

The last two times I was able to preach to you before Lauren and I headed to Africa for a couple of weeks, we began a series on authority, what it is, where it stems from, where we have to submit to it and where we don't have to submit to it. We started week 1 talking about God being the Creator God and if God is Creator of all things, then God alone has ultimate rights over His creation. That's hard for us because we're children of the Enlightenment and we have been programed for the last two-hundred years to think about "my rights. . .my rights. . .my rights. . ." and that everything that I don't like is a violation of my rights. Now, if you're talking about human on human, fundamental human rights are an issue. If you're talking God on human, human beings have no rights in view of a holy, perfect, sovereign, all-knowing God. So God cannot violate your rights. And we went through a whole bunch of Scriptures that nobody likes or puts on coffee cups just to show you that God is about God and the universe is about God, not about us, despite what most of us have been taught. That was week 1. It was a very chipper sermon.

The second week we let that progress. We said that if God is ultimate in authority and the Scriptures are God's words, then God's word is authoritative over our lives. We did a lot of presuppositional apologetics to support this. We used history and some other things to show you that the Scriptures, when arguing for their divinity, will point to history and historical facts more than it ever points to blind faith. So the New Testament in particular is constantly calling on eye-witnesses, for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. From Paul in front of Agrippa to Paul to the church in Corinth to Luke in the beginning of his gospel to Theophilus, they're saying, "Listen, you know, you've heard, you saw." We walked through the Scriptures that would have any kind of American court system slamming the gavel and going, "Okay, Christ resurrected from the dead." And we covered that at length in week 2.

Now from this weekend on, we'll take the Scriptures and look at what the Scriptures defined as our authorities, either God ordained authorities or authorities we have put ourselves under and must now submit to. That means I need to address government tonight. And I know already the Fox News people have the hair standing up and the CNN people are looking around. I'm just going to let the Bible be the Bible, but let me just lay my cards down on the table so you know my background, so you can then judge whether or not my background is somehow leaking into this sermon and I'm giving you opinion over fact. I am a military brat, growing up on military bases at the end of the Cold War. So I remember all sorts of silly things from my childhood. I remember that we didn't just do fire drills, but we did drills in case they dropped the nuclear bomb and we hid under our desks. I can still remember going, "Seriously? This is what we're doing? So if they drop an atomic bomb being in the hallway is going to save me?" I remember the Miracle on Ice, not the movie but the game. I remember when Rocky Balboa flew to Russia on Christmas eve and defeated Ivan Drago for killing Apollo Creed. I remember when the Russians and the Cubans invaded and a group of high school students got into the back of a truck, went into the hills and waged guerrilla warfare, winning us WWII. For those of you who are lost right now, that was the plot of Red Dawn. It literally had a bunch of us screaming "Wolverines!" for about six months until we realized we were lame and all alone. That kind of patriotism and love for the United States was just rampant in the circles I was in as I grew up. Because I grew up on military bases. Nobody thinks that America stinks on military bases. At least nobody in the early 80's did. We were just waiting for Russia to start it, and we were prepared. We had the stealth bombers, but they didn't know that back then. We were just kind of waiting. How much fear-mongering went on back then? How many shows were about some nuclear holocaust? There was this external bully and we were just waiting to rumble with them. And then the Wall fell and Reagan did what Reagan did and the Cold War ended.

From that moment on, there was the birth of what I see as two different streams. There is a cynicism born, and this is primarily in my demographic of 36 and under. There is just a cynicism about the United States that it's broken, it's kind of shady and there is a checked patriotism where it's not cool to be patriotic about the U.S. anymore. It's kind of like we mope around and apologize for how we screwed up the whole world. There is this, "Shame on us." Think about how many movies now, compared to Rocky IV and Red Dawn, are more about the U.S. being shady and subversive all over the world to take advantage of all the other countries on the earth. Now let me be clear here. I absolutely believe that some of that's happening. The sinfulness of mankind would deem it not just a possibility but a probability if not a factual reality. Now that's lane number one. It's just a deep cynicism about the U.S.

