This weekend we continue the Elephant in the Church series. I’ll actually be at NCC this weekend, but I’m flying to Germany between then and now. So I wanted to share my message this week via video. And I also figured it was much safer. You can’t stone me if I’m not there!

Well, I’ll be honest. This has been a tough series because there are tough topics. And this one might be the toughest. In fact, I told Lora that if I hadn’t verbalized in the very beginning that we’d talk about the political elephant I probably would have picked another topic. But when I say “read my lips” I mean it.

Well, here’s what I want to do this weekend. I want to make highly politicized statements that will cause irreconcilable divisions and ultimately split our church. Alright, that’s what I don’t want to do. But there’s an outside chance so listen carefully!

Well, let me share a little bit of history. And then I want to share five biblical principles that I think should guide us as we approach Election Day and beyond.

**Our Story**

Twelve years ago, Lora and I inherited a core group of nineteen people and started pastoring National Community Church. We knew that a church in the vortex of politics would have some interesting dynamics. Most of the people in our congregation eat, sleep, and breathe politics. Some of you even smoke politics! But you don’t inhale! I’m an equal-opportunity offender! I love the fact that our congregation is uber-involved in politics. I feel like I get to influence influencers. But it also creates some unique dynamics.

One of the things that struck me early on is the way so many churches in DC seemed to have a political agenda. I would read sermons by pastors and they seemed like public policy papers. It’s like they felt like their job was to tell their members how to vote and what to think on matters ranging from domestic policy to foreign policy. Listen, I have opinions about stuff. And I’d like to think they are expert opinions. But I don’t feel like that is my calling or our calling as a church.

I think there is a human tendency to be experts in things we’ve never done. Some of you have preached some amazing sermons. Imaginary sermons. But they’ve been amazing! And I’ve drafted some amazing imaginary pieces of legislation! I’ve had ideas that I’m sure would win unanimous approval from every country represented in the United Nations. And I’m pretty sure I could sit down with tyrant leaders and find a way to make peace. Of course, I wouldn’t sit down with them unless they agreed to certain terms!

What I’m trying to say is this. All this stuff is important. But our job as a church is to make disciples. And we certainly want to teach the Bible in relevant ways that inform everything from our finances to our marriages to our morals to our time management to our politics! But we made a decision, Day One, to be apolitical as a church. What I mean by that is this: we don’t endorse political candidates or political parties. Unless they promise us huge sums of cash as part of the faith-based initiative! Then we would. But they haven’t so we don’t! You think I’m kidding don’t you.

Listen, we need to think critically and biblically and tactfully about every issue facing our country. I think every political issue has spiritual overtones or undertones. I think we need to be engaged in the political
“process.” I was just in Canada last week and I like the way they say “process” better than we say so I’m going with the un-American pronunciation. Listen, I think we need to vote. We need more Christians who are called to culture-shaping professions like politics. It is our right and responsibility.

But I also believe that the church exists to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. And all too often, our politics actually gets in the way of that. Our political positions can be obstacles that keep people from getting to the cross. And Jesus didn’t come to set up an earthly Kingdom. He came to redeem us from our sin and setup a spiritual kingdom that would transcend every earthly kingdom. When the people wanted to make him king, which they did—John 6:15. Jesus resisted them. Why? Because he came to establish a kingdom that would transcend politics, transcend culture, transcend borders, transcend languages. And the day is coming when all the kingdom of this world will be His kingdom!

Revelation 11:15 says—

> And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.

Number One — Blood is Thicker than Water

Alright, well here’s what I want to do this weekend. I want to share some biblical principles that I think ought to shape the way we think and talk about politics. And I know that some of you are going to be disappointed because you want to know who I’m voting for. And I’d love to tell you. But then I’d have to shoot you. And that isn’t legal under a strict constructionist view of the Constitution. But that is a little off topic!

Here’s the first principle: blood is thicker than water. My mom used to say that all the time as a kid. It was her way of reminding us that family comes first. Your friends will come and go. But family is forever. And for some of you that is totally depressing! Of course, for others that isn’t really a factor because you grew up in the 90’s when it took a village to raise a child.

Here’s the bottom line: we are an incredibly diversified congregation! We have lots of people on both sides of the political aisle. We have people who have been inspired to go work on the Obama campaign and people who been inspired to go work on the McCain campaign. So we essentially cancel each other out and no one at NCC is really making a difference! Can we edit that out? Ok. You’re gonna do that right?

This may be the most important reminder I share today. We have lots of political differences. We belong to different political parties. And we fight for different things. But I want you to listen to Galatians 3:26-29.

