

## Life on the Other Side of November 4th

I believe that it was last Sunday that I said I was glad the election for president was finally over, but now I'm not so sure. I think I'm in withdrawal. Now that the struggle is over, I miss the suspense.

But however you interpret the results of this year's election, the larger question is, now that it is over, what is our role as citizens of these United States of America and what is our role as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Now that we have voted, or perhaps refrained from voting, what is our responsibility? What are we to do now? Several things come to mind.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul says in 2:1-4: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

When it comes to politics, I know that we are not all in agreement. And, that is to be expected. A lot of this has to do with family tradition, workplace environment, our circle of friends, the local politics of the area in which we live. We can be Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or something else, and we can feel very strongly about it. We can oppose one another politically and promote and defend our respective candidates with a great deal of energy. We might even appear to be bitter enemies. But when the election is over and the dust clears, our loyalty to Christ enables us to remain united as brothers and sisters in the Family of God. His blood that binds us together as members of His House is way stronger than our politics.

So the first thing we need to do now is to make sure that any division that may have crept in to our fellowship during the election hype is rooted out. Paul says we are to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." **It is Christ's command that His disciples be one in the bond of love.**

It is time to reaffirm our unity in the Family of God at Fourth Street. We all belong to Him and have the common purpose of

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encouraging one another and proclaiming His salvation to all who know Him not. A second thing that comes to mind regarding what we need to do now that the election is over is that we need to fulfill our daily obligation as citizens. Paul says in Philippians 2:5-8, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

Just as Jesus was among others to serve so we should adopt an attitude of service. And, yes, this applies to working for the good of the greater community and not just to our fellow believers in the Family of God. We are citizens of the nation in which we live, and our responsibility to that nation is to be the best citizens that we can be. Or, as Jesus said, to "render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar." Paul outlines what this means in Romans 12 and 13:

Paul says beginning at Romans 12:21 and reading through 13:8 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by

God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." As members of this earthly kingdom, called the United States of America, we

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are to participate fully and be good citizens of this kingdom. We are to pray for our leaders, vote in elections, uphold the law, participate in our nation's defense, and work for the good of all. Notice again what Paul says in Romans 13:5, "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." How we conduct ourselves as citizens of this nation is a part of our moral obligation under God. **We honor God by honoring the authorities He has established.**

Now as soon as we say this, we also know that it may not always be possible to comply with every specific law handed down by our government. Should we be commanded not to preach the gospel or not to meet together as a church, we cannot comply. Should we be commanded to teach our children or to allow others to teach our children things that contradict the plain teaching of Scripture, we must take a stand for God and against the state. The prophets of Israel opposed the kings of Israel when those kings sought to lead the nation into disobedience to God. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to participate in the acts of adultery commanded by the King of Babylon. The Apostles of Jesus said to the civil authorities who commanded them not to preach or teach any more in the name of Jesus, "we must obey God rather than man." But, in so much as it is possible for us to obey the civil authorities without violating the Lord's commandments, we are obligated to obey.

It seems to me that President elect Obama should feel more than the weight of office when he moves into the White House. Even now and every day he serves, he should be able to feel the weight of our prayers and the weight of the Holy Spirit compelling him to do right when he is tempted to do wrong, and when doing wrong would be so much easier.

Election day, Veteran's Day, our national day of Thanksgiving: all of these special days remind us to pray for our nation and its leaders and remind us of our obligation to fulfill our roles as citizens to the best of our ability so help us God.

On this side of November 4th, we need to come together as believers and love one another. We must allow our allegiance to Christ to unite us above and beyond our political differences. On this side of November 4th, we need to reaffirm our commitment to fulfill our obligations as citizens of our great

nation, and all the more because it is under attack from so many quarters. A third thing we need to do on this side of November 4th, is to make sure that our witness as followers of Jesus Christ is vibrant and winsome to all who know us and can observe our behavior. Listen to Paul's word in Philippians 2:12-16:

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing."

Notice Paul's assessment of the world in his day: He calls it a "crooked and depraved generation." They must have had the same sort of thing on the evening news in his day that we see on our news today. Wall Street and Washington fit the "crooked" part and "depraved" pretty well describes what's going on on Main Street of most of our urban centers. What we are to do about this is clear.

First Paul says we are to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. In other words we are to put our salvation into action, work it out, exercise it in the midst of the world in which we live. We know it cannot be a matter of earning our salvation, because it's the gift of God. But what we can do is put it into practice. What we are not to do is hide it away under a bowl or under a rock. Paul is telling us to practice what we profess to believe, so that those around us can see it and be influenced by it. **We are called to be His witnesses.**

The second thing Paul tells us in this passage is that if we belong to God then we can be sure that at all times God is working within us "to will and act according to his good purpose." God gives us the motivation to do what He wants us to do and to accomplish what He wants us to accomplish. What we need to do is keep ourselves aware of this and positioned to cooperate with the leading and guiding of His Holy Spirit. Our purpose in this world is to glorify God, and He will help us do that so long as we are willing to follow and obey His leading. We need to pray, **"Lord, help us to recognize Your voice and follow Your**

**word."**

The third thing Paul tells us here is very specific. He says, "do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God." Now some of us have a ways to go here don't we? We might be willing to do the right thing; but, when we do, we want everyone around us to know what a burden it is and how brave and wonderful we are that we are willing to sacrifice for God. Do you know what you have done when you do that? You've just spoiled your witness. Don't spoil it. Instead, when you recognize the temptation to complain or to present yourself as a martyr, repent. When you find yourself grousing around about doing God's will, repent, lose the "attitude," surrender your will to the Holy Spirit within you. It will set you free. It will enable you to serve the Lord and others with joy. **The joy of the Lord will be your strength.**

The last thing Paul says in this passage is a poetic description of our mission as believers; we are called to shine. Paul says we are to "shine like stars in the universe" as we "hold out the word of life." Please notice how positive this image is. We are to do what we do in cooperation with what the Lord is doing in us and we are to do it all without moaning, groaning, and without argument. There is a clue about how to do this found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, where he is talking to them about the generosity of the Macedonian believers in contributing to the needs of the church in Jerusalem. Paul says in II Corinthians 8:5, "And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will." In other words, the Macedonian believers were led of the Lord to make the sacrifice they made, but before they gave their gift, they settled it with the Lord: "They gave themselves first to the Lord and then" submitted to the request of the apostles. **In order to shine before men we must first surrender to the Lord.**

The best thing we can do for our nation and for the kingdom of our Lord, is to ask the Lord to send His Holy Spirit into our hearts and then surrender our wills to His. Then we need to obey Him without complaining or arguing, so that we can shine as stars in the universe as we hold forth the word of life. **The world needs us to shine.**

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Sermon for November 16, 2008

**Life On the Other Side of November 4th**  
Philippians 2:1-16

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