The second one is what I'll just call blind loyalty. What I mean by blind loyalty is really addressing party politics. What I mean by that is you get your Democrats who love the ideals of the Democrat Party, and they're blind to their shortcomings. And Republicans, don't think I was going to let you Fox Newsers off the list. The Republicans have their way of doing things where, "It's the Democrats that are jacking up the country." And both of them are lobbing grenades at each other, and neither one can see the weaknesses of their own belief systems and ideologies. This is just a blind loyalty that will not admit that there are holes in their party's philosophy and way of doing things. This is the other stream. So you've got cynicism and blind loyalty, which really creates a mess, because we don't feel like we have a common enemy, so you turn on yourselves and you cannibalize. And that's a lot of what you see happening.

The argument that I see taking place is really one about justice and mercy. Again, this is just my opinion. I'm trying to throw my cards down on the table so we can get to the Bible, so you can determine as I preach the Bible whether it's my opinion or the Word of God. It seems to me that the Democrat's platform is one of mercy. They want mercy. So you'll hear a lot about feeding the poor, taking care of those who are in hardship. You're going to hear a lot about that, aren't you? The Republicans are all about justice. They're about justice, they're about the law, they're about what's right. So if I could oversimplify the issue, that's how I see it.

So let that be your framework as we revisit this in the end. So with my cards on the table, let's get into Romans 13, starting in verse 1. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." That's not just civil government. It applies to governing authorities at your work place. So if your workplace says, "These are the rules," that's a governing authority. If you are a wife or child living in a home and the authority of the home says, "This is what our home does, this is how we do things," then those are authorities that you are under. And on and on I could go. Let's look at what he says here. "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." So those that are in authority have been given that authority by God for God. Let's continue. "Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." This simply means that my daughter has never been grounded for making her bed. You have never been pulled over for going the speed limit. A police officer has never pulled you over, come to your window and said, "Is there some reason you're not in a hurry tonight?" That has never happened. You have never been arrested for doing good and right. These things don't happen. That's what he's saying here in the text. He says, "Governments, civil authorities do not assault those who obey the rules, who obey the law. They assault and wound those, by the decree of God, who are in rebellion to those rules." That's as simple as I can make it. You don't punish your kid for doing what you tell them to do. You don't get a ticket for going the speed limit. Now some of us think you should get a ticket for going the speed limit, but you don't get one from governing authorities.

Let's look then in verse 5. "Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing." What very thing? The keeping of law. So Lauren and I just get back from Sudan a week ago today. And if something goes wrong in Sudan, you're just in trouble. If something goes wrong here, just call 9-1-1 and they're here in a second. In fact, some of you don't even dial 9-1-1. We have an army, we have fire fighters, we have police officers and we have civil government, and this is why we pay taxes. That's what this text just said. "You pay taxes that go to running this system. Let's keep going. "For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." Now if this text clearly defines the role of government and governing authorities and how they are appointed by God, placed by God and we are to submit to those authorities and pay taxes, respect and give honor to them, it brings up all sorts of questions.

