

11.08.20

Text: Matthew 7:12

Title: A Biblical Ethic

I've been praying for you in all your personal challenges especially staying healthy and safe. I know many of you feel stretched to the Nth degree doing things for your family and helping your kids with their studies and fun and extra-curricular activities.

I want you to know I do *some* in-person visiting but much is done by the phone, texting and emailing. I'm with a lot of people so I have to be extra careful about exposure to folks who are more vulnerable. Let me know if you would like a visit and we'll do our best to arrange it.

And I've been praying for our country. I feel led to today to speak on the topic of ethics. One definition of an ethic is a principle that can distinguish doing right and doing wrong. We guide our lives by ethics and principles and they come from many different sources.

There are many sections of Ethics: Business. Personal (Morals). Ethics of Wartime and Peacetime, Military ethics. It reminds me of veterans who are with us today, and those who are *not* here: who perished in battle, by disease, and in concentration camps; who did their duty and followed a shared ethic:

- That the mission outcome is above the need for personal safety
- One soldier willing to trust and put their lives in the hands of another soldier
- They are now with God and are with us. All those we have loved and surrendered to God are whole.
- American Ethic: our Veterans deserve the best care and treatment.

As Christians, we believe there is a *biblical* ethic. A *biblical* ethic is a principle of doing right and wrong that exists in, and is grounded in, Scripture. These are the things that define us. Why we carry the name *Christian*. Here are two biblical ethics which came to mind:

The first is our Text for today.

A second is, Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. – Colossians 3:17. And similar: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human bosses. – Colossians 3:23.

A biblical ethic isn't specific to religion and isn't limited to the church environment. We carry them with us. It allows and encourages people to interact better with their peers, their families, in their place of work, with friends and with strangers [who are friends not yet met].

What does a biblical ethic look like now that the elections are over? I think we Christians should meditate on some Scripture. Here are two suggestions:

1 Peter 2:13-15 (RSV and The Message)

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: make Christ proud of you by being good citizens whether to the emperor as the supreme authority, or to governors. Respect the authorities whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking rules.

In other words, now that the results are determined, and in the time afterwards, followers of Jesus Christ should accept those in authority as long as we are not required to go contrary to Scripture.

- We shouldn't pout, ridicule, or undermine against our elected leaders.
- That means we don't try to make life miserable for our fellow citizens and our leaders.
- That means we don't demonize the people, the candidates or the party that did not win.

We pray for all people, for our nation and world, seeking God's will and blessings for everyone.

This is the kind of life you've been invited into when you say 'I am a Christian', 'I am a baptized Christ-follower.' We are formed into the kind of life *Christ* lived, who prayed for His enemies, His supporters, as well as for those who betrayed Him.

Here's another one to meditate on: Romans 13:1-2 (RSV and The Message)

Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it's God's order. Whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and established.

I don't believe this passage means that Lenin was God's choice to rule in Russia. I don't believe this passage means God ordained Hitler to rule in Germany. I believe it means God has established governmental authority to keep order, whether it's a tribal council, an aristocracy, a monarchy, or a democracy or whatever kind. And those who are called to lead, or inherit leadership, or elected to lead are ultimately accountable to God. *Our* role is to keep God first and to be the best citizens we can be.

Now, questions will come up about whether or not the election results are God's will.

Fast on the heels of that question is this: Can we know God's will? How do we know what is God's will? These are important questions; this could be a topic for a study group or a future message series or weekly Zoom conversation.

There are many reliable ways to approach this that are faithful and grounded in Scripture. Here's one way. Leslie Weatherhead was a 20C English minister in the liberal Protestant tradition who was Pastor of City Temple in London and known worldwide for his preaching and writings. I can't commend a lot of his theology to you; according to Wikipedia (which we take with a grain of salt), much of his 55 books are outdated and virtually unread today. But his book *The Will of God* is worth your time. He preached five sermons to his congregation when City Temple was reduced to rubble during WW2 and people were wondering if the bombing was God's will or not, and these became the basis for his book so it's important you know the context of his writings.

Weatherhead suggested God's will can be divided into three sections: God's intended will, God's permissive will, and God's ultimate will. God's intended will can be seen in the Garden of Eden: peace and harmony, there was life and no death, Adam and Eve would walk and have fellowship with God whenever they wanted. When Adam and Eve did what they were told not to do (do not eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), they [and all humanity] rejected God's intentional will for them. Actions have consequences.

Since humanity rejected God's intentional will for them, God had to choose another way. Weatherhead calls this **God's permissive will: It's not what God intended or designed but human beings have to be permitted to make their own choices. It's part of the created order. We live in the era of God's permissive will.** I think a lot of what happens in our lives, in the Church, and in the world grieves the heart of Christ. For example, when a person goes out here and insists on texting while they drive, or chooses to drive after drinking alcohol, or chooses to express their rage on the road and it kills someone or themselves, **we say that is not God's intentional will but it has become God's permissive will.** And it is a sad and horrific tragedy that devastates the families involved and people. It becomes part of the family's story and the community's story. (I realize this is a striking and emotional example; I'm trying to make an important point.)

The third section is God's Ultimate Will. We find this throughout the New Testament. Part of God's Ultimate Will is that no one perishes. Part of it is that all persons receive the gift of salvation through Christ, and that each person spends eternity with Him. The Holy Spirit is constantly moving and wooing us, in the words of Paul in Romans 12:

- ***To not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of our mind that you may prove what is the will of God (intentional and ultimate will) what is the good and acceptable and perfect (complete) will of God.***

I commend Romans Chapters 12 and 13 for your reading this week.

So, as we look at the turmoil from voting, in our country and in our lives, we may approach/ interpret it as God's permissive will.

- Because Part of the truth is that we/people/society helped to create it.
- God allows/permits national turmoil/suffering as a result of our disobedience.
- Good News: God uses times like these to strengthen us and discipline us.
- Sometimes we experience pain simply because pain is part of fallen humanity.

And we hurt, not because God causes it, but because God permits it.

I would offer to you to accept the results of everything voted on as God's Permissive Will.

- If it went the way you wanted it to, give thanks to God for answering your prayer.
- Don't gloat or taunt those who disagree.
- Be cautious of folks who put man's results on par with God's Ultimate Will.

My hope is that we as a nation and a Church will not be complacent. We should not assume elected leaders, policies and programs are going to solve all our problems. Part of the biblical ethic is we accept those in authority as long as we are not required to go contrary to Scripture and the teachings and person of Christ.

- Let the calm spirit of Christ be seen in you.
- Have faith that God's in charge; God's Ultimate Will is going to be fulfilled.
- We focus on obeying the command of Christ to serve Him, to love one another, knowing our hope is in Christ and the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, not in man.

Closing prayer:

Gracious and Almighty God, what a week this has been! Thank You for leading us through this election. We pray for the Trump family and the Biden family in this time of transition, and for all who transition in and out of public service.

Strengthen your Church in our labors for the happiness and well-being of all people, that all may find their salvation and peace in You. Let the words of Revelation come true in our time, that the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.