

**ESSENTIAL ATTITUDES PRIOR TO THE ELECTION**  
**SELECTED SCRIPTURES**

Wednesday afternoon I was flying home from the ACBC conference in Indianapolis. As I was going through security, the officer at the x-ray machine saw a newspaper with a headline about the previous night's vice-presidential debate poking out of my computer bag. "Did you watch the debate last night?" he asked me. "No, I was at a conference and was unable to see it." He shook his head. "I don't want to say anything about either of the presidential candidates, but how did we end up with *them*? If even one of the vice-presidential candidates was running for President I could vote for him, but what did we do to deserve the two we have running for President?" And then he waved me through the metal detector without giving me a chance to respond.

I have heard and read statements similar to his in many different contexts — people who are frustrated, anxious, fearful, and angry about the process and the presidential candidates.

The question I want to ask this morning is, "How should the believer think about these things?" and specifically, "what kind of attitudes should he have as the election looms?" At least one attitude was implied in the last message in this series — a readiness to be submissive and obedient to the officials that are elected in four weeks.

We could talk about a number of biblical principles the believer should have: joy, contentment and peace, trust in God, thankfulness, and hope (confidence) in God. And we will address some of those in a future message, but this morning I want to address two attitudes: one attitude that primarily is related to you and your own heart, and a second that relates to our relationships in this church body.

**WHAT KIND OF ATTITUDES SHOULD THE BELIEVER CULTIVATE PRIOR TO THE ELECTION?**

This morning, we will identify two essential attitudes to cultivate prior to the election:

**1. Preserve (and Train) Your CONSCIENCE**

- ✓ Three possible ways to vote in the presidential election
- ✓ Apply the principles of the conscience in voting

**2. Protect Our UNITY (Eph. 4:1-3)**

- ✓ Lovingly ENDURE with one another (vv. 1-2)
- ✓ Actively preserve our UNITY (v. 3)

## 1. Preserve (and Train) Your CONSCIENCE

- Three possible ways to vote in the presidential election

- ✓ Actually, about six months ago, one writer [[Tony Reinke](#)] identified 12 different voting options:
  - Political apathy, skip the vote altogether because it lacks Christian priority to begin with.
  - Refuse to vote based on a settled conscience-based objection to the major presidential options.
  - Refuse to vote to send a message to a politician or a political party for reform, and vocalize the decision.
  - Refuse to vote as act of “settled judgment” on America, and vocalize the decision.
  - Refuse to vote for President, but vote on issues and congressional races and everything else.
  - Vote for a third party or write-in candidate with no hope of winning, and vote on everything else.
  - Rally around one particular third party or write-in candidate who could perhaps be given a chance to win, and vote on everything else.
  - Vote for cancellation by casting a vote for the candidate opposite the one you most oppose by cancelling out one of their votes.
  - Vote utilitarian by choosing the major candidate by using a lesser-of-two-evils mentality.
  - Vote utilitarian by choosing a major candidate based on who would appoint the best SCOTUS judges.
  - Vote utilitarian by choosing the major candidate who would most likely avoid global warfare and the death of civilians.
  - Pack up and flee before the wall is finished.
- ✓ I’m going to synthesize those to three primary options (these are the three most dominant options proposed by believers) and the biblical/theological rationale behind each of them:
  - [Thabiti Anyabwile](#) justified his vote for Clinton this way:
    - ... “A good number of people liken the choice between Clinton and Trump to a choice between Stalin or Hitler. Some argue there is no *lesser* evil—only evil....If we’re not just being hyperbolic with the comparison, but we truly believe ours is a choice tantamount in our context to Stalin or Hitler, then the question is, *How do you defeat them both? Both.* Neither should rule. Either is bad for *everyone*. Honestly, I don’t know how you defeat them both.... For me, compelled by the brutal realities, I now have to act, play my part as an individual citizen. I have to vote. And, regrettably, unless there’s a third party tsunami, *which I’d happily ride*, I have to vote for either Clinton or Trump because one of them will win....I feel the need to cast a vote—a vote *against* someone....
    - ... “To summarize: I think the evil is real. Consequently, my conscience is aroused and I feel obligated to act in a way that attenuates the evil—in this case, vote. That leaves one question:

Who to vote for? [I am going to] vote for Clinton. Okay... take a deep breath. Count to ten. Pray....Neither candidate represents any of my values....But Clinton represents the status quo, a steady state of affairs in that regard. Trump is the revolutionary, the rebel it seems without a clear cause. His prescriptions are not only draconian but also erratic. When I add the loathsome race-baiting, the misogynistic views of women, the isolationist foreign policy notions, the equivocating on abortion, the advocating of war crimes and escalation of conflict even with allies, I'm left looking at a revolutionary that would cast us in sentiment and law back to the 1940s at least....To be clear: Voting against Trump by checking Clinton does nothing to advance any of the issues I care about. So this is not a vote for Clinton or her platform. This is not an endorsement as some so ardently want to suggest. It's one man's vote for the status quo rather than the self-styled 'outsider' whose first step in potentially destroying the country is destroying his party."