Here are a couple that I just thought of. Maybe they aren't even on your radar, but even as I studied this months ago, here are some thoughts that I had. What about evil leaders? What about those who are tyrants? What do we do with those? Did God appoint them? Let's look at Romans 9, starting in verse 17. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, . . ." That's Pharaoh of Egypt who thought he was God, and Exodus clearly marks him as a wicked man who was forcing millions of people into slavery. He was a brutal, brutal leader. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Now, where did Pharaoh come from according to the Bible? God appointed him. Why did God appoint him? To exalt him and crush him so that God's name and renown might be known, heard and understood and that the ancient world would tremble at the idea of a holy, sovereign, all-powerful God. I told you in week 1 that some of this was going to be difficult for us. Here's why. If God is eternal, if He has always been and He will always be, He just has a much better perspective than you and me. Because all we can see is right now, and all we can see is the moment. And most of us who weren't history majors or who aren't nerdy enough just to study those things on a weeknight have a hard time seeing how one thing leads to another leads to another. And since we don't see the scope and scale of history, we can't see how something back here that seems so wicked can lead to a lot of beauty over here. For instance, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and ended up being second in command in Egypt and saved Israel from a drought that would have wiped them off the face of the earth. So we don't see that well. Rome is another example. When we started the Colossians series, we said that because of the Roman Empire, which dwarfs the United States in regards to history, scale and scope, brings some things to the world that the world had never seen before, mainly roads, peace and large cities. And because Rome did that, the gospel spread through the ancient world like nothing the world had ever seen. You had these cultural hubs where the gospel penetrated, and then the gospel went out of those hubs to the outlying areas. And then Rome, which was not a God-fearing nation, was used by God, raised up by God and then destroyed for its tyranny by God. And on and on I could go with examples. So my first question was, "What about evil leaders?" The Bible tells us that even evil leaders are placed by God in power for a season and will be judged for their tyranny. Anytime you see a guy like what's going on in North Korea or Iran, you just have to go, "Okay, it's just a matter of time." The people will turn on them, they will get hung, they will get burned alive and they will get killed. It has happened for thousands of years, and it will happen again. You don't oppress a people for long before they rebel against that.

The second question is, when can they disobey the governments and institutions? And I know some of you are keeping your fingers crossed, hoping I'm going to talk about traffic. I'm not. There is a pretty clear rhythm established in Scripture that says it is fine for you and I to be in rebellion against our authority if that authority is asking us to do something that is unbiblical and against the commands and decrees of God. Let me give you a slew of examples here. When Peter and the apostles are arrested in Acts 5, they are strongly told to no longer preach the gospel. Do you remember Peter's response? He says, "It's not right for us to do what you say. We must do what God says." Another example is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar erects the golden idol of himself and commands

that everybody worship this statue. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse. So Nebuchadnezzar gets furious and threatens to have them killed. In one of my favorite lines in the Bible, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say, "Do what you're going to do, for God can save us, He will save us and even if He doesn't save us, He's still God." So this enrages Nebuchadnezzar so he fires up the fiery furnace to the point where the men who throw these three in burst into flames. And Nebuchadnezzar looks in and sees Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego standing in the flames with a fourth who is like the Son of God, not being consumed. And Nebuchadnezzar forgets about his golden statue and says, "Their God is the real God. Get them out of the flames." So this is dissidence. It's people going, "We're not going to obey the edicts of a governing authority."

Let me give you just a couple more. You had the Egyptian midwives. There is a rumor that comes up from the Israelite prophets that there will be a deliverer from among them that raises up and delivers them from Pharaoh's oppression. So Pharaoh decrees that the sons are to be killed, but the Egyptian midwives won't do it. Instead, Charlton Heston's Egyptian midwife made a little basket, put him in it and sent him down the Nile and he's picked up by Pharaoh's own household and nobody puts him to death. The Egyptian midwife disobeys, and Pharaoh's household disobeys. This is all rebellion against a governmental decree. And then there is Esther 4:16 where it says, "Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." I love Daniel's brazenness. Daniel is told, "You're not allowed to pray to anyone but the king," but Daniel goes to his window, opens up the window and just prays there in the window. You've got the wise men in Matthew 2, where Herod says, "Hey, I want to worship Jesus too. After you find the Messiah, come back and tell me where He is." It was Herod's plan to kill Him. Did the wise men find Jesus? Do they go back and tell Herod? Was this a blatant disobedience to a governmental decree? Yes. So you can see this rhythm being established in the Scriptures where men are asked to do things that are ungodly, men are asked to do things that go contrary to the Scriptures and they refuse.

