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Sermon Notes

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Politics and Faith: BFL Class #1

“My Kingdom is Not of this World, but My Children are Still in this World”

I. A Decaying Orbit: Evangelicalism and American Culture

A. Our Immediate Context: An Imminent Election

1. Ashamed of politics

G.K. Chesterton: “Seemingly from the dawn of man all nations have had governments, and all nations have been ashamed of them.”

This seems especially true of American Christians now

2. The choices seem bleak... the “lesser of two evils”

3. On the one hand, Hillary Clinton, and her aggressively anti-Christian views on abortion, and religious freedom, and the gay agenda

4. On the other hand, Donald Trump, and his disgusting views on women, and his erratic nature, and his dubious spirituality, and his seemingly corrupt business past, and his xenophobic views on immigration and Muslims

5. Some desire not to vote at all; others say they’re going to “hold their noses” and vote for Trump; I’ve heard very few evangelicals advocate voting for Hillary, but some who have a heart for race relations or the urban poor are willing to “hold their noses” and vote for her

6. The whole thing is very distasteful to many... and it can be divisive; some are very concerned about Christians not voting, saying we have a moral obligation to vote and stay involved. It is

easy for factions to develop within the church, characterized by judgmentalism

B. Al Mohler: The Briefing, October 10 (the day after the “Town Hall” debate)

1. Argued against the “great evangelical embarrassment” of acting as apologists for Donald Trump’s reprehensible moral character
2. Traced out history of evangelicalism’s political activism—which he said was only a generation old
3. Spoke of the “marriage of convenience” between evangelicals and the Republican Party because of the Democratic Party’s decisive move in 1972 to embrace the mores of the sexual revolution of the 60’s and the untouchable sacrament of abortion on demand; the Republican Party opposed these stances and thus became the political partner of the evangelical movement
4. But with this election, it is clear that there is a man (Trump) who embodies everything evangelicals have always stood against when it comes to morality
5. The fact that there is no major party candidate that represents biblical Christians leaves us asking serious questions about political involvement

C. Understanding the Kingship of Jesus in the Mixed Public Square

1. Jesus is King over all!!

Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father.

Ephesians 1:20-22 [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Revelation 19:11-12 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

Abraham Kuyper: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”

C.S. Lewis: “There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan.” [Christian Reflections, p.33; Ashford, 24]

2. BUT... the world is PRESENTLY MIXED... like the parable of the wheat and the weeds
3. How is Christ’s Kingship exerted over those who do not yet profess allegiance to him as King?
4. How should Christians express Christ’s laws, commands, values, morals to those who are spiritually dead?

D. Bruce Ashford: *One Nation, Under God*

1. Christians seem particularly divided by politics now
2. For the past few decades, many evangelicals strongly embraced an active role in politics while actually retreating from other aspects of popular culture—the arts, entertainment, and science

Ashford: “We evangelicals have never stopped wanting to change our country, but we’ve too often voluntarily limited ourselves to one tool: the hammer of political activism. And when all you have is a hammer, every problem begins to look like a nail.”

3. But recently, with very public losses in the areas of gay marriage and the continual failure to overturn Roe v Wade, some evangelicals have begun to advocate giving up political involvement altogether; most notably conservative nationally syndicated columnist Cal Thomas and others

4. Even if we do not retreat from politics, the questions looming as we move ahead in the future seem daunting
 - a. The astonishing rapidity of change in national discussion of the homosexual agenda... now beyond gay marriage to transgender issues seems alarming
 - b. The recent Massachusetts law that may mandate even churches to provide transgender bathrooms and to refer to people in public by pronouns aligning with their preferred gender speaks of a scary future in which basic religious liberty is at stake

E. Russell Moore and the Collapse of the Bible Belt

II. Jesus and Politics: My Kingdom is Not of this World

A. Jesus' Temptation

Matthew 4:8-10 *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

Jesus not desirous of the "world" and its glory the way normal men are

B. Key Text: John 18:36-38

John 18:36-38 *Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." ³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." ³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked.*

1. First assertion: Jesus IS a King... his coming begins spread of his Kingdom

Mark 1:15 *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Matthew 12:28 if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