➤ [Wayne Grudem](#) justified voting for Trump this way:

... "I did not support Trump in the primary season. I even spoke against him at a pastors' conference in February. But now I plan to vote for him. I do not think it is right to call him an 'evil candidate.' I think rather he is a good candidate with flaws....He is egotistical, bombastic, and brash. He often lacks nuance in his statements. Sometimes he blurts out mistaken ideas (such as bombing the families of terrorists) that he later must abandon. He insults people. He can be vindictive when people attack him. He has been slow to disown and rebuke the wrongful words and actions of some angry fringe supporters. He has been married three times and claims to have been unfaithful in his marriages. These are certainly flaws, but I don't think they are disqualifying flaws in this election....

... "To my friends who tell me they won't vote for Trump because there is a chance he won't govern at all like he promises, I reply that all of American presidential history shows that that result is unlikely, and it is ethically fallacious reasoning to base a decision on assuming a result that is unlikely to happen. Consider instead the most likely results. The *most likely* result of voting for Trump is that he will govern the way he promises to do, bringing much good to the nation. But the *most likely* result of not voting for Trump is that you will be abandoning thousands of unborn babies who will be put to death under Hillary Clinton's Supreme Court, thousands of Christians who will be excluded from their lifelong occupations, thousands of the poor who will never again be able to find high-paying jobs in an economy crushed by government hostility toward business, thousands of inner-city children who will never be able to get a good education, thousands of the sick and elderly who will never get adequate medical treatment when the government is the nation's only healthcare provider, thousands of people who will be killed by an unchecked ISIS, and millions of Jews in Israel who will find themselves alone and surrounded by hostile enemies. And you will be contributing to a permanent loss of the American system of government

due to a final victory of unaccountable judicial tyranny. When I look at it this way, my conscience, and my considered moral judgment tell me that I must vote for Donald Trump as the candidate who is most likely to do the most good for the United States of America.”

- The “I can’t vote for either” vote has been articulated by [Russell Moore](#) (cf. also [Denny Burk](#)):
  - ... “...what happens in a race where Christians are faced with two morally problematic choices? Should voters cast a ballot for the lesser of two evils? This unpredictable election cycle could go in any number of directions, and I keep getting asked this question. For starters, unless Jesus of Nazareth is on the ballot, any election forces us to choose the lesser of evils. Across every party and platform, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Still, the question is a valid one. Believing in human depravity doesn’t negate our sense of responsibility. By the standard of God’s law, every person is a liar, but that doesn’t mean we should hire an employee we know has a pattern of lying. Jesus taught that all who have lust in their hearts are adulterers, but that doesn’t mean a woman should shrug her shoulders when she learns her potential new husband is a serial philanderer....
  - ... “When considering the question of choosing between the lesser of two evils, we must begin with voting is within our system of government. In our system, *citizen* is an office; we too bear responsibility for the actions of the government. Just as the lordship of Christ made demands for public justice on office-holders in the New Testament (Luke 4:15), the same is true for those who rule as citizens. The apostle Paul taught that the sword of Caesar is given by God to commend good and punish evil (Rom. 13:1-5). The Bible addresses the limits of this role, recounting those who use the sword in unjust ways and are held accountable to judgment (i.e., Revelation 13)....
  - ... That said all political issues are not equal. I’ve voted for candidates I disagreed with on issues like immigration reform or family medical leave because I’ve agreed with them on the sanctity of human life. I could not, though, vote for a “pro-life” candidate who is also for racial injustice or war crimes or any number of other first-level moral issues. There are some candidates I agree on issues like economic growth or national security for whom I could not vote for because they deny the personhood of the unborn or restrict religious freedom for all people....
  - ... In the cases when I’ve voted for an independent or written in a candidate, I didn’t necessarily expect that candidate to win—my main objective was to participate in the process without endorsing moral evil. As Christians, we are not responsible for the reality of our two-party system or for the way others exercise their citizenship, but we will give an account for how we delegate our authority. Our primary concern is not the election night victory party, but the Judgment Seat of Christ. When Christians face two clearly immoral options, we cannot rationalize a vote for immorality or injustice just because we deem the alternative to be worse. The Bible tells us we will be held accountable not only for the evil

deeds we do but also when we “give approval to those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32). This side of the New Jerusalem, we will never have a perfect candidate. But we cannot vote for evil, even if it’s our only option.”