> 26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

If Paul had been writing this in twenty-first century America I think he would have included Republican and Democrat. There were huge divisions in the ancient world. But Paul said those divisions disappear in Christ. We are all one in Christ Jesus.
I know that sounds somewhat utopian. But I think Paul is saying our allegiance to Christ comes first. Our allegiance to each other, as a spiritual family, comes second. And our allegiance to whatever political party we are part of comes third.

So it’s “God first.” “Family second.” And “politics third.”

Why? Because blood—the blood of Christ, the bloodline that runs through everyone that is part of the family of God—is thicker than water!

I remember a few years ago when an NCC was trying to get a job on the Hill. His dream was working in the political realm. And he was part of a political party that will remain nameless. I remember hearing that his small group decided to fast and pray for him. And God opened the door. And he went to work on the hill fighting for issues he cared about. But what was so cool to me is that his small group included people from both parties. But they were willing to put their politics aside and fast and pray for their brother-in-Christ.

We have our differences. We have lots of people that see lots of issues—everything from health care to welfare to war—differently. But we’re called to love each other despite our differences. And we ought to take our obligation to love each other more seriously than our allegiance to a particular party or issue. Jesus is bigger than the Republican party. Jesus is bigger than the Democratic party.

And that brings us to the second principle.

**Number Two — Our Kingdom is Spiritual**

*Philippians 3:20-21* says:

> 20 But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

Listen, we are citizens of the U.S. Yes. And I celebrate that. I am proud to be an American.

[Video of *I'm Proud to Be An American*]

I don’t think you can look at our history as a country and deny that we’ve done some things wrong. But we’ve also done some things right. And I believe we are a blessed nation. I believe that God has a unique plan and purpose for the United States of America. We have the collective potential, as a nation, to do some amazing things.

But here is the deal. We are first and foremost, citizens of heaven. We are part of a spiritual kingdom. And our prayer is this: *Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done!*

Now I know that some of you are still looking for political clues. You’re guessing and second-guessing who I’m voting for. And I’m about to share something that could be interpreted as clue. But it might just be a Jedi-mind trick.

I’m not sure exactly how to say this, but fighting injustice or alleviating suffering or caring for the sick or helping the poor or fighting for life are not political agendas. They are God’s agenda. God cares about everything from AIDS to orphans to the environment. Why? Because he made them! So this is a spiritual statement not a political statement.
If the church was really doing its job—if we really cared about what God cared about—we wouldn’t need the government to do it for us! I think a lot of government programs ought to be church programs. But the government has picked up the ball because the church dropped the ball.

I know this is somewhat utopian. And I don’t believe in unicorns. At least outside the black forest in Germany. And that was two hundred years ago. Can we edit that out?

I think the church, in too many instances, has abdicated its role and responsibility.

By the way, I was speaking at a conference last week with Donald Miller, author of Blue Like Jazz. And he shared about an initiative that his church in Portland started called The Advent Conspiracy. They were fed up at the commercialization of Christmas so they challenged people to quit spending so much money on themselves and give it away. They have raised millions of dollars and they just gave a $500,000 check to the mayor of Portland. How cool is that? They just said, we as the church care about this city and we want you to use this as you see fit. They said we want to be part of the solution to our city’s problems!

By the way, Donald has publically endorsed Barack Obama. I didn’t know that. But I think it affords an opportunity. When I say that, some of you like him more. And some of you like him less. That is a natural reaction. But I had some people emailing me and messaging me when I mentioned his name. And we didn’t even talk politics. But they were ready to rake him over the coals. Now listen. I’m sure Donald Miller and I don’t see eye-to-eye on every issue. In fact, there is one issue in particular that we don’t agree on. And it’s an incredible important issue. For many, it is the litmus issue. I’m not going to tell you what it is. Because it’s far more fun to keep you guessing! But here is what frustrates me. People get upset at Donald over this issue. They write him off. I can disagree with Donald on this issue. But I can still appreciate the fact that he biked all the way across America this summer raising $250,000 to build wells in Africa so kids can have clean drinking water. You may not like his stand on some issues. But too often we excommunicate each other.

Listen, if you’re anything like me. Sometimes you’re astounded at the simple fact that not everybody sees the world the way you do. They just don’t get it. But you have to remember. They have the right be wrong!

Let me share an email I got from an NCCer because I think it captures this well.

When I first came to DC, I really struggled with the fact that people I cared about and respected could have such different perspectives—especially when we shared the same core convictions in Christ! But I had a revelation one day when I realized, most Christ-followers want the same outcomes (health care for people, jobs for families, education opportunities, etc.) but we just have very different perspectives on how to get there!! Once I realized this, I felt so much more at peace. My friends were not evil after all!

