

True Belonging #6 GC 10.14.18
Romans 13:1-14

INTRO

So **what kind of people** belong to this community called, the church? For several weeks now we've been talking about the **kind of community** this is – a Christ-centered community, a worshiping community, a transformative community, and a serving community. That's important because **before you join** a group or organization, you want to know **what** that group or organization **stands for**; what they're **all about**.

But you **also** want to know **what kind of people** belong to it. Are they the kind of people you want to **spend time** with? Are they the kind of people you want to **be associated** with? And most importantly, are they the kind of people you want to **be like** someday? Because chances are **if you belong** to a group of people for any length of time, you're **going to become like them**.

A couple of weeks ago we heard from **Pastor Robert**, who told us how back in high school he really wanted to sit with a certain **group of kids** at a certain table in the lunchroom. He managed to **work his way** into that table, but after hanging out there a while, he realized that these really **weren't** the kinds of people he wanted to be with, so he **went off** in search of another group.

The old-time **comedian Groucho Marx** famously said, **"I could never belong to club that would have someone like me as member."** – Groucho Marx His words are a reminder that a **group is only as good** as the people who belong to it. *

So today and in the weeks to come we're going to talk about the **kind of people** who belong to this community called, **the church**. What kinds of **behavior** and **relationships** can we expect to find in the **Body** of Christ, and what kind of people **will we become** if we **Truly Belong** to each other?

We're going to return to **Paul's letter** to the church in Rome. And in this next section, Paul is going to get very **practical** about what it means to belong to the Body of Christ. Let's look at chapter 13, beginning with the first 7 verses.

IN POLITICS, CIVILITY

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves....

For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Romans 13:1-7

They say that friends should **never talk** about **religion** or **politics**. We're going to talk about **both** today! And the truth is, **we need to**, because I can't remember a time when the **intersection** of church and politics has been so **challenging** and so **contentious**. I'm **glad** we have an opportunity to spend a little time and talk about **what you can expect**, and **not expect**, here at Grace when it comes to politics. I really want us to **figure this out**, not just for **our sake** as a church, but for the sake of **our nation**, that's being **torn apart** right now by political **divisiveness**. We all know what a **sensitive** and **challenging topic** this is, so I'm going to ask you to be

gracious and **patient** as we work our way through this, and **not just react** to something you **hear** or **don't hear** until you've heard **the whole thing**. You'll notice I've got my **politically correct shirt** on today. Not Red nor Blue, but Purple, the **royal color** of King Jesus!?

This is such an important topic we're going to spend **most of our time** on this section of chapter 13, but then we'll quickly look at **two other examples** of the **kind of people** who belong to the church. Let me lay out a few **foundational principles** from this text, and then we'll try to **apply them** to our **life together**.

First, **Government is ordained by God**. Paul couldn't be clearer about this. He says it at least **3 times**. *The authorities that exist have been established by God*. He's **not** saying that God **approves** of every government's **actions**, or of **every person** who holds a political office. He's simply saying that the **institution** of government; the **practice** of recognizing and empowering **civic leaders** is in keeping with **his purposes**. So **as members** of Christ's body, the church, we are **not anti-government**. We **recognize** and **respect** the **rightful role** government and politicians are meant to play in God's economy.

Secondly, **Government exists to promote human flourishing** by promoting **good** and restraining **evil**. Again, Paul couldn't have made it clearer. *"The authorities are God's servants"* From the very beginning **God's will** for humankind was that it would **flourish**. *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,"* Government serves God's purposes by **creating conditions** that allow **its citizens** – **all** of its citizens – to flourish. Freedom, opportunity, safety, health, prosperity, justice, order, peace, protection. These are **good things** that God desires for every human being.

Thirdly, **Government is worthy of our thoughtful cooperation**. If government serves God's purposes, then it is our responsibility to **cooperate** and **participate** in ways that are **available** to us. We **submit** to its laws, we **pay** our taxes, we **respect** our leaders. Paul **couldn't have imagined** a situation in which citizens could **"vote"** as we do today, but clearly that is **one of many ways** we "thoughtfully cooperate" with government. He also **couldn't have imagined** a situation in which citizens could **speak out** or **protest** as freely as we can in many countries today, but again he would expect us to **do that thoughtfully**, and with respect.

