

# Gospel Perspectives on Politics Part 4

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Date: 29 September 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Alright friends, it's 9 o'clock. We're going to go ahead and get started because we've got a lot to cover today. Welcome back to our class on Gospel Perspectives on Politics. Just take two seconds to talk about where we've come in the class.

So we started off looking at some basic principles for political discipleship. We kind of just ran through some kind of basic ideas that help orient us to the topic. And in the second class, Tyler walked us through some lessons from the early church.

So we looked at Augustine and the City of God and drew out some lessons from that. And then last week, John walked us through some lessons from America's twin foundings with the Puritans and the American Revolution Constitution.

So all those are up on the podcast. If you weren't here to see any of those, you can listen to those. Today, what are we going to do today? So today, we're going to talk about how to love church members with different politics.

Loving church members with different politics. It's no surprise that political difference can just threaten to devour our unity and love of one another in the body of Christ. I think we've been somewhat spared from that at Trinity over the years, but it's certainly a threat these days.

[ 1 : 11 ] So we kind of know that we're supposed to love each other. But kind of the question is how? How do we get there? How do we get there in our minds and our hearts? So to approach this topic of loving church members with different politics, Tyler and I are going to kind of team teach today.

And we're going to touch on two questions that have actually come up over the course of the class. The first question is, can we shine a little more light on this distinction that we made in our very first class between what we might call matters of first importance and matters of wisdom or conscience? I think we used the metaphor of straight line and jagged line issues there, but we're not going to use that today. We're going to talk about matters of first importance and matters of wisdom or matters of conscience. And second, Tyler's going to talk about how to be wise and discerning when it comes to engaging media and technology, which also plays into loving one another well in the church family.

And Tyler will talk some about that. So that's kind of where we're going. Hopefully we'll have some time for Q&A; along the way. And hopefully by the time we're done, we'll be equipped to love each other better through our political differences.

So part one then, loving church members with different politics, wisdom issues. Okay, so I think the first thing we want to see here is that Paul himself seems to distinguish between matters of first importance and matters of opinion or matters of reasoning or matters of dispute.

[ 2 : 34 ] Do you know where he makes that distinction? We don't find them in the same passage, but we see them in different passages. Where does Paul talk about matters of first importance? Remember? I know it's early.

Our minds are just waking up. 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15, right? 1 Corinthians 15, right? I deliver to you what I receive. These matters of first importance, right?

And what were those matters of first importance? The central truths of the gospel according to scripture, right? I think we can also put in there the sort of clear moral commands of scripture, too. We don't want to separate doctrine from life, right?

Paul never does that in his letters. So the central and clear teachings of the gospel and the clear moral commands of scripture. But then in another place, Paul also talks about matters of opinion or what we might call matters of discernment or literally matters of reasoning.

Does anyone remember where Paul talks about that? Romans 14. Romans 14. That's right. Thanks, Alex. Romans 14. The ESV will translate that as the opinions, which the kind of word underneath opinions is literally reasonings, which kind of helps us to see that Paul's talking about kind of reason-based implications of scripture.

[ 3 : 49 ] We're not talking about truths expressly set down in scripture. We're talking about kind of how we reason out from those truths or sort of the opinions that we take based on that. And do you remember there in Romans 14 exactly what the rub is for Paul or what the kind of conflict is for Paul in Romans 14?

We'll look at it a little later. That's okay if you don't. They're talking about what kind of food should we eat? What kind of religious observances? What days should we observe, right? It seems like the background there is that there are some Jewish background Christians who are wondering if we should still keep the food laws or the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament.

Now, I think it's important as we're kind of laying out this biblical distinction between matters of first importance and matters of opinion. Notice how Paul approaches these matters differently, right? When it comes to matters of first importance, how does Paul respond?

Think about Galatians 1. In Galatians 1, the gospel itself was being overturned, right? And how does Paul respond? He says, well, look, if I or an angel from heaven preach to you a different gospel, let them be accursed, right?

These are not things that we're sort of trifling or playing around with, right? Or think about Romans 12. Just a couple chapters before, Paul will talk about differences of opinion. Then in Romans 12, he'll say very clear, look, we should abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good, right?

[ 5 : 06 ] Very strong language there when it comes to these matters of first importance. But then when it comes to matters of opinion or reasoning or discernment, Paul will say, and again, we'll look at that in just a second.

Paul will say, look, don't despise one another. Don't judge one another. Rather, welcome one another. Okay? And then what's the rationale for Paul's approach to both of those things?

So basically we have first importance. And then we have opinion. And these are really important.

Paul's not going to budge on those. But on these he says, don't judge, don't despise, welcome one another. Okay? But why does Paul have that approach to both of those? The approach to both of those is actually the glory of God. God's glorified as we hold firm to the matters of first importance. God is glorified, we'll see in Romans 14 and 15, as we welcome one another in our differences over opinion. Right? The same drive behind both, but acknowledging that there are different things that we hold differently.

