy in all nations until He returns.

That's why, non-Christian friend, we urge to trust in Jesus as King today, before it's too late. You need what no presidential party or candidate can ever give. Do not walk away from this church gathering today thinking, "I need that candidate or that party." Walk away realizing you need Jesus. I implore you today to become an exile with us in this world, to become a citizen of a Kingdom that will never, ever, ever end.

Will you bow your heads with me? I want to ask, "Have you bowed the knee to Jesus as King in your life? Is Jesus King of your life? Have you put your faith in Him to be forgiven of all your sin? Have you said, 'You are Lord of my life'?" That is the question that will determine where you will be a billion years from now.

So I invite you, if you cannot answer yes to that question to pray right now, saying, "Jesus, I choose today to follow You as King." Ask God to forgive your sins. Pray, "God, I've sinned against You and need what Jesus did on the cross for my sin to cover over me. I need to be forgiven by You. Today I put my faith in Jesus as my Savior and as Lord of my life." If you pray that, know that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved and will become the citizen of a Kingdom when you put your faith in this King.

Jesus, we praise You. There is no one like You. You alone are worthy of our trust. You alone are worthy of our allegiance. You alone are worthy of our hope. We love You and pray You'd help us exalt You in all these ways we've just seen in Your Word, especially during these days as the church in this country.

Help us exalt You, Jesus, by taking evil seriously and avoiding it, by running from it in our lives. Help us exalt You, Jesus, by promoting good continually and doing it, bringing glory to Your name in our country. Help us exalt You, Jesus, with this countercultural command to honor everyone, especially leaders. Help us honor President Trump. Help us honor former Vice President Biden. Help us honor every President who comes into office in our country and all the leaders around them.

We pray You would help us exalt You, Jesus, by loving one another well. We pray what You prayed for us in John 17, that we would be one as You are one—Father, Son and Spirit. Give us this kind of oneness, we pray. Help us as Your church to make Your supremacy known in our country where we so desperately need You. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus our King. Amen.

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