Finally, **Governments, and citizens, are ultimately accountable to God**. Paul reminds both leaders and citizens here that **God is in charge**, and that we have to answer to him for our actions and attitudes. When **government doesn't** serve his purposes, when **citizens don't** respect their leaders and fellow citizens, society **flounders** instead of flourishing. And while Paul doesn't say it here, it's clear in **many other places** in Scripture that a believer's **ultimate allegiance** is to the **Kingdom** of God.

So given these four **foundational truths**, what does that mean **practically speaking** when it comes to **faith** and **politics**? "Politics" simply refers to the **activities** of government, and the ways citizens **interact** with that government. Pastor **Tim Keller** is one of the most highly regarded **thought leaders** in the contemporary Christian church, and he wrote an Op-Ed piece on politics in last week's NY Times. At one point he wrote, **"Christians cannot pretend they can transcend politics and simply 'preach the gospel.'** Those who avoid all political discussions and engagement are **essentially casting a vote for the status quo....To not be political is to be political."** - Tim Keller

I think Tim is capturing the **essence** of what Paul is getting at here in Romans 13, that as people of faith, and followers of Christ, we have a **responsibility to engage** with our government and with each other, and that's **politics**. But we're finding out these days **how very difficult** that is to do. I've **never seen** Christian people so **at odds** with each other, and **churches so disrupted** by political controversy.

So let me **offer a way of thinking** about politics and the church that I'm finding helpful. We might call them **Rules of Engagement**. My thoughts here are **inspired in part** by conversations with a few of our **pastors**, and I'm grateful for their contributions.

Let's start with a **category** or "**zone**" that I'll call **Political Values**. These are convictions regarding the **responsibilities of government** that we find in the **Scripture**, and that I think **most** if not all Christians would **affirm**. * The list I'm going to share with you was **recently released** by the National Association of Evangelicals, a loose **association** of Bible-believing, gospel-preaching churches across the country. We're **reading a lot** in the **media** about what evangelicals **supposedly believe** when it comes to politics, and a few **high profile leaders** are attempting to speak for evangelicals, which is **impossible** for any **one** person to do. Some of us are even getting **uncomfortable** using that **label** to describe ourselves because of all the political **entanglements**. But I **found it helpful** to read what a **broad group** of evangelical leaders and traditions **identify** as the things we actually **stand for** politically. So here's the list, in no particular order.

First, (**Religious Freedom**) **Protecting religious freedom** and liberty of conscience. Christians generally believe that **every citizen** should have the freedom to **worship** and to **practice** their faith responsibly without governmental **control** or **interference**.

Second, (**Sanctity of Life**) **Safeguarding the nature** and sanctity of human life. We believe that **every** human being bears the image of God and deserves the chance to live – **including** the unborn, the aged, the chronically or terminally ill, and those with disabilities.

Third, (**Justice and Compassion**) **Seeking justice and compassion** for the poor and the vulnerable, including those with **less power**, such as women, children, immigrants, refugees, minorities, prisoners, and victims of human trafficking. God has **compassion** for the needy, and calls on those in power to be **attentive** and **responsive** to their needs.

Fourth, (**Healthy Families**) **Strengthening marriages, families, and children**. The Bible and history tell us that the **family is central** to a productive society and human flourishing, so government has a responsibility to ensure that every **household** has **access** to adequate housing, health care, education, employment, and legal protection.

Fifth, (**Human Rights**) **Preserving human rights**, including the rights to life, liberty, justice, security, and dignity.

Sixth, (**Racial Justice**) **Pursuing racial justice** and reconciliation. God's vision is to **reconcile** all people not only to Himself, but to one another, and to overcome the **divisions** and **discriminations** that **elevate** one race over another. There is **no favoritism** with God.