[ 6 : 07 ] Now what I want to try to do is, you know, this biblical distinction here. This is 1 Corinthians 14. This is Romans 14. I want to kind of flesh that out a little bit.

But can we kind of, can we put a little more meat on the bones of this first importance matters of opinion kind of difference? And lots of people have done this. Recently I've been reading a book by Jamie Dunlop called Love the Ones Who Drive You Crazy, which is a really good book.

Even though we're recording this, I'll say this. I was talking to Jamie's brother Rob the other day and he said, Jamie joked about dedicating the book to me. So, because, but he didn't, he did it.

So, but really good book, really good book. Talks about a lot of different passages of how we love one another in the body of Christ. He does touch on this distinction and I found it really helpful. So, so as we think about these differences that we can have, we might think about, one way it's been talked about is primary issues.

Right? Primary issues. Or doctrines. Sometimes we think about this as like kind of first level disagreements. Right? And these are certain truths that you, you, you can't deny these and still be a Christian in any meaningful sense.

[ 7 : 16 ] Right? These are the truths that emerge as just inescapable conclusions when scriptures are faithfully read. Either because they're explicit in the text or they arise just unavoidably from the text.

Right? What would be some examples of primary doctrines that are clear in scripture? Well, some examples might be the deity of Christ. Right? Jesus is God. Murder is wrong.

Right? There's one God. And the Father is God. And the Son is God. And the Holy Spirit is God. That's the doctrine of the Trinity. Right? Sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is wrong.

That seems abundantly clear in scripture. Forgiveness of sins is found through Christ alone. Also abundantly clear in scripture. So these are first level, primary things. But then we might also talk about secondary doctrines.

And secondary doctrines are those disagreements that, as some would say, they create reasonable boundaries between Christians. Okay. So these are issues where faithful Christians disagree.

[ 8 : 19 ] And where are those disagreements tend to separate people into different churches or different denominations? Historically, what have these been?

Right? Baptism. Church government, polity. Right? If you want to know the difference between a Baptist church and a Presbyterian church, a lot of it has to do with our practices on these two things.

There are some other things. But a lot of the practical differences are these two. Right? So over the years, theologians kind of categorize these as secondary issues. We wouldn't look at someone who holds a different view of baptism than us or a different polity than us and say, I don't think they're Christians.

Right? But we would say, wow, we've come to different conclusions there. And it really does shape our life together as a church. So we've kind of, those kind of fall into a secondary category, a second level. Then there's this third level, or tertiary.

Tertiary. That makes you sound really smart in my conversation if you use the word tertiary. This is the kind of third level. Right? And these are disagreements that don't need to separate Christians into different churches.

[ 9 : 28 ] Right? These are often referred to as non-essential matters. They're often talked about as matters of conscience or wisdom issues or things like that. And this third level here, you know, what else can we put in here?

We can also put in here things like end-time views. Are you a free millennialist or a post-millennialist? You know? It's kind of different.

And it does seem, even though Paul doesn't use this kind of trifold distinction, it does seem that Paul's, when he's talking about matters of opinion, it does seem like he's dealing with these issues down here.

Although, granted, this one's kind of fuzzy. Right? Some of these can kind of slip into that circle. So when we're talking about Paul's approach to issues in Romans 14, right, we're not talking about how to approach primary issues.

We're really talking about how to approach these things on the third level. Things that don't really, they're not essential to being a Christian. They don't even necessarily divide us into different church families. But they're things that we all know that don't really define a Christian or not.

[ 10 : 35 ] But we have different opinions of them. We come to different levels of those. Okay? Briefly, any quick questions on this kind of distinction that we see in Scripture and then we kind of flesh out a little bit?

Yeah, Richard? So, I'm not sure. So, not all groups of Christians agree that there are this kind of division.

Sure. Then also, not all groups of Christians, not all groups of Christians who agree that there are such divisions agree what belongs in which division.

Yeah, that's absolutely right. Yeah, absolutely right. Yep. Yes. Very good observation. You're right. So, we're going to talk at the end of my section about how to approach all this from the spirit of the gospel.

Right? So, but we do have to acknowledge that different Christians are going to put different things in different categories. That's absolutely right. Yeah? So, I cross-culturally like to think sometimes in terms of principles and factors.

[ 11 : 42 ] Yep. So, we certainly can say the differences of culture. Yeah. And we go back to Babylon, Confucian language, Scott's plan for university. Sure. So, you find the principle and then you figure out how does that apply.

Yeah. In different cultural settings. Yeah, sure. How do we, that means that principles could be in all three of these categories? Oh, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Those principles influence what you do in practice in different cultures. Yeah. You need principles from all three here. Yeah, I think that's a really good distinction between principle and practice.

We're going to do something like that in just a minute when we apply all this to politics.

But, yeah, I think there are principles in each one of these. But, it's really an acknowledgement that on some of the principles, there's a lot of clarity in scripture. On other principles, maybe there's not as much.

Right? Yeah. Okay, let's keep going. What we want to do is try to gain a little more just like clarity on what are these kinds of things?

