

# Navigating America's Political Chaos

*Greg Strand, Executive Director of Theology and Credentialing with the Evangelical Free Church of America*

As we navigate this election and the post-election outcomes, we must consider some possible responses of Christians to our changing political and moral landscape. How, then, shall we approach this? Here are ten truths for us to consider.

- **God is sovereign.** Remember the words of Psalm 2:1-4: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.” God is sovereign over all the nations and peoples and kings and rulers. He is sovereign over the election process and the candidates.
- **God providentially governs all things.** God’s providence is good, he knows the beginning and the end and everything in between (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 46:10; 48:12; Rev. 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13). And this knowledge is not a good guess, but it is personal and planned. Consider Proverbs 21:1: “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”
- **God sovereignly and providentially puts governments and rulers in place.** Paul writes, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1). This addresses God’s sovereignty and providence, which are doctrinal truths about God and his unfolding plan. But these truths are not abstract. They are lived out in real-time in a real place. For Paul, he wrote at a time during which Christianity was not acceptable and Christians were persecuted.
- **Our cultural context is more similar to the early church than it has been since Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313).** This edict granted Christians religious toleration in the Roman Empire. Many now believe we live in a post-Constantinian day, with both strengths and weaknesses, which also carries with it post-Christian implications. Many have been addressing the various options Christians now face regarding how to live in, interact with and engage culture, e.g. Benedictine Option, Babylonian Option, Jeremiah Option, among others. One option not often mentioned for Christians is a Dispersion Option, that espoused by Peter in his epistles (1 and 2 Peter). Peter begins his first letter, “To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). These are believers, “elect exiles,” who are part of the “Dispersion,” those who are living in a foreign land with different values, customs and mores, and who live as pilgrims, as if this is not our true home. This reflects a similar cultural setting in which we live today. Read, ponder and pray through the Petrine epistles, as there is much we can and ought to learn about life and ministry in our contemporary day.
- **Christians, in general, and Evangelicals, in particular, bought into cultural Christianity, depended on it too much, and confused the gospel with its cultural accoutrements/entailments.** This is why, I believe, so many Evangelicals are struggling. There is a desire to go back to an earlier day, a day that

was known for a greater cultural alignment with Christian truth and morality. That day is past. In some ways, this is forcing Evangelicals to discern between the true gospel and its cultural expressions or entrapments. In response, some pull away from the culture and cultural engagement, while others become too comfortable with it. One must recognize the spirit of the age so that one clearly discerns the Spirit of the ages and then responds appropriately. What does it mean for us today to be in the world, but not of the world (Jn. 17)?

- ***Evangelicals live in a day in which the truth we affirm is considered a moral minority.*** As noted above, this is reflective of how the early church lived. There is much we can and ought to learn from them. Additionally, there are many brothers and sisters who have lived, and continue to live, as minorities in a majority culture. For example, African Americans have lived this way for many years. In this day in which we live as moral minorities, we have much to learn from those believers who have lived as ethnic and/or racial minorities.
- ***We remember we serve a King, the King of kings and Lord of lords, in his kingdom.*** Although this world is significant in that it is God's creation and though fallen it is being redeemed (Rom. 8:18-25), this world is not ultimate. God is unfolding his plan in and through history. We do not wring our hands as if things are out of control. We do not become anxious because our preferred political candidate or party is not on the "throne." The reason is because God remains on the throne. The way in which we live and respond these days reflects and reveals a great deal about what we believe about God and his plan. Do we believe we have to usher in God's kingdom, or help it along by ensuring the right people get in office? If we do, we are working to establish a kingdom of man, not the kingdom of God (Gen. 11). It is in response to God's judgement of the nations that John writes of Jesus, "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).
- ***This kingdom of God is marked by a cross.*** This means God's kingdom is an upside down kingdom in which the weak are strong, and the strong are weak, since God's power is made manifest and is grace made sufficient in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10). In contrast, the kingdom of man is marked by a crown, a theology of glory. And although we do not deny a crown and glory, they only come through the cross. This world, and those who live by the ways of the world, desire the crown and glory apart from the cross. How much have we been influenced by and bought into this idea, especially when we consider the power associated with a political machine or majority?
- ***We are exhorted to pray.*** As Christians, we are exhorted, first and foremost, to pray that God's kingdom will come and his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Furthermore, we are also exhorted to pray for our leaders and those in authority over us (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Prayer is not perfunctory and passive. It is the heart of communion with God and foundational to our engaging in the work of God. The fact that we do not engage prayer with this in mind reflects our misunderstanding of God, prayer and our role/response and the most fruitful and effective way to engage in cultural engagement and influence today. As one writes, "To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world."
- ***We trust in the Lord and his promises and place our hope in him and his plans.*** Our response and engagement is to trust in the Lord and hope in him. Trust is not only affirming all the truths associated with God and his Word, but also living our

lives, speaking, engaging in this world based upon those truths. It is those who wait on the Lord who will renew their strength (Isa. 40:28-31). This sort of life, a life given to those by faith, manifests the gospel, the kingdom, a life marked by faith. This means the following: those who have been made righteous by faith, they also live by faith (Rom. 1:17). This means we do not despair or wring our hands based upon a president or political expediency. We hope in God. And this hope is not a wishful thinking based upon the political winds, but rather it is based on the sure and certain hope and promise given by God (Heb. 6:12-20). With Paul we pray, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13).

I conclude these ten truths with a focus on the book of Revelation, written by John and intended to bring comfort, hope and assurance to Christians in the midst of difficulties, trials and persecutions. Charles Hill [summarizes](#) the message of Revelation, which is an excellent reminder to us:

*Revelation delivers to the distressed churches of Asia Minor and to the church in all ages, the triumphant assurance that behind the scenes of history and despite the vicissitudes of history, the kingdom of God is in power, and Jesus Christ the King of all kings is on his Father's throne executing his sovereign judgment over the world. Though to the fleshly eye the events of history may often seem to say the opposite, though the church of Jesus Christ might seem despised and defeated, it is Jesus Christ who rules the kings of the earth, and his purposes are patiently being worked out here below.*