Seventh, (**Peacemaking**) **Promoting just peace** and restraining violence. God intends people and nations to live in **harmony** with one another, so good government promotes and preserves **peace** through just **policies**, skillful **diplomacy**, and military **strength**.

Eighth, (**Creation Care**) **Caring for God's creation**. God has **entrusted** human beings with the **stewardship** of this planet, so government's role is to **enact laws** and **policies** that

ensure the earth's **beauty** and **productivity** for the **generations** to come

So there you have it. **8** Political Values that I believe most of us would **affirm** as **foundational** for Christian people, regardless of **which party** or platform we might identify with as individuals. You can see that they span the **political spectrum**; liberal and conservative, * which may explain why Tim Keller **titled** his piece, *Christians Don't Fit in Political Boxes*. Again, there's **a lot being said** about evangelicals and politics these days, but **if you want to know** what actual evangelicals actually stand for, this is a **pretty good list**.

So with those convictions in mind, let's consider **another zone** or **category** that I'm going to call **Political Virtues**. These are the **attitudes** and **behaviors** that the Bible tells us ought to **guide** our political **interactions** with **government** and with **each other**. Most of them are listed right here in Romans 13. We are to **Honor** those in authority over us, recognizing they are there to **serve God's purpose** in our lives. We are to **Submit** to our government by **obeying its laws**. We **Cooperate** with the government by paying **taxes**, **voting**, and **participating** in civic life. We are to **Respect** not only those in **authority**, but our **fellow citizens** as well, even those who might **disagree** with us. And finally, **Prayer**. Paul doesn't mention it here, but he does so in **other letters**. We pray for those in authority, that they might seek and follow God's **wisdom** as they carry out their responsibilities. *

We could **elaborate** on those or come up with a few more, but I think we'd **all agree** that these Virtues are **foundational** to our political **engagement** as Christ-followers. If I were to come up with a **word** that **summarizes** or captures them all I might use the word, **Civility**; a word we're hearing a lot these days, usually **bemoaning** the lack of it in our culture.

Surely this is something that ought to **characterize** Christian people when it comes to politics. *

So as I see it, **these two zones**, or categories, are **essential** and **universal** for Christian citizens. **Regardless** of your political persuasion, or situation, these biblical Values and these Virtues ought to **guide every believer** as we relate to each other and our political institutions.

But there is a **third zone** or category that is **less clearly defined** by Scripture, and that is the zone I'm going to call, Political **Strategies**. These are the **means** and the **methods** by which citizens or governments might actually **promote** human flourishing and a just society. These Strategies are **many**, and **varied**, and **debatable**. *

For instance, let's take the Sanctity of Life, and in particular the issue of **abortion**. We said that **Safeguarding** the sanctity of human life is important to God and to human flourishing. But there are a **variety of ways** that Christian people might want to pursue or promote the sanctity of life. Some will work toward **limiting abortion**, even working to overturn Roe v. Wade. Others will want to **provide support** for women experiencing a crisis pregnancy. And still others will want to be sure that **children** born into **under-privileged** circumstances are well-cared for and given every opportunity to thrive.

Each of these and **all** of these are valid and effective **strategies** for Safeguarding the sanctity of life. Christian people may **disagree** over which of these strategies is most **urgent** or most **effective**, and there may be times and places to **debate that** in more detail. But our **commitment** to the Values of respect and civility mean we won't **pass judgment** on each other, we **won't attack** each other, and we won't **break fellowship** with each other if we choose to pursue this conviction by **different methods**.

The same thing might be true when it comes to **immigration** and **refugees**. Some will argue that we should be **more welcoming** to people who are **fleeing** for their lives or **seeking** a better future. Others will argue that it's **irresponsible** to welcome more people than our **system can absorb**, and without proper **security measures**. There's **wisdom** in **both** perspectives, and as **individual** believers we are free to **pursue** and **promote** the strategies that we believe will be **most effective**, or are **most in keeping** with biblical principles. And as brothers and sisters in Christ we'll **talk to each other** about these things from time to time, to **challenge** and **stretch** each other, but we'll do it in a spirit of **respect** and cooperation and **civility**.