[12:45] What are we talking about here? Where do they come up in our life together? So, I'm going to erase these if that's okay. Oh, that was a very good eraser. Oh, maybe I'm not going to erase it.

I'm just going to spin it around. Ta-da! Look at that. A blank slip. John Locke would be so impressive. Okay, let's get a little more kind of clarity on these third-level disagreements or these matters of opinion.

And I think as we help to kind of flesh these out, it will help us to then see like, oh, okay, like maybe some of the disputes we have are falling into this third level. So, the one way we might sort of talk about it, or one issue that comes up in this third level, is something that someone believes is sin for one person, but another person doesn't.

Right? Now, this one's, I don't know how helpful this one is, but we're just going to talk about it.

Right? Sin for me. Right? This one's, I think this is sinful. What are we talking about here?

Sometimes our consciences can disagree on morality of the thing itself.

Right? Take the example of historically in the church about drinking alcohol. Right? There are some Christians who look at scripture and look at alcohol and say, we shouldn't do it at all. Right?

[13:57] And other Christians say, I don't, I don't, I think our conscience is free there. Right? So, in many cases, there is a Christian who might, you know, believe that this is wrong, but there isn't enough clarity of scripture to really get us there kind of conclusively.

Right? I think some of our matters of kind of third level fall into this one. Right? I actually don't think this is the biggest one. I think there are others that are more helpful. Or others that kind of trip us up more.

So, the second one is the best way to achieve a good end.

Okay? The best way to achieve a good end. Ah, okay. The morality of the goal isn't debated. But the path to get there is kind of unclear.

Right? Think about it. How should society combat racism or abortion or things like that? And what role should the church play in those efforts? Right? Let's say that everyone in the conversation agrees that racism is evil or abortion is wrong, but they might disagree on the path toward justice.

[15:12] Right? Another example is child rearing. You know? We might agree on the desired goal as Christians, raising our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Right?

But we might have different convictions on how to get there. I can't believe you let your kid play so many video games. Right? How could you let your kids go to public school?

Right? Right? Right? Right? These kinds of different things. Look, all Christians are agreed we want to raise our kid in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but we do have different sort of ideas of how to get there. Right? Those tend to fall into that third bucket.

Here's another one. Different moral prioritizations. I don't even know if it's helpful for me to write this. My handwriting is so bad.

But different moral prioritization. Ooh, that's a big word. Okay. What are we talking about here?

[16:10] In this case, it's different. It's unclear how the different moral goals kind of trade off against each other. Right? Which one do we prioritize over the other?

Where do we invest more of our energy and time? Right? One of the examples that Jamie Thumbach gives in his book is disagreements over how we might spend our money.

Right? We all agree that we should support our local church and support our family. Right? Those are both moral goods. Yep. But we might differ on how to prioritize that when we purchase a car, for example.

Right? Someone might look at another person's decision and think, oh my goodness, how could they have spent that much money on that automobile for their family? That's just a waste.

Right? You know? Tyler, you used to drive a white Mercedes, didn't you? Yep. You know? White Mercedes. I can't remember how many times I used to think, how could my brother be driving a Mercedes?

[17:11] I'm totally kidding. Tyler was given the car. It was a 1985 Mercedes. Which was given to you, right? Or given to you for a pittance, right? Yeah. It was given to you for free. Which is a really good example of, we ought to check ourselves before we start throwing these judgments around.

Right? We often don't know the story. We'll get to this in a second. But doesn't voting fall into this category? As we kind of try to choose between different candidates. As we kind of weigh up our different moral prioritizations of different issues.

I wonder if a biblical example of that might be when Paul and Barnabas end up parting in Acts 15. Oh, that's really good. Yeah. Where Paul is, hey, we need to be committed to this mission here. And Barnabas is thinking, and John Mark is flaky. So he's going to just be dead weight. Slow us down. Got to prioritize this goal.

Yeah. Got to prioritize the development of this young Christian. Yeah. Right? Both important biblical priorities. Right? Developing a young leader. Right? Advancing the gospel.

[18:14] Right? In a reliable way. Yeah. And they ended up parting. Right? But what's interesting is you read through the New Testament, you find that the relationship wasn't utterly destroyed because of that.

Right? Paul will say at the end of his life, send John Mark. Right? So, maybe Barnabas was right. Maybe he did need to be just developed a little more. Who knows? Right? Yeah. God worked through it.

But last one. Last one. Okay. Overlapping. I want to make sure I say this right. Overlapping. Overlapping justifications of authority. Of authority. Okay. Overlapping realms of authority. Here's what we mean by this. Maybe it's clear to get it out of an example. Who has the responsibility to make sure a child is safe? The family. Right? I mean, I think most would say, absolutely, the family does.

[19:10] But, what if a parent is abusive or endangers the child's safety? Well, then, according to most Christians, the government has a role to play. Right? You see here that God's given parents the responsibility to raise their children.

Yes. And God's given the government the responsibility to protect its citizens. So, when the jurisdiction of one God-given authority, in this example, the parents, overlaps with another, the government, when we see that those things start to overlap, it's at that intersection that Christians can often arrive at different positions of conscience.