2. Second: Jesus' Kingdom is not yet complete... even here he is saying people on the side of truth listen to him
3. Third: Jesus' Kingdom is NOT OF THIS WORLD
 - a. Note the proof: "If it were, my servants would FIGHT to prevent my arrest...:
 - b. Worldly kingdoms advances by the power and violence of the sword
 - c. Jesus' Kingdom does not ORIGINATE from worldly power, not is it ADVANCED by worldly means
 - d. No battle, no election, no Supreme Court decision will ever bring in the Kingdom of God

C. Parables Teach the Hidden Nature and Growth of the Kingdom of God

1. Again and again, Jesus introduced the parables of the Kingdom by "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..."
2. Kingdom Parables show hidden, mysterious growth

Luke 17:20-21 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God will come, He answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; 21 no one will say, 'Look here!' or 'There!' For you see, the kingdom of God is among you."

Matthew 13:33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Matthew 13:31-32 "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

3. The Kingdom Consists of Broken-Hearted Sinners Saved by Grace

D. Seek First the Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:33 seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

E. The Government We Yearn For

Matthew 6:9-10 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

III. Living Godly Lives in “Babylon”

A. Jesus Knew He Would Leave His People “in this World”

John 17:14-17 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

B. Our Challenge: How to Live Godly Lives “in Babylon”

1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.

C. Babylon:

1. Keeping ourselves free from defilements

Daniel 1:8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life-- comes not from the Father but from the

world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

2 Peter 3:11-13 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

2. Settling down and seeking the blessing of Babylon

Jeremiah 29:4-7 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

3. Realizing the future of Babylon

Jeremiah 51:6-8 "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the LORD's vengeance; he will pay her what she deserves. 7 Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad. 8 Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her!"

4. Fleeing Babylon

Revelation 18:4-5 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; 5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

IV. Practical Advice from Kevin DeYoung

Kevin is Senior Pastor of University Reformed Church (PCA) in East Lansing, MI, and a member of the Gospel Coalition

On October 13, 2016, he posted a blog on the TGC website entitled, “Seeking Clarity in this Confusing Election Season: Ten Thoughts”

Here is my summary of his insights

- A. DeYoung wanted his church members to know that he will in fact be voting in this election, but not for either of the major party candidates, because he felt that neither one cleared “a basic threshold of personal integrity, sound judgment, and trustworthiness.”
- B. “You can’t be a Christian and do ‘X’ in this election”: DeYoung asserted that he didn’t believe there were any clear-cut decisions in this election such that “you can’t be a Christian and vote for so and so” or anything like that
 1. Issues are too complex and the level of wisdom needed here is such that we cannot bind each other’s consciences on this
 2. Various trains of thought:

DeYoung: “Someone may think Trump is a lecherous oaf, but still conclude that his policies and judicial appointments have a better chance of being good for the nation. Likewise, someone may find Clinton’s position on abortion utterly deplorable, but conclude that Trump’s pro-life credentials are untrustworthy and that Clinton is less likely to be recklessly incompetent. Others may be convinced that an unpopular Clinton presidency may be better for conservative principles in the long run than a train wreck Trump administration would be. Some people may think voting third party is a waste. Others may figure it is one way to send a message that the system failed us this time around. Or maybe they really, really like Gary Johnson or Evan McMullin or whomever.”

3. How DeYoung sorts it out:

DeYoung: “Do I agree with all these arguments? No. But am I able to tell Christians that these arguments are manifestly unbiblical? No. They are conclusions that require prudential judgments. While our church might discipline a member for holding the positions Clinton holds or for behaving the way Trump has behaved, this does not mean we have biblical grounds for disciplining a church member who, for any number of reasons and calculations, may decide that voting for either candidate (or neither) makes the most sense. And if we wouldn’t discipline someone for a presidential vote, we should stop short of saying such a vote is sinful and shameful.”