I should mention that we have **Grassroots Ministries** here at Grace addressing both abortion and refugees.

You **get the idea** [**bring back chart**] – our Political Values and our Political Virtues are **biblically-determined** and **broadly affirmed**. Our Political Strategies are **personally determined**, and **broadly debated**. What this means **for the church** is that we **operate primarily** in these two zones – **Values**, and **Values**. We need to **preach** and **teach** and **pursue** these as a community of faith. But this **middle zone**, the Strategy zone, is generally a matter of **personal calling** and **perspective**. The **church equips** you to operate in this zone by preaching these Convictions and these Values, but **every believer** has to **act** according to their **conscience** and the leading of the **Spirit** in their lives.

Now, there will **occasionally** be **political issues** that the church will need to **engage directly**, as it should have in **Nazi Germany** and in **slave-holding America**. But these issues need to be identified **prayerfully**, **Biblically**, and **collectively**.

So here's **what you can expect** politically at Grace Chapel. We will **pray** for our leaders and for concerns like

these, on a **regular** basis, and when something **unusual** happens in our country or the world. We will **teach** on these themes when the **Scripture takes us** there, or when the **situation** calls for it. We will occasionally **provide forums** for safe and honest **inquiry** and **debate** – as we're doing with the Q Commons event. And we'll **encourage you** to **participate** as fully as you are able in civic life – to **vote**, to pay your **taxes**, even to **protest** or **run** for office if you feel so led. But we will do all those things from a **thoughtful**, **biblically-informed**, **non-partisan** perspective. Non-partisan a very **high value** for us here at Grace.

Here's what we **won't do** at Grace Chapel. We **won't** tell you **how to vote**. We won't ask you to **sign petitions**. We won't **endorse** a political candidate, party, or platform. We won't **assume** that everyone in our Life Community or small group sees things the way we do. We won't **rant** on social media. We won't **pass judgment** on each other, or **walk out** on each other over political **strategies** or **perspectives**. And, I **assure** you, we won't get **yanked around** or **drawn off-course** by every political **firestorm** that comes along.

And we **won't ever forget** that our **ultimate allegiance** is to the Kingdom of God, and that our **mission** is to proclaim the **good news of Christ** in word and deed, and to **make more disciples** for Him. The **solutions** to this world's problems are **spiritual**. They are found in **Jesus Christ**. And **knowing Him**, and **making Him known**, is what this community is **all about**. That's why we **celebrated Communion first** today, to remind us **who** and **what** we are all about.

So if you ask me **what kind of people** belong to this community called the church, I would say that when it comes to **politics**, we are people of **Civility**. (**In politics, civility**.) People whose **biblically-informed engagement** in politics is marked by honor, respect, cooperation, and prayer. *

IN ETHICS, INTEGRITY

That's a **lot of ground** to cover, and I told you we would spend most of our time on that challenging topic. And if you **have difficulty** with anything I've said or not said here, please understand that I couldn't say everything on this topic, and feel free to **reach out to me** personally at bryan@grace.org.

But this **sermon** isn't just about **politics**. It's about **what kind of people** belong to this community called the church. And Paul has **two other issues** we want to touch on **briefly**, and then we'll wrap up. Let's look at vs. 8-10 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:8-10*

If Paul was talking about **politics** in the **first section**, he's talking about **ethics** here. He's talking about right and wrong **behavior**; how we **treat each other** as human beings. As followers of Christ we are certainly people who **keep** the 10 Commandments. We **don't commit adultery** because we know it ruins lives and destroys families. We **don't take human life**, because we believe every human being is made in the image of God and has a right to live. We **don't steal** because it deprives someone else of something they rightfully earned or own. We **don't covet** because it begrudges another person's freedom to be happy or successful.

But as followers of Christ, our **ethics** are not determined simply by **law**, but by **love**. "*Love is the fulfillment of the law.*" Paul says. So as Christ-followers we not only

"don't commit adultery." We **also cherish** our spouses and work on our marriages. We don't just "not murder." We **value and protect** human life and flourishing. We don't just, "not steal." We **give generously**, so those in need aren't tempted to steal. We don't just "not covet." We **rejoice in other's good fortune**, and are **content** with what God has given us.