Is it ever proper to overthrow a government? Since we are in Texas, I thought we should address this one. Yes, you can overthrow a government, but not with fatigues and a Winchester. So let's chat about what the Scriptures would have to say. What we saw in Romans 13 is that God establishes or appoints leaders. In our system of government, He does that through human means. The human means for our democracy is voting. So you and I hold the power to vote in and to vote out of power those who govern us. So the way you overthrow our government is by emptying out those who are in and replacing them with those who are more capable. Insert here the cynicism, because it does seem to be a lot messier than that.

Now, what about our brothers in North Korea? What about our brothers and sisters in Iran? How would it work then? There is not democracy. You don't vote in and vote out those who are in power. I mean, there are votes, but I don't know that we can put a lot of stock in those elections. There is a huge difference between an individual law breaker and law-abiding citizens rebelling against tyranny. Let me give you an example. If you read the Declaration of Independence, there is charge after charge against King George III, and almost all of them have to do with him violating his own laws that he had mandated his constituents to obey, him dissolving his own legislatures and revoking charters. When those 52 men signed the Declaration of Independence, they signed it as representatives of larger bodies of people. They didn't sign it as individuals in rebellion against Britain, but rather as men sponsoring larger groups of people. They were lower government challenging higher government that had become tyrannical. This is how you see it happening in our history. Of the 52 signers of the Declaration of Independence, more than half of them had seminary degrees or were heavily involved in clergy as elders and managers. In fact, John Q. Adams was actually vice-president of the Massachusetts Bible Society. Who knew Massachusetts had a Bible society? I did not.

Now, I want to step out of Romans 13 here and unpack for you what I think are five wrong views of government. I'm pulling a bulk of this from Wayne Grudem's new book Politics - According to the Bible. Here are five wrong views of

government. Wrong view number one: government should compel religion. If you study history, all those European wars between the Protestants and the Catholics, those were all about state sponsored religion. It was all about the state saying, "This is the religion of England. . . This is the religion of France." And then the next regime came along and changed the state religion. And you just had a century of bloodshed, and you also had some cats get on a boat and head across the sea looking for freedom from such nonsense. Now in the Christian world, outside of some crazies, this idea has been largely abandoned in Christian thinking. It has not been abandoned in Islamic thinking. So if you think of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan or these places that still practice sharia law, they believe that you can say, "We are a Muslim state that obeys Muslim law. We are an Islamic state, and we obey the Qur'an. And anyone trying to convert a Muslim or any Muslim caught reading literature that is not Islamic in tendency can be punished according to the law." So although there are religions that believe this, it has been wholesale rejected by 99% of those who claim the Christian faith, as it should be. The best hope you and I have is liberty. That's the best hope you and I have as men and women who love the gospel and love the Scriptures. We do not want a state-sponsored religion. First of all, for our faith, it doesn't even work. You can't legislate heart change. You can legislate morality, but does that create worshipers? Are you saved because you don't have an abortion or because you don't murder people? Are you saved because you do those things? No. You're saved by a regenerate work of the Holy Spirit of God. So for the state to say, "We're a Christian nation" is absurd. You can be built on Christian morals and ideals, but you cannot be a Christian nation, because there will be those in that nation who are not believers in Christ. And if you create an environment like that, there would be an unbelievably harsh amount of judgment on those who didn't love and serve Jesus Christ. There would be no grace and invitation for them to walk in. And we know this because of history. Here are some other reasons to reject it. Jesus refused to force people to follow Him in Luke 9. Jesus establishes the realms of God and Caesar in Matthew 21 and 22. Jesus clearly teaches that His kingdom is not a worldly kingdom. You're just not going to be able to argue that one. So that's wrong view number one.