✓ And as an aside, this is all predicated on two assumptions:

- It is biblically permissible to vote (it is a liberty I *can* practice; Scripture does not prohibit me from voting).
  - ... Titus 3:1 (in the context of our relationship to governmental authorities) tells us to “be ready for every good deed” and 1 Tim. 6:18 tells believers to be “rich in good works” and the context indicates doing good things broadly for those around them. It certainly would include something like voting so that we are affirming those who are good and righteous for the broader good of the culture.
  - ... When Israel was in captivity in Babylon, Jeremiah instructed the people, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” (Jer. 29:7). Certainly casting votes for candidates we believe to be honorable and righteous is doing good for those around us (and ultimately us also).
- It is biblically permissible *not* to vote (it is liberty and as such I do not have to practice every liberty; Scripture does not mandate that I have to vote).
  - ... There is no mandate in Scripture that we must vote since democracy was not known in either the OT or NT. The emphasis of biblical writers was simply to be submissive to and content with the leaders God has appointed (e.g., Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:13ff; 1 Tim. 2:1-2).
  - ... Not voting for a particular office up for election also is a conscience issue for some; they believe they have the right to vote, but some candidates are so morally reprehensible that they cannot affirm either of them with their vote.
- If both these assumptions are true, then it is also permissible to vote for some things and permissible not to vote for other offices (e.g., one might not vote for the President, but he will vote for candidates for house, senate, and various state races).

• Applying the principles of the conscience in voting

- ✓ It is clear from the arguments of all three possibilities that with at least the first two options, all are supposing and guessing what the best/worst option for the next President is going to be.
  - And the truth is that no one knows. We do not and cannot examine hearts and we do not know the future. We are guessing how men will act in the future. [So be *very* careful about speaking authoritatively, “this candidate *is worse* than the other...” Or, “This candidate will/won’t \_\_\_\_.” We just don’t know.]
  - That being said, we do have a track record for what each of the candidates is; they have made decisions and spoken with their mouths and their hearts have been revealed (**Lk. 6:45**). Every word a man speaks demonstrates what he is internally. And that is what leads people in the third category to say, “both are evil, and I cannot endorse either...”

- ✓ A few months ago, we saw that Paul identified in Romans 2:15 that every person everywhere has a conscience that convicts them of sin and affirms them for righteous deeds. As we looked at the conscience, we also identified that believers should cultivate a godly conscience.
- ✓ As we think about this election, believers need to spend some time thinking about their own consciences and training them to think biblically. Let me summarize a few principles that we looked at back then:

➤ **Remember your conscience (and the way you use it) is not perfect (1 Cor. 8:10-12)**

... There is much in this passage, but of importance this morning is recognizing that while everyone has a conscience, not everyone's conscience is accurate — some are **weak** and can't enjoy eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols (without feeling the conviction of their conscience that they are sinning). Others are **strong** and they can eat without feeling like they are sinning. The point that Paul is making is that no one has a perfect conscience and that people's consciences will vary on all kinds of different topics. Let's apply that to this election:

- You have a belief, conviction, conscience about how to vote (particularly for the president); you need to vote according to what your conscience is telling you is right. Do not violate your conscience and train yourself to ignore this God-given gift.
- Allow others to vote their consciences and do not despise, rebuke, or become angry and argumentative against them. Earlier I quoted from three men who affirmed three very different ways of voting in the election. I agree with one and disagree with two, but I have benefitted from all three of them in other areas; I own and have read their books and/or listened to their sermons. They are godly men attempting to do the right thing before the Lord; when your brother votes differently from you, assume he is attempting to do the same thing.

... Be aware that while we want to (and should) assume our consciences are right, they are not always right. And we may have different standards from others on the same issue and neither is sinful. There will be variations in what our consciences believe to be right and wrong. Because that is true, we need to train our consciences...