So **In politics**, we are marked by **Civility**. And **In ethics**, we are marked by **Integrity**. Integrity is about **oneness** and wholeness. It means that **one thing**, the **same** thing, **motivates everything** we do, and that one thing is **love**. The self-giving, other-centered love that God has **shown to us** in Christ.

IN ALL THINGS, BEAUTY

And finally, Paul turns his attention to our **lifestyles**, our behavior. Look at vs 11-14 *And do this, understanding the present time....The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.... Romans 13:11-14*

We don't have time to look at all the words in detail here, but basically Paul identifies **three kinds** of behaviors. What he calls "*carousing and drunkenness*," we would probably call "**wild partying**." What he calls, "*immorality and debauchery*," we might call "**sexual recklessness**." And what he calls "*dissension and jealousy*," we might call "**conspicuous competition**." You know what that means – "*my kitchen is newer than your kitchen.*" "*my kid is smarter than your kid.*"

Obviously, Paul isn't saying that Christian people can't **go to parties**, that we don't **enjoy our sexuality**, and that we never try to **improve our kitchens**, or our kids! The Bible

gives us **freedom** to enjoy and pursue all of these things. He's simply reminding us that the **thing we want most** in life is to be **like Christ**. "*Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,*" he says.

Jesus lived the **most beautiful life** that's ever been lived. He **enjoyed** people and parties. He **celebrated** marriage, and the sexual union of a husband and wife. He had a **career** and a **home** for many years. He **enriched** the life of **every person** he encountered, and he **spoke** the most powerful words the world has ever heard. He lived a **beautiful life**, and he **invites** and **enables** us to do **the same**.

So those are the kinds of people who belong to this community called, the church. **In politics**, we aspire to **civility**. **In ethics**, we aspire to **integrity**. And **In all things**, we aspire to **beauty**. The **beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ** himself. *

Civility. Integrity. Beauty. We **haven't arrived** yet. We **haven't attained** these qualities in full. But we **come together** to **pursue** them, to **practice** them, and to **offer them** to the world. That's the **kind of community** we want to **be** and **belong** to.

Friends, our society is being **torn apart** by political **acrimony**, moral **bankruptcy**, and **reckless** living. Let's show the world a **better way**. A **more beautiful** way. Let's show them the **Jesus way**.

COMMUNION SET-UP (after announcements)

As we mentioned last Sunday, during this **Belonging series** we felt it would be helpful to celebrate The Lord's Supper a bit **more often**, and in some **fresh ways**. The Communion Table is a powerful place to experience True Belonging, because the Table reminds us that we **belong to each other** because we belong to Christ. He is at the **center** of our life together, and the communion table reminds us of that very visually and experientially.

So today we're going to celebrate Communion as a part of our **worship set**. We have **stations** set up around the room – 4 in front, 2 halfway down, and 4 at the rear of the balcony. In just a moment the **band** will lead us in some worship. We'll do at least **two songs**, and as we do, **whenever you feel ready** you can go to one of the stations and partake of the bread and cup, **on your own**. You can go **with someone** or on your own. When you get there you can **thank the Lord** in your heart for what he's done for you, and then **take the bread and the cup** right there, and place the **empty cup** in the empty tray. WE have **gluten free** bread at each of the front stations on the floor and the center table in the balcony. If you'd rather have **someone bring you** the elements, just slip a hand up and they'll come to you.

After I pray, we'll **stand** to sing so it will be easy for you to **slip out** whenever **you're ready**. We **don't** expect you to come **all at once**, or in **rows**. Come when **you're ready**. We'd like to ask everyone to EXIT their row **to the RIGHT**, and then come back the other way.

“On the night he was betrayed....the bread...the cup...until he comes.”

PRAYER

Let's **stand** to worship, and you can come to the table **when you're ready**, moving to your **right**.