Right? Because, in both instances, they both have scripture on their side, don't they? Right? Now, disagreements in that kind of category may not be as common as the first three.

But, they are tricky to kind of figure out. Does that make sense? That third one? Yeah. Okay. So, what are we trying to do here?

We're trying to get a little more traction or a little more description of these matters of opinion.

Right? Okay. So, now what I want to do is I want to apply this as a bloater.

[20:19] I realize I have my eraser right here. So, great. That works much better. Yeah, look at that. Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow.

Okay. Let's apply all these distinctions, then, that hopefully have come from our reflection of scripture to some political issues. And I want to talk about three levels of political discernment. Three levels of political discernment. I want to talk about principles. And then I want to talk about public policies.

And then I want to talk about particular politicians. It's pretty sweet.

I got five Ps in there. Right? Principles. Public policies. And particular politicians. So, I think as we're doing our political discernment, all three things are applied.

[21:31] Right? Principles. How should Christians order their lives? Right? Public policies. What sort of public policies in the public square should I be advocating for?

Or hoping kind of to address some of the things I see to make society better for everyone? Right? Third. Particular politicians. Who do I vote for? Depending on their character.

Or their policies. Or the particular kind of direction of their political party. Right? And here is my thesis. That as we travel out in this circle, we get more and more into the realm of wisdom and opinion.

So, let's run that through a grid. Let's start with racism. Right? Racism, scripturally, is wrong. That's a principle. To discriminate against someone on the basis of their race or ethnicity is wrong.

Think about Genesis 1. We're all created in God's image. Think about Ephesians 2. Christ has died for Jew and Gentile and took the dividing wall of division down between us. Think about Revelation 5. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation are gathered around the throne.

[ 22 : 39 ] Right? Such biblical support to help us to know that racism is wrong. Right? Okay. Okay. There's the principle. We all agree. Right? Now we move into public policies.

How do we start enacting that in the public sphere? Is it through police reform? Criminal justice reform? Reparations? Affirmative action? All of those can be really good applications of this principle.

But suddenly, even as I've listed those off, some of you are like, I don't know, some of them I like. Some of them I don't. Right? And then let's take another step out to particular politicians.

Right? Well, now we're sort of doing this weighing of different policies that they hold. Right? Okay.

Let's take another example. The environment. Right? Environmental protection or stewardship.

That's a really good principle. Right? God created all things. Humans should steward creation wisely to God's glory. Think about Genesis 1 where he puts us as humans in the midst of the created order.

[ 23 : 43 ] To have dominion over it. Not to rule with an iron fist and, you know, trudge out all of it.

But to care for it and cause it to flourish. Right? Or think of Psalm 19. The heavens are declaring the glory of God.

Right? We all know as Christians we should be good, wise stewards of the created order. But then let's take a step out into public policies. Does that mean we ought to advance green technologies? Does that mean we ought to ban drilling and fracking? Does that mean we ought to agree to sort of international agreements to reduce carbon emissions by a certain year? All of those can be a fine application of that principle.

But boy, do we differ. Right? And then, of course, again, when you get out to particular politicians, well, golly, we're just weighing different moral prioritizations, aren't we? Okay, two more, I promise. I think as Christians, most of us would agree that a human fetus is a human life and thus worthy of protection. And therefore, unless the mother's life is at risk or maybe some other circumstances, most Christians would agree that abortion is morally wrong.

[ 24 : 48 ] Not unforgivable? Not unforgivable? No sin is unforgivable. We have compassion towards those in that situation and care and come around them. But we would agree that the act itself is wrong.

We can look at many scripture passages that point us in that direction. We think of Psalm 51 and Psalm 139 where David talks about his personhood in the womb. God knowing me and planning my days, even being a sinner in the womb.

We think about Luke 1 when John the Baptist leaps in the womb when Mary comes with Jesus.

Right? What a beautiful passage that is. Okay. Now let's move out to public policies.

How should Christians approach what we agree is a moral principle in the public sphere? Ought we to engage all of our energies towards abolishing abortion completely?

Or severely limiting it? Or ought more of our energies be devoted towards protecting religious liberty and freedom of conscience for those who are in medical professions? Or maybe the best approach is to address the underlying causes of abortion.

[ 25 : 53 ] Poverty, family stability, things like that. Or maybe we ought to approach it through advancing the cause of adoption and foster care. All of these things to get at this same principle.

Right? Okay, and then again, once we get out to particular politicians, goodness, then we're all weighing the pros and cons, aren't we? Okay, last one. Last principle. Divorce.

You think, well, this isn't a political issue. It's not, is it? Isn't that interesting that it's not? Now, when you look at scripture, most Christians historically have agreed that divorce is only permissible in cases of adultery or abandonment.

And some Christians would add physical abuse to that. Right? Now, lots of Christians disagree over remarriage, right? Some say, yes, you can be remarried as long as the divorce was permissible. Some say, no, as long as the first spouse is living. So, you see suddenly that even that principle has, even in the principle realm, we have some difference. Right? But I think all Christians would agree that just no-fault divorce.