- C. “David was a sinner too”: Christians cannot cover the sinfulness of Presidential candidates with theologically shallow statements like “David was a great sinner, but also a great king.” Yes, but David clearly repented of and repudiated his sin... Christian graciousness (especially in public assertions) should not extend to a candidate that is guilty of great sin but does not also have David’s clear repentance
- D. “God used Cyrus as a pagan”: Similarly, Cyrus the Great was a pagan who God used (see Isaiah 44-45, in which God raises him up and calls him to his service, though he does not acknowledge God). Yet this does not mean that, were we to have the opportunity to vote for a pagan ruler, we should do so... nor are we promised that God will use every pagan ruler for good as he did with Cyrus
- E. Don’t Defend the Indefensible (wrt Trump): No matter what you do with Trump, it is wrong for Christians to publicly defend his candidacy or excuse him without dealing forthrightly with his disgusting statements and actions toward women. The church must keep itself clear and clean from such demeaning attitudes and wicked actions as Trump has clearly displayed. The church should never defend the indefensible.
- F. Don’t Defend the Indefensible (wrt Clinton): Some conservative Christians have voiced more public criticism for Trump than for Clinton because they plainly think Clinton’s extreme and evil views on abortion make her candidacy completely indefensible as well. Beyond the abortion stance (including overturning the partial birth abortion ban), Clinton’s views on the political gay rights agenda, and her handling of Benghazi and her dishonesty at many levels make her a poor choice for President to put it mildly.

G. “We Are Not Voting for a ‘Pastor-in-Chief’”: DeYoung agrees... but says this:

DeYoung: “I don’t insist that the President of the United States has to be qualified to be a leader in our churches or even a member in our churches. And yes, many presidents have been morally bankrupt. But we can’t say what we would do then with what we know now. More importantly (and more theologically), we must not be moral relativists. The Bible does not teach that every sin is the same, nor does it suggest that private character is an irrelevant consideration for public service. There is nothing about sitting in the Oval Office that magically transforms people into something other than what they have been. If anything, power tempts even good people to be bad and makes bad people even worse. Our candidates will always be imperfect. When and where that imperfection crosses the line into ‘morally unfit’ may be a matter of discretion, but it must be a matter that matters.”

H. “Don’t Cast the First Stone”: Many Christians seem to imply that to bring up the significant moral failures of both these candidates is “casting the first stone” (John 8), acting like we are perfect and need political candidates to be perfect as well. But that is not so. We have the right to evaluate political candidates morally:

DeYoung: “I evaluate presidential candidates with the same sort of grid I’d use for a staff evaluation: character, convictions, competence, and chemistry. Obviously, I don’t look for all the same things in a president as I would for an associate pastor. But I do think that in both cases a person’s ethical compass is crucial. The Founding Fathers, however imperfect they were in practice, were at least agreed that a Republic cannot long endure apart from the cultivation of virtue. I’d like to see the President defend and pursue the same.”

I. “Our” Side vs. “Their” Side: DeYoung noted the tendency we have to deal unfairly with the sins of “our” candidate vs. “their” candidate. We tend to give “our side” more grace, and “their side” more strictness:

DeYoung: “Would the same Christian leaders excusing Trump’s statements ever think to excuse the same from Clinton (Bill or Hillary)? Of course not. Would liberals be overlooking Bill Clinton’s treatment of women (and Hillary’s role in downplaying or silencing accusations) if a Republican candidate (or spouse) had the same trail of serious allegations? No way. So much of politics is ‘defend our guy at all costs’ and ‘seek and destroy their guy at all costs.’ The church must show a better way.”

J. Church over Politics: In our covenant, we speak of giving the church “sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin.” This must mean government. DeYoung puts it this way:

DeYoung: “I am interested in politics, always have been. I follow the ups and downs and ins and outs of the campaign season closely. I love my country and care about who wins and loses. Elections have consequences. Yet I’m much more interested in the church – my church and the Church. Our fidelity to biblical truth, our personal holiness, our sincerity, our consistency, our ability to speak with grace and truth, our unwillingness to confuse the kingdom of this world with the kingdom of Christ, our realism in the midst of utopian promises, our hope in the midst of fear and loathing, our winsome witness to the gospel – to embody these realities week after week is more important than what happens on the second Tuesday in November.”

V. Practical Advice from Romans 14

A. Vote, but accept each other

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

B. Vote, but don’t judge each other

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

C. Vote fully convinced in your own mind

Romans 14:5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

D. Vote “as to the Lord”... in view of your relationship with Jesus

Romans 14:7-8 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

E. Recognize the Lordship of Jesus supersedes all our votes

Romans 14:9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

F. Vote in light of Judgment Day

Romans 14:10-12 For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

G. Vote in light of the far greater worth of the Kingdom of God

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

H. Vote and keep your controversial views quiet

Romans 14:22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

I. Vote by faith

Romans 14:23 everything that does not come from faith is sin.