➤ **Train your conscience by the Word of God (1 Tim. 1:19).** Here Paul talks about the priority of **fighting the good fight** of faith in Christ (v. 18). In other words, "be faithful to Christ and the gospel." How?

... By **keeping faith and a good conscience**. Faith and conscience are linked together.

... To keep faith means, "to preserve with your life the objective realities of the gospel." **Faith** in this verse is not "believe," but as a noun it is the content of what we believe — the doctrinal and biblical truths that we believe that constitute our core beliefs. So Paul means that we live in the same way that we have been saved — we live according to and by the gospel.

... And the only way to know the faith and the gospel is to know the Scriptures. (Cf. also 1:5)  
If we want our consciences to operate truly, they must be informed by Scripture.

... The mind, informed by the Scriptures is essential to having a good conscience that rightly evaluates our lives and leads us to good living.

... As one pastor said, both instruction and conscience “are necessary in the struggle against erroneous doctrine and behavior. Without them there is no tenacity or resilience to carry on the fight. And those who deliberately reject these weapons will eventually suffer ‘shipwreck in regard to their faith’ (v. 19b).” [Swindoll]

... **How can you train your conscience?**

- **Train your conscience by educating it with biblical truth (1 Tim. 1:19)** — “A regular diet of Scripture will strengthen a weak conscience or restrain an overactive one. Conversely, error, human wisdom, and wrong moral influences filling the mind will corrupt or cripple the conscience.” [MacArthur, *Vanishing Conscience*, 39.]
- **Train your conscience by educating it with truth** — sometimes our consciences are misinformed and inaccurate because we’ve given them wrong information — in relation to the election that might be because we have failed to correctly read and research the candidates’ positions and actions on various key issues.
- **Train your conscience by re-educating it with biblical truth (e.g., Gal. 2:11-14).** Though Peter knew the truth, he needed to be reminded of it because at a key moment he acted contrary to what he knew to be true.

... **How can you train your conscience on issues related to this election?**

- What are the responsibilities and privileges of the believer in relation to the government? (E.g., do we have to vote? do we have to vote for every office?)
  - What are the relevant issues in the election and what does Scripture say about them? If you haven’t resolved your understanding of the Bible’s teaching on things like abortion, war, capital punishment, race, economics/debt, and social action you need to do that.
  - What do the Scriptures say about the responsibilities of government and leaders and who among the various candidates fits those requirements? All candidates will be “flawed” (sinners), but some have a life-long patterns of sin that may disqualify them (e.g., using Moore’s example: if you hire anyone in your business, you are hiring someone who has lied — and is “flawed” in that way, but if you are hiring an accountant, you’d never hire a pathological liar — he/she would be disqualified for that position).
- ✓ One of the difficulties for the believer in this election is that there are no obviously easy answers. Good people whom we love and trust have different ideas about how to vote in this election. And that means that we are going to have to do some work and thinking for ourselves prior to this election.
- ✓ And godly people will have different ideas about how to vote in this election. I suspect that all three primary ways of voting will be represented by people in this room. The issue then is, “how will we relate to one another when we have strong differences politically?”

## 2. Protect Our **UNITY** (Eph. 4:1-3)

### • Lovingly **ENDURE** with one another (vv. 1-2)

- ✓ When we see the word **tolerance** we should not think of worldly definition that approves any kind of behavior — the “virtue” of people who don’t believe in anything (Chesterton)
  - The word is used 10x by Paul —
    - ... of tolerating persecution (1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Thess. 1:4)
    - ... of tolerating Paul’s preaching (2 Cor. 11:1, 4)
    - ... of tolerating each other to the point of forgiveness (Col. 3:13)
    - ... of “tolerating” sound doctrine / teaching (2 Tim. 4:3)
  - The word means to endure and “hold up” or “put up” with difficult behavior — when others are both an irritation and when they sin against us.
  - The word is also a present tense, which means this is to be the regular activity of the believer.
  - And notice that he says **for one another** — implying that we all need this extended towards us — I not only need to practice it, but I need others to practice this with me as well...
- ✓ How is this endurance demonstrated?
  - We intentionally are humble, gentle, and patient with others (v. 2).
    - ... Am I humble with others, understanding that I am made of the same depraved flesh?
    - ... Am I gentle and meek with others, willing to waive my rights to restore the relationship?
    - ... Am I patient, understanding that the Lord has been patient with me?
  - It is demonstrated **in love** — i.e., we commit our will and affections to the needs of the other believer regardless of the cost to ourselves.
    - ... It is possible to bite the lip and just “endure...” But here he says that it is done in love — with affection so that we do not harbor bitterness.
    - ... The way to cultivate this kind of love (which is admittedly not natural) is to be grounded in the love of Christ (3:17, 19). We cannot love others fully until we’ve known the gracious love of Christ.
  - We endure with each other not out of sheer will, but out of overflow of the love we’ve received from Christ. (Note the emphasis on love in this passage — 4:15-16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23)
  - Regarding the election, we endure with one another because all of us are speculating about the future and what we think might happen after the election. However, we are certain of two things: 1) we are called to endure with one another, and 2) we *are* unified (v. 3). So it is more important that we love one another (Jn. 13:34-35) than we are proven right about the election.
- ✓ How is this going to work?
  - Someone sins against you (*again*, and *again* — think Peter in Mt. 18:21-22); or a believer (!) irritates you or ridicules you, or even ostracizes and persecutes you (don’t think it can’t happen — it has, here). Or someone chastises you for your choices in the election.