Wrong view number two: exclude religion from government altogether. Now this is a view promoted by the ACLU. I think they do some good things, but their view is that religion should be nowhere near politics and government and authorities. This is also the stance of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and most of secular society. They would say, "It's fine for you to believe whatever you want to believe, as long as you believe it in your house and you keep your mouth shut. But if you stray outside of your house, if you open up your mouth, that's a violation of my rights under the Constitution." The only problem with that is the actual Constitution. Let me give you some reasons to reject this. 1) It completely overrides the will of the people. How can you tell people who religiously say, "My entire framework is built on these foundations, is built on this world view," that they're not allowed to impart that worldview into how they actually live out their lives? That's madness. 2) It changes freedom of religion into freedom from religion. Now let me read to you the 1st Amendment. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. . . ." Which means the government can make no law about the establishment of a statesponsored church. The government has no constitutional right to call us a Christian nation, a Muslim nation or to form the United States Church. That is a constitutional impossibility. And now look at what it says next. ". . . or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech." It is not in our government's power to inhibit our practice of our faith. 3) It wrongly restricts freedom of religion and it restricts freedom of speech. 4) It has never been adopted by the American people. If you're a law nerd, you may know *Lemon v. Kurtzman* in 1971. The Supreme Court ruled that the government must not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion, which means the government cannot pass laws that inhibit religion. 5) It removes from government God's teaching about good and evil. We covered in week 1, as children of the Enlightenment, since we are uppermost in our own affections, then we decide what's right for us, nobody else does. It's why you have the insanity of a guy like the former governor of New York Elliot Spitzer getting busted by a wire tap (that he led the charge establishing) hiring a high-end prostitute. He sets into motion these laws to trap those in prostitution, and then he's calling on his phone to set up a prostitute from New York to come to DC and meet him in this hotel. And then he gets busted. Now how does that happen? Because there is no law but what he makes. Because there is no good or evil. Even if you read his apology, he's like, "I've let my self down. . . I've let my conscience down. . ." He was the guy

who was going to bring ethics back to politics. Well whenever there is no standard of good and evil and good and evil are whatever you make them, it's easy to sell out and do whatever you want. Because to you there is no ultimate standard; there's just "whatever feels right to me in the moment and the Mrs. is kind of lost her mind and I've been busy at work and this woman is just easier." That's how that happens. You remove an ultimate standard of truth and then you've got free reign to do whatever you want whenever you want to do it. 6) There are many examples of God giving biblical counsel to rulers for the good of the ruler and for the good of the people. You can find this in Daniel 4, Luke 3, Acts 24 and on and on I could go.

Wrong view number three: all government is demonic. Now this is the idea that, since we live in a fallen world, all authorities and rulers in this fallen world are influenced by the demonic. So our best goal is to withdraw from those places and form our own entity, our own culture and our own way of doing things. So this is that sectarian idea that we talked about at the end of our Colossians series. We talked about withdrawing from the world and creating a "holy huddle." Now, I do think all institutions and governments are influenced by the demonic. I don't think you can read Scripture and not come to this conclusion. But it also doesn't change the fact that God has appointed and uses governments and authorities to accomplish His will.

Wrong view number four: do evangelism, not politics. This is that cynical idea that says, "You're never going to be able to work within government and change anything. So let's just do the Christian deal, let's just tell people about Jesus and forget about politics altogether." Fundamentally, the error here is you have a reductionist view of the gospel. You see the gospel as personal salvation and not as both a personal salvation as well as God leading you here as a light in a dark world, both for His name and renown and to push back what is dark in the world. And Christians, believing just contrary to this in Evangelism and in politics, have done the world some amazing good. Let me just read some of those for you. They outlawed the killing of unwanted children, child abandonment and abortion in the Roman empire in 374 A.D. They outlawed the gladiatorial contest in 404 A.D. They outlawed the branding of criminals' faces in 315 A.D. They instituted prison reforms in 361 A.D. They stopped human sacrifice among the Irish, the Prussians, the Lithuanians, the Aztecs and the Mayans. They helped outlaw pedophilia. They granted property rights and other protections to women. They banned polygamy. They prohibited the burning alive of widows in India. In 1829, they were burning widows alive in India. They outlawed the binding of young women's feet in China in 1912. They initiated public schools in Germany in the 16th century. They advocated education to all children in many European countries and fought often for the abolition of slavery in Rome, Ireland, most of Europe and in the United States. In fact, in the 1830's, nearly 2/3 of all who were supporting the abolition of slavery altogether could be traced back to clergy and those involved in their churches.

