



Agreeing to Disagree and Deal Breakers: Ephesians 4:2-6, 16; Matthew 5:13-16, 44

October 20, 2024

By Pastor Joshua Clough

Group Leader Notes

Today we begin a short series on religion and politics, *Breaking Points: When Religion and Politics Collide*. Religion and politics collide in our everyday lives with friends and family, at work, online, and in our social media feeds. When it comes to politics, we are divided on many issues, and for those of us who follow Jesus, even how we vote, our faith values. When it comes to politics, the tension and conflict we feel can lead us to a breaking point. So, what do we do when religion and politics collide?

Questions: When it comes to religion and politics, what is the pathway towards a healthier engagement for the disciple of Jesus?

Bottom Line: Your candidate will win or lose in a matter of weeks. There are things we'll agree and disagree on, but the church will win or lose based on how you treat each other.

Take Home Message:

On many matters, we can agree to disagree. However, as fellow Christians, we must agree that we choose to follow Jesus and live out his vision for us.

Main Scripture Readings:

Ephesians 4:2-6, 16

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Matthew 5:13-16, 44

¹³ 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ 'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to

everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:44

⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Other Scripture References

John 17:11, 20-21

Acts 15:39-41

Teaching Points:

- Both views are valued and work together:
 - *Conservative values:* We conserve and value and maintain what is good and beautiful about our traditions and values; we conserve what is handed down from one generation to the next.
 - *Liberal values:* We are open to reform and new ideas, which means being generous in spirit.
- From *The After Party: Toward Better Christian Politics* by Curtis Chang and Nancy French Finding our way toward better Christian politics requires ...
 1. *Investing in relationships:* When we talk politics, we're talking about our friends, parents, siblings, relatives.
 2. *Learning humility and hope:* The word disciple means learner (in Greek). We are all on a journey to be more like Jesus. We don't have all the answers; we need a willingness to listen.
 3. *Loving your neighbor:* What we long for most is making a positive difference in each other's lives.

Group Discussion

Begin in prayer before reading and discussing the text.

1. Let's begin with a pulse check on how we are feeling as we approach the Presidential election. Would you describe yourself as feeling anxious, indifferent, frustrated, hopeful, or excited? Is there another word that best describes your current feelings? This question is more about how we feel and not who and what you support.
2. The message quoted Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17:20-21
 - A. What relevance does Jesus' prayer have in our current cultural moment?
 - B. Being one does not mean agreeing on anything, but it's a call to unity. Why do you think oneness is so critical to the church?
 - C. What are ways we can grow in our unity as Christ-followers?

3. Pastor Joshua mentioned that the problem is that our modern political system has made the two sides an echo chamber unto themselves to the point where the other side becomes the enemy. Have you experienced or witnessed this? What roles do you think our modern mediums, like 24/7 television and social media, play in fueling partisan viewpoints?
4. Curtis Chang said that anyone who is married understands that agreeing to disagree is a fundamental cornerstone for how to live together. Ask your small group for issues that they have chosen to agree to disagree on. Why is this so difficult to do with political issues?
5. Curtis Chang also strongly advised us not to reduce anyone to an artificially constructed binary choice forced upon them by the national political system. Take a moment to consider whether you have labeled anyone according to their political beliefs or perhaps if you have been a victim of this. Ask volunteers to share their personal experiences.
6. What spiritual practices will you implement or commit even deeper to in your life to help create more unity around you and also provide peace, clarity, and even joy to your soul this election season?

Let's Pray

Dear Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit help to mold and shape us into people who seek to learn and listen, who seek to be challenged by others who might see things differently. Help us to develop a deep passion for loving you, for loving our neighbors, even our enemies. When it is most difficult, help us to be salt and light so that from us emanates your love and our grace, even on those matters that we feel so passionately about. Your call to love others is greater than any disagreement that we might experience. At the most fundamental level every one of us is a child of God, and if we can remember to treat each other in that way we might make a difference in people's lives, ultimately that people would see you through us. Help us to be the salt and the light of the earth. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.