- You say in your heart to yourself, “I will endure with this person; I will not respond in kind...”
- You add, “I will respond *in love*; I chose to extend affection and forgiveness to that person...I choose to love the one who appears not to love me.” (Be careful about judging appearances!)
- Here is the principle of tolerance and endurance with others — we are merely extending to others what God has extended to us in infinite grace. I endure others because God endures me!

• **Actively preserve our UNITY (v. 3)**

- ✓ Biblically speaking, unity is not something that believers or the church produce.
  - Notice the text — **unity of the Spirit** = the Holy Spirit is the One who generates unity.
  - In no way is unity accomplished or produced by believers.
    - ... Unity was prayed for by Christ in the Garden (Jn. 17:20ff)
    - ... Unity was accomplished by Christ on the cross (**Eph. 2:14-16**)
    - ... Unity is produced and given by the Holy Spirit (**Eph. 2:18; 4:3**) — it’s His unity.
    - ... Implication — we do not and cannot make unity; we already have it. God’s church *is* unified.
- ✓ So what is our responsibility in relation to unity? The Ephesian believers and we are to be diligent to *preserve* the unity we have received from the Holy Spirit.
  - **Be diligent** has a sense of urgency and haste — be zealous. Spare no effort. Make it a priority.
  - **Preserve** = “keep,” “guard,” make sure it remains unharmed — ready for its intended purpose (e.g., v. 13; Js. 1:27; 2 Tim 4:7; Jude 6, 21).
  - Both verbs are present tense — always be at this task of preserving the unity we’ve been given.
  - The principle Paul is making is that our unity in Christ is greater than any preferences over which we may differ. We cannot let secondary issues divide us and destroy primary concerns.
- ✓ So how is this unity protected? What do we do to keep the unity we’ve been given?
  - The bond that keeps believers unified is **peace** — Christ came preaching peace (2:14, 15, 17), and the message of the gospel is peace (6:15), and peace is a gift of God to believers (1:2; 6:23). We have been reconciled to one another through Christ, so let all your relationships in the church reflect that reconciliation.
  - We will preserve the unity God has given us when we pursue peace with one another.
  - How can we maintain unity?
    - ... The NT Epistles repeatedly stress our unity through commands tied to “one another” —

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| ✓ Love one another (19x)                    | ✓ Admonish and encourage one another |
| ✓ Live peaceably with one another           | ✓ Greet one another                  |
| ✓ Participate in the membership of the body | ✓ Forgive one another                |
| ✓ Be devoted to one another                 | ✓ Serve one another                  |
| ✓ Honor one another                         | ✓ Bear one another’s burdens         |
| ✓ Be of the same mind with one another      | ✓ Submit to one another              |
| ✓ Accept one another                        | ✓ Encourage one another              |

... Use our words to speak the truth in love so that we all grow into Christ (vv. 14ff, esp. v. 16)  
— which means that we will never allow preferential issues (like voting) to divide us.

### **CONCLUSION:**

It's tempting to forget the things that are most important in this election — we become so concerned about who will or will not win election that we forget our responsibilities before the Lord.

- ✓ In this election, honor the Lord by informing your conscience biblically and then voting accordingly.
- ✓ In this election, honor the Lord by lovingly enduring one another and protecting the spiritual unity of the body of Christ.

**BENEDICTION:** Rom. 11:33-35