[ 27 : 01 ] God isn't pleased by that. Think of Matthew 5, Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 7. Okay, we agree. No-fault divorce is wrong. Let's go into public policy.

Should no-fault divorce be legislated against? Isn't it interesting that no-fault divorce was first legalized in California in 1969 by then-Governor Ronald Reagan, who would eventually become the first U.S. president who had been divorced?

Former President Donald Trump was the second, by the way. But by 2010, every state had legalized no-fault divorce. I bring this up as an example because we see that not everything that's immoral we agree should be illegal.

Right? So you see another layer of the discernment and the opinion realm that we fall into when it comes to public policies. Right? Okay. For the sake of time, we'll just stop there.

I think the point has been made that as we kind of travel out in these circles of political discernment, we're getting more and more solidly in the realm of that third realm of opinion where Christians do differ.

[ 28 : 27 ] Okay? All right, I want to talk a little bit about them. Given all that, briefly. Okay. Okay. How do we love each other? Well, first, I think we just understand a little better the kinds of decisions and discernments we're making.

Right? I think that can help take the temperature down a little bit as we have these conversations. But I think we need a little more than that. When we look at Romans 14, Paul says, you know, there's two dangers that can emerge as we kind of have differences over conviction.

Right? One is despising. One is despising. And one is judging. Paul will say in Romans 14, 3, don't despise or judge one another. Isn't despising kind of a sin oftentimes of the more permissive crowd?

In Romans, those who thought they could eat meat looked at those who were being a little more cautious and were like, legalists, you know. But then on the other side, it was judging.

Right? How could you do that? Right? And isn't it interesting that for Paul, differences in conviction don't necessarily damage church unity, but judging and despising do.

[ 29 : 36 ] What's the opposite of those two things? It's welcoming. Paul will say, welcome one another as God in Christ has welcomed you. So how do we work in our hearts to overcome judging and despising?

I want to say four things. First, remember that you're a creature. We've talked a lot about this in our elders meetings. Remember that you're a creature. You are, by God's creation, a finite being in space and time.

Right? You do not see everything. You do not experience everything all at the same time. And God made you that way. And that's good. But does that not mean that you don't see all sides of an issue?

You haven't experienced all sides of an issue. So your perspective on an issue is going to be limited by God's creative design of who we are as creatures.

Right? So first, we have to just take a step back and remember that we're creatures. Yeah?

Second, see the faith of those we disagree with.

[ 30 : 39 ] See the faith of those we disagree with. Very often people on both sides of a debate are motivated by sincere faith. Right? Those who would argue for, you know, reparations and those who would think that's the worst idea in the world.

Right? Might both be motivated by a sincere faith. Right? Listen to Romans 14, 5-7. One person esteems each day as better than another while another esteems all days alike.

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. Develop your convictions. That's good. Right? The one who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord.

Since he gives thanks to God. While the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. Right? Acknowledge that we're all trying to honor the Lord from faith.

Don't we often presume the worst motives of people we disagree with? You know? We think only evil motives could lead someone to look at the same facts as I do and arrive at a different conclusion. They must be horrible sinners.

[ 31 : 39 ] Right? Or have some twisted motive. No! Right? And this is more than just assuming the best of another believer. Right? I think it's an invitation to a conversation with them.

Right? Don't just sit back and judge. Talk to them. And seek to understand not just their convictions. Right? On these things. And seek to understand not just how their experience shapes their convictions.

Right? But seek to understand the faith that drives them or informs those decisions. Ask how their faith motivates that opinion that you disagree with.

Ask how their faith leads to a different prioritization of values than you do. Right? Ask how their faith has changed their thinking over time. Right? Now we're having a really good conversation about how the gospel begins to inform all of these difficult decisions.

And that can sort of help diffuse this kind of destructive spiral of suspicion and animosity that we see. Third thing. So first, you're a creature. Second, see the faith in the people you disagree with.

[ 32 : 48 ] And third, consider the judge. Paul will say in Romans 14, Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It's before his own master that he stands or falls.

And he will be upheld for the Lord is able to make him stand. Right? And Paul will say later in that passage that we will come unto judgment. Right? God will judge them and God will judge you.

Right? Now when Paul's talking about judgment here in Romans 14, he's not talking about condemnation to eternal judgment. Right? He's assuming that we're all believers. We've all found forgiveness and justification in Christ.

So this judgment here isn't sort of a judgment to sort of inclusion or exclusion from the new heavens and new earth. It's talking about this final accounting of Christians that we will face.

We'll stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Our works will be sort of shown to be. Right? It's not going to determine whether we're saved. But we do give an account to God. Think of the parable of the talents. Right? Now, in these disputable matters, I think what Paul's pushing us here is to say, Look, it's not your responsibility to adjudicate every false opinion in your church.