Wrong view number five: do politics, not evangelism. Now this has happened before. This is basic social gospel nonsense. It's, "Let's help the poor, let's help the needy and just leave Jesus out of this, because He's offensive. So drop the atonement and feed the hungry and take care of the poor. Making people comfortable here for an eternity in hell is an ignorant, empty exercise. Just pick up any popular Christian magazine, head to Lifeway and peruse any of those books you find that have a real social engagement bent, look for the atonement, look for the cross of Jesus Christ as our only hope. In most of the books, you'll find it lacking. It's, "Yes, let's do good for mankind, but let's leave the atoning work of Jesus Christ out of it." This simply doesn't work. And we've already seen it twice in the last hundred years. I don't know why, but all of a sudden we're loving this idea again.

So let me try to wrap this thing up and leave you with four things that I think you need to consider as you leave here tonight. You and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, should be looking at the world through a biblical/gospel lens. Now this creates two huge frustrations in me. Because of what God has done here, I get invited to speak at pastors' conferences all over the world. So I've been to those pastors' conferences where the men sitting in the seats are pastors. They are preachers like I am. I will see a guy stand up in front of pastors and they'll open up the Bible and they'll teach something

contrary to the Bible. And because they can do it in a way that's entertaining and their church has grown, the pastors will applaud them. So that, like Paul in Athens, provokes me, and so I get up and say they're not saved, they don't know their Bibles, they should never preach again and that their churches aren't actually churches. And then they applaud me. It's like they can't tell the difference. One guy actually got up and said that the gospel can't be defined outside of your individual communities in front of twelve thousand pastors. He's saying that the gospel is for you whatever you want it to be. This is heresy. And nobody said anything. They took notes. God help us. How in the world are we supposed to see through a gospel/biblical lens when our pastors can't do it? So if you're a pastor reading this, know your Bible. What are you shoveling to your people if you don't know the Bible? What are you talking about? I don't care if your church is growing. Might does not make right. God simply moving in a place always happens despite men. Go read Jesus in Luke 17 where He says, "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" And that's all men of God, all men who preach the Scriptures and try to serve Him are simply broken men who God uses mightily. But the reason we're in such a mess is because people don't know the Bible. There is no possible way for you to see the world through biblical lenses, there's no possible way for me to go, "This is how I handle my finances, this is how I handle my wife, this is how I handle my children," if you don't know this.

So the Pew Research Center just rolled out some statistics. 29% of those claiming to know Jesus Christ say they've been in contact with the dead this year. Here's the scary thing. I think they have. It's just demonic, and they were so biblically stupid that they don't know they're messing around with the demonic and inviting the demonic into their house with their beautiful wife and their beautiful kids. They are inviting in the destroyer into their home. 29% of those who call themselves Christians. This is from the Pew Research Center. You can look it up. 14% consulted a psychic. Witchcraft. A lady with cards. Maybe dialing a 900 number. So we're not in the Scriptures because, "I can't be reading. . .not when I can pay \$35 for a demon possessed lady to tell me what my future holds. I can tell you what it holds – a lot of weird stuff in your house. I'm looking into your future now. Yes, scary dreams, that is what is in your future. I feel provoked at the next one. 22% of Evangelicals believe in reincarnation. It gets to the point where I want to pull out my hair and punch someone. What are we teaching our people? What is going on on Sunday mornings? What in the world is going on in our churches? Man, we've got our problems too, but if you believe in reincarnation here, you're not listening.