Here’s what I’m getting at. We need to be the solution. We need to be the church. We need to be the blessing. We need to be going into our schools and say: how can we be a blessing? We need to be walking into our council member’s offices and asking: how can we be a blessing? We need to be volunteering our time.

Let me put a dream on the radar. A couple months ago, we hosted an event called the Convoy of Hope. We blessed nearly 10,000 people with 80,000 pounds of groceries. We gave people haircuts. We helped them make resumes. We did a job fair. And it was amazing. But at some point, I think we realized that the Convoy wasn’t an end in itself. It was a means to an end. I believe that within the next year, God is going to give us a ministry center where we can make a difference seven days a week. Call it a dream center. Call
it a hope center. It’ll be a place where we care for the physical, economic, and educational needs in our city. But it’ll be more than that. I think it’ll be a place that offers spiritual hope! I don’t know when. I don’t know where. But we’re starting to do prayer drives. We’re knocking on doors. We’re exploring options. So if you know of a building in a strategic part of town—maybe the worst part of town. Or if you want to give us a building, let us know! And I’m not kidding!

But here’s my point. Yes, we want to make a difference politically. I believe politics is a noble calling. And we need Christians to view that as their mission-field. We need Christians in culture-shaping professions. And God strategically positioned people throughout the Old Testament in positions of political power to make a difference—Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Queen Esther in Persia. But it’s not about John McCain’s kingdom or Barack Obama’s kingdom coming. It’s about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ being advanced on earth. That would be a good place to say Amen! It’s about His agenda. His mission. His priorities. And we, as the church, are His vehicle.

One final footnote.

John 6:14-15

14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

They thought the solution to their problems was political. They wanted to elect Jesus. Jesus for President. But political policies are not ultimate solutions. The ultimate solution is the Lord’s prayer: Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. And that transcends both political parties.

**Number Three — Don’t Pass Judgment on Disputable Matters**

This is an incredibly important principle when it comes to politics. And it’s a difficult one to explain and apply. But let me give it a shot.

There are issues in the Bible that are black and white or right and wrong. The Bible is explicit. When you turn something that is black and white into something that is gray it’s called relativism. We live in the bastion of political correctness where it is wrong to say something is wrong. And that’s wrong. I think we need to stand our political ground on issues of right and wrong. And we need to fight for what is right. Listen, if it’s black and white then we need to be black and white! On the other hand, there are issues that are gray. The Bible is not explicit about them. And when we turn them into black and white or right and wrong issues, it is called legalism. And both of those errors are incredibly destructive.

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

What is a disputable matter? It’s something that is gray. The bible is not explicit. And we need to give some biblical latitude. We do that with our core belief statement. There are some doctrines that are non-negotiable. Jesus was the Son of God. He lived in a sinless life. He died on the cross for our sin. And he was raised again on the third day. But there are other issues—eternal security, the rapture of the church, and whether or not to sing the third verse of a hymn—that we’ve disagreed on forever.

We quote Rupertus Meldenius all the time. He said, “In the essentials unity; in the non-essentials liberty; in all things charity.”
That’s not just a good theological maxim. I think it’s a good political maxim. Of course, we define essentials and non-essentials differently. And I know that many people are one-issue or two-issue voters. And there are one or two issues that I weigh more heavily than others. Let me tell you what they are. Wait. Did you edit that out? Sorry about that.

Let me try to give us some perspective. There are political issues that God-fearing, Christ-loving, and Bible-believing people will disagree on until Jesus returns—whether that be pre, mid, or post-rapture. But here is what I’ve discovered over the years. There is a lot of cynicism and skepticism outside the beltway. But I’ve grown to appreciate the people who have devoted themselves to making a difference in the political realm. And I may not agree with their politics. But I can appreciate their passion.

And here is an important spiritual lesson I’ve learned. Not everybody is going to be as passionate about the things I’m passionate about. And that’s ok. I think we sometimes want everybody to care about the things we care about as much as we care about them. And if they don’t we think they are lukewarm Christians. But just as the church is a body—and we need different people with different passions—I think the same holds true politically. We need different people in different departments fighting for their God-ordained passions. We need people who care deeply about health care. We need people who care deeply about life. We need people who care deeply about education. We need people who care deeply about the environment. I’ve learned to appreciate people who care deeply about a variety of issues that aren’t my primary passion.

We need our differences as a church. We have a core value: conformity doesn’t equal maturity. The same is true in the political arena. We need our differences. And when it comes to disputable matters or matters of conscience we need some biblical latitude.

**Number Four — If you don’t vote don’t complain.**

The political atmosphere right now makes me think of Numbers 14:26-28:

26 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 27 “I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites.”