[ 33 : 59 ] The ones that you think are false. Right? Yes, on matters of first importance. Right? We ought to be guarding those well. And the elders have a particular responsibility to do so. We still do so with love and charity.

Right? But yes. But aren't most of the things we're talking about in politics, these secondary issues that end up getting so heated and tear us apart? Right? Yes, conversation and debate can be very useful.

Yes, we can be iron sharpening iron. Right? Yet, for such disagreements as these, don't exhaust yourself in argument.

Right? It's not yours to be the final judge of that. But then also remember, Paul will say on this point about judging, Remember that God's not just going to judge them. He's going to judge you. Right? And before God's throne, what will be more important? Winning the argument with our brother or sister over these opinions? Or loving our brother or sister with whom we disagree?

[ 34 : 59 ] You know? I think when we stand before the throne of Christ, he's not going to ask us where we stood on the 101 political issues that divide us. He's going to say, How did you love my sheep?

Last thing. Aim for God's glory. Welcome one another as God and Christ welcomed you for the glory of Christ. For the glory of God. Isn't it interesting that as we welcome those with whom we disagree, we do so because Christ has welcomed us.

And then God's glory shines more brightly than if we never disagreed in the first place. Do you see what I'm saying? If we were, some of this reminds me of John's lesson from last week, if we were completely homogenous, saw everything the same way, and we loved each other, do not even the Gentiles do the same?

And yet in the church of Jesus Christ, disagreements are not obstacles. They're opportunities to magnify God's glory. God's glorified when we're unified amidst our difference and disagreement. Perhaps more so than when we're unified because we all believe the same things. So aim for the glory of God. Political difference isn't necessarily a problem, even if it's painful.

[ 36 : 21 ] I think if we approach each other in the way Paul recommends, our political differences can expand our understanding as creatures and extol God's glory. All right. I'm literally going to stop there and just hand it over to Tyler.

Go. Go. Yeah, just to put an exclamation point on what Nick was saying, I find it striking in 1 Corinthians when there's divisions and factions within the church.

Paul doesn't get into the particulars, but he asks, is Christ divided? So our unity is meant to show others what God is like. And our common unity rooted in Christ supersedes our tribal differences.

I'm going to shift gears here and talk about our engagement with media and technology. Consider this part of the section a little information hygiene for us this year, giving a little more visine for us to

have a discerning eye as we look, as we watch radio, podcast, and television.

I think it was Abraham Lincoln who said, don't believe everything you read on the Internet. You get my point.

[ 37 : 41 ] Take one thing away. He says, don't believe everything you read on the Internet. And I want to highlight just three steps to avoid as we engage in media and technology. The trap number one is the echo chamber.

The echo chamber. Echo chambers and news consumption. You know, all of us want newspapers and the media to be a trusted, independent watchdog, where the powerful are held to account, a free, independent press, where we uncover corruption, expose wrongdoing, and challenge misinformation.

But in the last 30 years, we've seen a different model develop globally. The rise of news and entertainment. So this has been called infotainment.

Infotainment. The term has been used to describe media outlets that don't aim to report facts, but it's theatrics. Right? Sensationalism garners more eyeballs and clicks.

So advertising revenue depends on ratings and website traffic. And the economics is pretty simple if you're a news organization. Increased ratings through theatrics.

[ 38 : 49 ] Higher ratings mean more money. Right? This is not new. Many have written about this. For many, it's not about public service.

It's about profit. Infotainment. The same goes for social media and the algorithms that pump content onto your feed. More clicks, more money. So previously, I'm not saying sensationalism may be new.

This has been the case for many years. But I think previously, you probably get the print edition of the New York Times. Maybe the print edition of the Wall Street Journal. And then you read both and you try to come up with an informed view of a public policy or a matter at hand.

But today, it's harder to do that, isn't it? Because we have news at 24-7. Where we resort to sound bites rather than constructive conversations.

You know, this isn't news to many of you, but the media channels that Americans watch on a daily basis can be labeled infotainment. CNN. Fox News.

[ 39 : 54 ] MSNBC. Daily Wire. If you spend most of your time on one of these channels, you're placing yourself in this echo chamber. And when you walk out, your view of reality is totally different.

So let me just give you an example. MSNBC and Fox News. They both were sued for defamation for statements made. Now, defamation for public figures is hard to prove.

Because you not only need to prove a factual error, but you need to prove something called actual malice. Which we get from the common law. So actual malice means the news organization was intentionally spreading lies.

So it's hard to prove. How do you prove that someone not only made a factual error, but actually intentionally did so? Right? And that's been a legal requirement since our founding. Now, MSNBC and Fox News were sued for statements made during the shows of Tucker Carlson and Rachel Maddow.

Maddow was sued for calling another news network, quote, paid Russian propaganda. In another instance, she was sued for saying a doctor was performing mass hysterectomies against immigrants detained at detention centers.

[ 41 : 01 ] And this doctor was called the uterus collector. Tucker Carlson, on the other hand, was sued because he repeatedly claimed software and the voting machines were rigged, causing the election to be stolen for Donald Trump.

