

KINGDOM CITIZENS

A Weekly Guide to Walking in Radical Devotion

Week 4

Not Right, not Left, not Private

There is a lie western culture opted into a few centuries ago. This lie is still believed, and it shapes much of our political landscape on both sides of the political aisle. The lie is this: Through human progress, humanity can create utopia. Through our own efforts, science, technology, self-expression—you name it—we can make the world the way it is supposed to be.

I want you to think about that for a moment and ask yourself: *Is that true? Can we, in fact, create an ideal world?*

Human progress is responsible for many incredible and wonderful things. I mean, cars can drive themselves for crying out loud! There is no doubt we've made progress. The Bible tells us that God set up the world for human flourishing. Because of that, there is much good in the world that has helped humanity to flourish.

However, the sin that exists in the human heart and permeates the world continues to wreak havoc on the entire enterprise. Governments always have and always will misuse their God-ordained power and oppress people for their own benefit. The progress in our country highly favors some while excluding, marginalizing and oppressing others.

It is naive and unbiblical to think that sin can be dealt with through politics, and it is equally naive to assume that

reshuffling the political deck will lead to the utopia the human heart longs for.

I am not saying we shouldn't seek to do good to all people. That is a mandate God has given us. However, placing our hope in the LIE that human progress will lead to utopia will always disappoint us.

In an ultimate sense, the political right and political left are both talking about the same thing. The disagreement is over *how* that utopia should look. That disagreement is wide and high and deep, but the fundamental belief undergirding both sides is that human progress done in a particular way (right or left, conservative or progressive, democrat or republican) will lead to a utopia. The assumption is that if one side had all the power, they would be able to shape the world into what it is supposed to be.

Kingdom Citizens led by the Spirit and submitted to God's Word know it is not this simple. We know we can't fix what is deeply broken in the human heart and in human systems without the only One who has the authority and power to redeem that brokenness. We are not right, not left and not private. We are biblical realists who bear witness to the Good News for all people that another Kingdom is breaking in on earth.

Lee Camp says it this way in his book, *Scandalous Witness*:

"This same sort of realism must characterize our own sharp social critique. The Bible is no utopian, do-

gooder manifesto, but uncomfortably, sometimes painfully, realistic. Yet still the Bible depicts all powers—everything from king to priest, marketplace to temple, marriage bed to social policy—as potential gifts to human communities. Each gift may nonetheless oppress and overreach. Such realism must pervade our thinking regarding the relationship between church and world.... This fact is of great sociopolitical import and stands in great tension with the naiveté with which both stereotypical liberals and stereotypical conservatives often address social problems. It is they who often are the utopian idealists, not the writers of Scripture. The Bible is much more realistic about the challenges posed by broken social systems. Scripture has no naiveté about the ease with which such brokenness can be made right."

What Camp and many others observe is that the Church has failed to live faithfully to Jesus and God's word in her engagement with American politics. The term "evangelical" has been co-opted by the right and lost its original meaning. It is now seen as a political identity rather than a faith identity. In this sense, the Church's alignment with Jesus Christ, His salvation and way of life has been vandalized and disempowered as a witness to the world. In place of that witness, a different Jesus has taken shape.

The appropriate response to this is repentance. The danger is to think we can correct this by shaping Jesus into a democrat. Again, both parties are driven by the same unbiblical lie of human progress. A Jesus who looks like a democrat is no more faithful a witness than a Jesus who looks like a Republican.

Cricket...I can hear the frustration from republicans and democrats alike at this point, but bear with me.

Jesus' announcement that the Kingdom of God has broken in is meant to be shared in the public square. He has announced a new way of life, a new way of being human. What does it look like to be faithful to *that King*? Again, Lee Camp expresses this really well:

"The great paradigmatic moment of political encounter in the founding narrative of the Christians comes with the gospel: 'Change, and believe in the good news of the reign of God.' This new political movement of God would entail specific practices unlike those of the nations, unlike those of the powers whom we have falsely assumed have the monopoly on political power. This new political movement would offer the world something at which kings and rulers would shake their heads: love of enemies, practices of reconciliation, sharing of wealth, honoring of marriage, renunciation of our varied practices of greed and lust, and an embrace of all the practices of life and mercy and kindness. Or thus said Jesus...."