The Israelites were always complaining and grumbling. I think we need to quit complaining and quit grumbling. We need to stop pointing out what’s wrong and become part of the solution. Otherwise, we’ll continue to be known for what we’re against instead of what we’re for.

Here’s the fourth principle: If you don’t vote don’t complain! And even if you do vote, and the person you vote for doesn’t get elected, then don’t spend the next four years complaining. If all you’re going to do is complain, move to Canada! I’m serious. We’ll launch a location in Newfoundland.

Listen, here is what is going to happen this week. We’re going to go to the polls. We’re going to cast votes. And unless there are lots of hanging chads, we’ll wake up on November 5 knowing who the next President is going to be. So what should we do? First of all, I want to encourage you to celebrate my birthday! Yes, my birthday is November 5th. And I do accept gift cards and cash. Wink!

If your candidate wins, go ahead and do a little dance. Call it “the Obama” or “the McCain.” But what if your candidate lost?

Well, here’s a thought. If your candidate loses, it may be the perfect time to actually obey Matthew 5:44.

44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
Come November 5, half of us will have the opportunity to put this verse into practice. And here’s the good news. If you’re candidate lost, you’ll probably be more spiritual than the other political party in four years!

Now let me get serious. What if we quit complaining and started praying. I honestly think it would change the political tone in our country. You know what I’ve discovered. When I talk bad about someone behind their back, I can’t look them in the eye. But when I’m praying for something, even someone I don’t really like or agree with, I can look them in the eye.

And that leads me to my final point.

**Number Five — Respect Those in Authority**

*Romans 13:1-7* says,

1 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. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 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. 4 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. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. But Paul didn’t live in twenty-first century America. Ha! He lived under Roman rule. In fact, he had a few brushes with the law. He had been illegally flogged. Almost died. But he didn’t hold a vendetta against the government. And Rome didn’t offer anywhere near the freedoms we enjoy under the bill of rights!

Paul says we need to respect those in authority. I know we’ve had some Presidents that are hard for some people to respect. And the reasons vary from having not having sexual relations with an intern to mispronunciation of words. And I think it’s ok to disagree. It’s ok to even joke. In fact, I propose that the next election cycle is one long roast. But we need to show some respect for the President, whether we agree or disagree. He’s still the President. And we ought to be praying for him.

I think we as Christ-followers need to operate in a spirit of humility and a spirit of reconciliation.

We need a spirit of humility.

Listen, DC is a very insecure place! There is lots of image-making and political posturing. There is a lot of insecurity. It’s not the easiest environment to be a humble, authentic, follower of Christ. But if you have the courage to follow the example Jesus set, I think you can make a difference the way Jesus did.
We also need a spirit of reconciliation.

Again, fighting injustice and alleviating suffering and caring for the poor are not political agendas. They are God’s agenda. And we need to come together for a common cause. The cause is bigger than our differences! God is bigger than a good president or a bad president. And the church ought to model the kind of unity in diversity that would actually get things done in a bipartisan way on Capitol Hill. There’s something about the church that unites people in a way that politics cannot.

Job 11:6 is one of my guiding principles. It says, “True wisdom has two sides.” I believe truth is found in the tension of opposites. And we’ve got to find a way to embrace the tension. I honestly think, if we take the best of both parties, we’re better off a country.

So you want to know who I’m voting for?

I have some friends who are for Barack Obama. I have some friends who are for John McCain. And I, my fellow citizens, am for… my friends.

[static]

One final thought. When the election is over, it’ll be 1,460 days until the next one. Let’s be part of the solution. Let’s get involved. Let’s serve. Let’s care. Let’s pray. And let’s help solve problems.

Let me borrow some thoughts from a friend of mine.

What is more important than how we vote on Nov. 4 is how we live on Nov. 3 and Nov. 5. We vote everyday with our lives. We vote every day with our feet, our hands, our lips, and our wallets….ultimate change does not just happen one day every four years. —Shane Claiborne

Let’s close in prayer. But here’s what I want us to do. I want you to grab the hand of the person next to you at all of our locations. And I want us to pray for the election. And I want us to pray for each other. I know that lots of people have their job on the lines. And someone won’t just win or lose an election. Someone might win or lose a job. So let’s pray together.

Father, we are on the verge of an important decision. We pray that you would guide us to make a wise decision when we walk into the voter’s booth. May we have your mind and your heart as we vote. And not matter, what the outcome is. We pray that we would make a difference, that we would be part of the solution, that we would seek to glorify you.

We pray for those whose jobs are on the line. Give grace. Give peace. Give strength.

And, finally, Lord, we pray as you taught us:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. Matthew 6:9-13