These are pretty sensational claims. Right? These aren't my words. The network's own lawyers argued in court, saying, yes, these statements are false.

Made by Maddow and Tucker Carlson. These statements are false. But, and here was the defense that they made. By the context of the show, a reasonable viewer would know these facts, these aren't meant to be reporting a fax.

Instead, it's, quote, exaggeration and non-literal commentary. In other words, they're saying, look, you should know these are opinions and not actual facts on these shows.

And the uterus collector doctor case is still in court, but they determined this was not a factual statement. Now it's up to the jury to decide whether Maddow intentionally lied about this.

[ 42 : 08 ] Actual malice. Now, better legal minds have pointed this out. If you are a news organization, you're actually more legally protected if you don't cooperate and investigate the story. You know why? Because if you investigate it, now you don't have any plausible deniability. Right? You can, a 24-7 news cycle, you just put something out there. And if it ends up being a false statement, okay, but we didn't intentionally lie about that. So the point of this is be discerning about what you're listening to. You know, the dashboard light as you consume media should go on when you hear the news anchors start to assign motives behind the action. So-and-so did this because they hate X. Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with opinion shows. I'm not saying you can't watch these networks. Or Maddow or Tucker Carlson. The problem is if you're relying on them to give you your news intake.

[ 43 : 15 ] And if you think your news source is completely objective, you're the one I'm worried about. All right? Don't be gullible, friend. You know, more foundationally, are you consuming more news media than you are the word?

You know, it's an irresponsible posture, especially in this age of infotainment. It's sensationalism. It's trying to get more eyeballs and clicks. Don't be gullible. You know, I think all of us would be much better if we just shut the news off and just read the word and prayed until the election. I know I'd be much better off if that happened. Okay. That's trap number one. Irresponsible news consumption. Trap number two. The Newman effect. The Newman effect. This term comes from Thaddeus Williams' book, which I've appreciated, *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth*. John Perkins, I think, contributes to that book. He's a great voice. John Perkins, a Christian civil rights leader. Now, disclaimer, this is not an endorsement. All right?

[ 44 : 22 ] What is the Newman effect? Well, there was a famous interview, which has been the subject of study, between Kathy Newman from British Channel 4 News and Jordan Peterson.

In a viral interview, Newman and Peterson touched on subjects from the gender pay gap, patriarchy, and transgenderism. And during the interview, Jordan Peterson would make a point. And then Kathy Newman would immediately respond with, so you're saying. And it would be an extreme cartoonist straw man. In an inflammatory, distorted statement. Right? And it happened 17 times. It became a viral meme. This is the Newman effect. When someone is, when you talk to someone, and they put words in your mouth to make you defend something you didn't say.

So, we all do this in our day and age. The Newman effect. Someone says, I believe racism still exists today. So, you're saying you're a cultural Marxist.

[ 45 : 29 ] I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. So, you're saying you hate all gay people? And they should have no rights? I believe fatherlessness is a problem where 70% of black families are born without a father.

So, you're saying you want to stereotype all black people? And you want to sweep slavery and Jim Crow under the rug like it never happened? I believe you should wear a mask.

So, you're saying you're in favor of government. That's what you're saying. Last one. I believe being a mother is one of the most important callings a woman can have. So, you're saying women aren't intelligent enough to be in the workforce?

Should be seen and not heard and should be consigned to baby making and kitchen duties. That's what you're saying. That's not what I'm saying. So, if we're honest with ourselves, we all live with this tendency, don't we?

Rather than engaging someone else's political positions, we associate with them some extreme repulsive beliefs. And if we're going to have good conversations, we should be aware of this tendency within all of us.

[ 46 : 37 ] Now, where do we find this rhetoric most often? Social media. Social media is training you to be suspicious. And left unchecked, love, peace, and patience are replaced with rage and suspicion.

Beginning to see people who disagree with you as some alt-right-wing crazy fundamentalist or some radical leftist. So, to have better conversations, Nick mentioned this, 1 Corinthians 13. Love believes all things, meaning we assume the best in others, and we give them the benefit of the doubt. Avoid the Newman effect. Part of loving someone else well is hearing them out and believing

what's best about them.

So, step one was the echo chamber. Step two was the Newman effect. And the last step is divisive propaganda. Divisive propaganda. This is the darkest step in polarization.

So, this is kind of dark, as I have read about this. Tribalism has a horrific history. By some estimates, propaganda has helped to produce 100 million casualties in the 20th century alone.

[ 47 : 48 ] The Nazis used it to dehumanize Jews. The Nazis would say, you know, Jews only appeared human. Inside, there were animals. The KKK used it to dehumanize blacks.

The 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville spoke of the parasitic class of anti-white vermin. In the Hutu Tutsi genocide, Tutsis were called inyensi.

They're cockroaches. They were called vermin that must be liquidated in the interest of self-defense. Now, how do we identify propaganda? Thaddeus Williams gives three common marks of propaganda.

First is a damning revisionist history. So, you rewrite history designed to paint the other group in the worst possible light. You take out anything positive about them.