That same laziness when it comes to what the Scriptures say our lives should be leaks right into the fact that there is a real apathy and laziness when it comes to politics and the drift of government in our country. My fear is that we're going to wake up one day and go, "Oh no." I'll give you just two examples. After Matthew Shepherd was killed, which was a tragedy. That also created rage in me. In the end, after that they began to create what they call "hate crime" law. So if you commit a crime against a people group, if you commit a crime against a black man for being black, if you commit a crime against a homosexual for living a homosexual lifestyle, then there was a different charge as opposed to the charge of murder or assault that was already on the books. America was in a buzz about hate crime laws, how we needed them, how this was going to help fight off those things. I just remember thinking, "Uh oh." Because if you allow the government to decide intent, then where are we ten years from now? Ten years from now, do they use that law to say, "What Matt Chandler is saying out of the Bible is hate"? If we can take the 1st amendment and twist it to mean that you can't play "Mary Did You Know?" at the mall without violating somebody's rights at Christmas, do you not think you can take a hate crime law and say that I'm not allowed to say what I think from the Bible because it's hate? Meanwhile, I can burn the American flag and slap my Qur'an, but I can't put a manger scene in front of city hall. Don't you think that could be twisted? There's just this complete disconnect from what's actually happening in our country.

Dearborn, Michigan is a highly populated area with Arabs. Just a few months ago, outside of an Arab festival, four former Muslims were handing out the Gospel of John to anyone who wanted it. Not three minutes in, they were arrested by Dearborn police. There were no bullhorns. They were handing out the Gospel of John to anyone. There is video of it. Google it. They are arrested for disorderly conduct. Their disorderly conduct is, "Would you like a copy of this?" Now, the court system will throw it out. It won't go anywhere, but they were still arrested. I fear that if we don't wake up, then we're going to wake up and go, "Oh no. What happened?" And what happened is, in our cynicism, we weren't engaged and we lost it. Because here's the thing. No one is nervous in here right now. In Asia, I had to leave my hotel at 1:00AM and go to this house at 3:00AM and wait for the pastors to get there. And then the pastors sang under their breaths. And then we had to teach quietly and they took notes. It was exhausting. You teach for two hours, get a fifteen minute break, teach for two hours, get a fifteen minute break, and they just ate up any bit of theological training they could. And you could feel the nervousness in the room, because at any time, the doors could be kicked open and we could all be hauled with no due process, no trial. We could literally vanish and no one would care. Now if I vanish, there would be people who care because I'm a US citizen. But they vanish all the time and no one cares. But you're not afraid of that. I'm not afraid of that. I could go share the gospel with whoever I want in this city right now. I'm not going to be arrested for that. But you're already beginning to see some drift here.

So what can we do? I'll give you four things. Number one: be good citizens. That starts at a local level. Vote. I'm not trying to be P Diddy on you. I'm just saying, go vote.

Number two: grow in your knowledge of the Scriptures. The answer to the question "What is life?" is not found in our culture; it's found right here. So the lenses by which we see the world are informed by the Scriptures, not by our culture. Do you want me to prove it to you? We just got back from Sudan. Here's a question I got in Sudan. We were teaching on how a man should love his wife like Christ loved the church. In essence, she's not your donkey. If you've ever been to Africa, that works. That's contextualization at its finest. Your wife is not your donkey. I swear to you, we get the question, "If that's true, then why are we to divorce our wife if she doesn't bear us children?" Now that's culturally what they believe, but is that biblically right? So is the Bible wrong or is their culture wrong? Yeah, their culture is wrong. So the Bible tells their culture what parts of their culture is beautiful, right and lovely, and it tells what parts of their culture are wicked, fallen and must be lined up with how God designed the universe to work. And the same holds true here. So if you don't know the Bible, then you're not going to be able to get involved in areas that you should be involved, because you'll let culture decide for you on key topics that only the Bible should decide for you.