In all these and many compelling ways besides, the Scriptures call us to face the pain and brokenness of human history. And we are called to have the courage to play our part: to be brave as the soldier, committed as the activist, devoted as the evangelical, sedulous as the journalist—speaking to, acting for, sowing the seeds of the world that is on its way, knowing that it requires great labor, perseverance, and a willingness to suffer, and promises, too, on the journey, of deep joy and gladness, friends and fellow pilgrims, called as we are to be bearers of the end of history. We shall refuse to vindicate Marx by refusing to let our faith be an opiate of

the masses; we shall face the pain and oppression squarely and proclaim the good news that the hope of all humankind, evoked in and out of our tears and cries and confusion and anger, has come, shall come. And we shall dare to live by it. So: No, history is not one damn meaningless thing after another. Moses, the prophets, and Jesus, each in their own way, insisted that history has a goal, a direction, an intrinsic and inescapable importance in the purposes of the Creator of all things good. And woe be unto those who stand in the way of this great God's unfolding of this narrative, which will not be stopped until all that is beautiful and good and true is made manifest in our midst."

Kingdom Citizens are a peculiar people. We believe that heaven has broken in through Jesus and have tasted its reality through the Holy Spirit. We know that every kingdom on earth will one day bow to the true King. We know that God and God alone will re-make the world the way He originally intended it to be. We know sin has infected and affected every heart and human institution. We know the only remedy is the offer of a new heart and a new birth in Jesus.

And we know we are called to bear witness to *that* world. We may differ on how to go about it. We may differ on the role politics can play, but we should never trust that our next president holds our future. Our future is in the hands of Jesus Christ and the Father who dwells in us through the Holy Spirit. **THIS** future is secure.

So we will not be private about this Good News, and we will not place our ultimate trust in one political party. We

should be ashamed that the Church has, in some places, defended Trump's character and vitriol against Black people, people of color, women, Muslims, immigrants, and others. We should never assume the democrats will represent the church either.

Instead we will fight for justice for all people, and we will love our enemies. We will acknowledge our anger and pain, acknowledge the pain of others and seek to bring the healing of heaven to one another. We will no longer pretend that any political party has the market on God or His Church, and we will not settle for the naiveté of the world.

As people of God and His word, we are free to be realistic about the world and its brokenness. So we will cry out, suffer for and sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others. We will vote as good citizens, vote to glorify Jesus and, whenever possible, vote for policies and candidates that demonstrate love for our neighbors. We will consider the economy and jobs but also racial injustice and the marginalized. We will ask God for wisdom and seek first His Kingdom, so that even as we vote we might bear witness to another world.

And we will, I pray, seek the unity and peace of Christ for His Church and fight hard to be unified, knowing that no human power or institution should separate us. We all have work to do as Kingdom Citizens. We all have personal changes to make, so that together we can follow Jesus into His Kingdom and welcome people to the freedom of His reign.

Block quotes in this guide can be found in the following book:

Camp, Lee C. *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians*. William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020.

Scripture

Begin by reading 1 Corinthians 13 aloud (try it from The Voice or The Message to shake up any over-familiarity with the language). Allow the invitation to love permeate your imagination for what is possible in the family of God.

Questions

Are you tired? Share it with one another. What made you tired this week?

You're not alone. Before you begin to imagine all that you can do with this invitation to loving unity (and feel overwhelmed), remember Jesus's words in Matthew 11:28-30:

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

This invitation to love is **Holy Spirit work**. It is not something any one of us can just rally enough or dig deep enough to sustain. Until the Kingdom of God is all the way here, there will always be another conflict, another person in need, another loss....So our first work is to fall on our knees and pray. If you don't know what to say, that's okay. Tell Jesus. Be honest. Borrow the prayers of

your brothers and sisters across time and boundaries. Cry out to God.

Share with another about your prayer life:
What has been helpful?
What has been hard?
What do you want your prayer life to be like?

Prayer

Close with this prayer from John M. Perkins's book, *One Blood*:

Lord Jesus, teach us what it means to love like You love. Cause us to become uncomfortable with surface-level friendships. Help us to yearn and hunger for deep fellowship that is real and can be seen and that will light the way for those who are in darkness. Would you set ablaze in our hearts a passion for your Church. Lord, make us One. Make us rejoice when the other rejoices. Make us weep when the other weeps. Lord, make us One. For Your glory, Amen.