The worst possible light in the most condemning way. So, in their entire history, the Hutus were the innocent victims, and the Tutsis were always the aggressors. Friend, this is bearing false witness against their neighbors.

[ 48 : 51 ] Right? It's one thing to disagree with an idea. It's entirely another to shake your fist at you people. Number two is encouraging you to treat all members of that group as guilty of the sins of the entire group.

So, any individual within that group belongs to that group and is an exemplar of that group. Right? Tyler, I no longer see you as an image bearer.

I see you as a white, patriarchal, cisgender oppressor. Third, blame all of my suffering, all of my pain on those damnable groups. And any individual within that group.

And this is the final step of an us versus them mentality. Right? You can't find a job? It must be those foreign invaders coming into this country. That's all their fault.

Propaganda. And this kind of rhetoric leads people right into the arms of some extremist ideology.

Oh, come on, Tyler. That's the riffraff. We don't need to worry about that. We're in New Haven.

[ 49 : 51 ] There's no propaganda here, is there? Okay, I'm going to read two abbreviated news articles. And this is not a personal attack on any of these people. This is just to show what's standard fare in many universities and major community outlets.

The first is written by a professor at a major university in a national newspaper. Article number one, she writes this. So in this moment, here in the land of legislatively legitimated toxic masculinity, is it really so illogical to hate men?

But we're not supposed to hate them because hashtag not all men. But when they have gone low for all of human history, maybe it's time for us to go all Fema and Louise and Foxy Brown and their collective thoughts.

Men, if you really are with us, you should pledge to vote for feminist women only. Don't run for office. Don't be in charge of anything. Step away from the power. We got this. And please know that your crocodile tears won't be wiped away by us anymore.

We have every right to hate you. You have done us wrong. Hashtag because patriarchy. It is long past time to play hard for team feminism and win.

[ 51 : 06 ] Okay. That's article number one. Article number two. Every Hutu should know that every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only priority is the supremacy of his ethnic group.

The experience of the October 1990 war has taught us a lesson. The Hutu must be firm and vigilant against their common Tutsi enemy. All strategic positions, political, administrative, economic, military, and security should be entrusted only to Hutu.

The education sector must be majority Hutu. The Hutu ideology must be taught at every level. The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi. So if you replace the word men for Tutsi, there are parallels in these articles, aren't there?

Both articles come from major media outlets. The first article is from the Washington Post. The other is a major newspaper in Mwanda. Both articles cite historical grievances.

One paints men in the worst possible light. The other, the Tutsi, in the worst possible light. Both say to refrain from showing mercy any longer. One was written in 1990, and the author was charged for war crimes for inciting genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda.

[ 52 : 21 ] The other is a celebrated professor at a major university in the Northeast. Thankfully, she's not calling for genocide, but the same heart of tribalism is in both.

This is standard fare in university departments. New York Times, an esteemed University of Michigan law professor, wrote an article, Can my children be friends with white people?

A renowned professor at Yale who writes that black rage is a healing response, and she fantasizes about stabbing a nameless white man on an airplane, feeling a killing rage, fantasizing about shooting him with a gun.

If you don't think there's propaganda down the streets, you're not paying attention. Is there any surprise that there's a rise of anti-Semitism in New Haven on campus?

Are you drawn to this kind of media? Now let me address the Newman effect. So you're saying we need to sweep these things under the rug? Not for a moment am I saying that.

[ 53 : 21 ] There's been real hurt. The world is a twisted place. But Christ calls us to forgiveness. The most heroic thing you can watch is a victim's family look over at the perpetrator in court and say, I forgive you.

And hating others is not an option for us. Even if the other person espouses a hateful ideology, we need to afford them the dignity of creating the image of God. Relentless, unsympathetic, head-shaking at one specific group of people is not the way.

Scapegoating them. Blaming all your problems on them. The world wants you to do that. Resist the temptation. In the interest of time, let me just give you five diagnostic questions and conclude with the scripture.

Consider, friend, are you easily offended? Do you use condemning rhetoric about other groups of people? Are you slow to assume the worst in others?

Or are you quick to assume the worst? Do you blame all of your problems on others and never recognize evil in your own heart? Are you preoccupied with your own feelings rather than engaging someone charitably about what they're saying?

[ 54 : 35 ] All right, think of the person you disagree with the most. A person whose politics you despise. I want you to just picture them in your mind for just a second. Picture that person smiling at you with all their smugness.

Now think of this. They're an image bearer. They were made in the image of God. And God calls you to love them and pray for them. So this us versus them should have no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

I conclude with Ephesians 4, verse 31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God and Christ forgave you. So, friend, we've been forgiven. We need to extend that forgiveness to others.

So let me just conclude in prayer and then we'll go downstairs. Father in heaven, we pray, Lord, that we would be united in Christ. And all that we say and do as a church, that our politics, we would have a chance to talk with one another in a spirit of love and unity as we've talked about this morning.

[ 55 : 42 ] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, two things, everybody. First, this room needs to be set up for children.