Number three: don't let talking heads be your only source of information. If you've got a Glenn Beck tattoo on your back shoulder right now, I'm sorry. I hope you were drunk. You will never hear me say I hope you were drunk again. I'm not saying he doesn't have good things to say or doesn't. To be honest, I haven't followed him a bunch at all. I know he's supposed to be the head of the Evangelical movement, despite the fact that he's a Mormon. But that's a whole other sermon for a whole other day. In the end, don't let a simple talking head like a Rush Limbaugh or Glenn Beck or whatever the other equivalent is, don't let that be the only source of your information. Watch reactionary politics. I see this a lot in my generation and those underneath me. If you can't stand the Right and see things in the Right that drive you crazy, don't just all of a sudden say, "Okay, then I'm Left. I'm not that, so I have to be this." Because the truth is both have sin in them because there is men involved, which takes us back to an understanding of the Scriptures. If you are defining yourself by what you're not instead of what you know, you're ignorant and immature. And the kingdom and the country will be better when you grow up. Except that these people are having babies, and so another ignorant and immature will follow you. So if you know what you're not but have no idea what you are, can you do me a favor and shut down you blog and quit talking? You don't have to. I don't have any real authority over you, but I would encourage you to not let talking heads be your only information. And you've got to stop desiring to be relevant and cool. Can we just

be biblical? Jesus is never going to be cool to the masses. It's never going to be cool to the masses, ever. The attempt is stupid.

Number four: you have to remember that our only hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our only hope. Remember how we set up this talk where there are those who love justice and those who love mercy. Do you remember the ark of the covenant? The ark of the covenant was a gold box. Inside the gold box were the two tablets of the Law, Aaron's staff and a golden bowl of manna. That was in the ark of the covenant. On the top of the Law sat the mercy seat. On that mercy seat, there were two angels that were formed out of gold that looked down upon the seat. And they sprinkled the blood of the lamb on top of the mercy seat that sat on top of justice. It is God's way of communicating a billion things. One is that you can never separate mercy and justice or it goes wrong. Do you remember what happened when the Nazis opened the box in Raiders of the Lost Ark when they took the mercy seat off? The Holy Spirit sucked everybody's eyes off and melted their faces. You don't take mercy off of justice. If you do that, you're going to make one of two errors. You're going to go the mercy route where you remove the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, because God isn't a wrathful God and never gets angry at sin and the wickedness of those who rape and pillage His creation. So you make God indifferent towards our wickedness and there's just mercy. That is erroneous and leads to hell. Or you'll go, "Here is the Law. Here are the commands," and you will make Christianity so appalling to those who have fallen short, which includes you. Which makes the self-righteous so sad. They are so aware of everybody else's shortcomings but not their own. It's like a short guy making fun of other short guys. It's just ironic/sad. But our best hope is an understanding of what God has said is righteous and our understanding that we fall short and we need mercy. And Christ has become the fulfillment of justice in the mercy of God through the cross of Jesus Christ. And so preach the gospel to yourself, preach the gospel to your neighbors, preach the gospel to your co-workers. We must be gospel people.

So this is my hope that we would understand that we've been given a real beautiful gift by God and that you would walk in it. I am an American second and of the kingdom of God first. And my gratitude for being born here goes to God, not to George Washington, not to the founding fathers, not to the Constitution, not to the Declaration of Independence, but to God who raised us up, who has put His hand on us and blessed us immensely. And I'm just watching us and praying that we don't crash this thing into the ground.

Let's pray. "Father, I want to pray that we would have repentant hearts, hearts that have been filled with gratitude for the freedom that You have given us. I thank You that we are here tonight holding Bibles of which most of us have multiple copies and that's not illegal. I thank You that we have resources at our fingertips and we are not here in fear and that we cannot be arrested without due cause. We can't even be pulled over without due cause. Surely You have shed your grace on us. So forgive us for our cynicism, forgive us for our whining and forgive us for our disenchantment. My prayer is that You would move our hearts toward You, move our minds toward You and that we might thank You for what You've given us in Your Son. We need You. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."