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July 16, 2017

**A Christ-like Response  
Politicism  
(Conservatism/Liberalism)**  
*Joshua 5:13-15*

**The One in Charge**

- Exodus 3:5, 14; Romans 14:11-12; Isaiah 45:23;  
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**Whose Side is Jesus On?**

- 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Luke 12:33; Jeremiah 31:3;  
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**Be on Jesus' Side**

**- Love All**

- John 13:34-35

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- 1 Thessalonians 5:13-18

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- Romans 12:18; Matthew 5:9-10

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## **ISMS: A Christ-like Response Politicism (Conservatism/Liberalism)**

As you watched that video, I'm sure there were times that you knew exactly which circle you would go into, and maybe there were some times that you had to wonder which one you'd go to. Of course, that video wasn't scientific by any means, unless it was a study on how groups can influence our viewpoints; there were probably people in those groups that started out with a firm conviction one way, but when they saw the crowd go another way, they considered changing their opinion. Just *seeing* those polarizing choices may have created stress in your minds! And it is far from funny; we have people in our country and community and church who are deeply divided about politics. The issue of politics has even divided immediate families. That video illustrates in a simple way how the climate in our country is more contentious, more divided, than ever, and in some cases we act in ways that are nearly criminal. Regardless of who is right and who is wrong, it seems like both sides are using means that are unjust, unethical, and filled with prejudice and hate. We've become more than uncivil, each side being consumed with destroying the other side while our country hurdles toward the cliff.

So what do we do as Christians with the highly charged politicism in our country today?

This is a part of our summer-long sermon series called "ISMS: A Christ-like Response." There are so many ideas and philosophies and agendas that are swirling around us every day, and it's hard to know sometimes which ones are good, which ones are bad, and sometimes we don't even realize that they are influencing us and our faith – in ways that can be beneficial or dangerous to us. Some isms impact us in ways that are good, some are bad, and some are benign. Some isms infect our faith and leave us with a weak, watered-down, or an altogether different faith than we started with. We want to think about *how* we should think about these isms. We are praying that this series would affirm, or when necessary correct us in different ways – all so that we can better *be* and *bring* the presence of Christ most powerfully into our community and culture and conversations, through our lives and actions and thoughts. Because our community and culture need to be introduced to Jesus, and one way that happens is through our lives. So we need to be prepared.

We also want to invite you to share your questions, observations, disagreements, or concerns with us about these topics. You can do that in one of several ways: you can use the cards in the seat back in front of you, you can email us at "isms@wvcnaz.com" or you can message us through our West Valley Church Facebook page. At the end of this series, the pastors will take a Sunday morning and have a panel discussion and do our best to respond to your questions and comments.

So far we've looked at the isms of racism, pluralism, optimism and pessimism, heroism and terrorism, and patriotism.

So when it comes to politicism, I wonder if we can answer the question of how Jesus viewed the two sides of being a conservative or a liberal. And, if we can answer that question, maybe we can figure out how we should respond to the issue.

According to exit polls in our most recent presidential election, two thirds of all evangelicals who were registered to vote (65%) were aligned with the Republican Party. One out of five (21%) was Democrats and just one out of ten (10%) was registered independent of a party. If Jesus' followers were any indication of what Jesus would be, then the odds are that Jesus would be a registered Republican. But is that what Scripture shows? I am not so sure.

You might wonder if we should even discuss politics; if that's even in the Bible. Let me quote one author in answer to that:

“The Bible is intensely political. Every prophet is risking their skin by talking truth to power. Every king weighs obedience to God against other concerns. Every temple, shrine and altar has political ramifications. The same with every war, skirmish and battle. Even the Sermon on the Mount is political. Love your enemies? Do good to those who hate you? Who do you think Jesus is talking about? Religion and politics have always been deeply intertwined. Jesus' own life is an example of that. This comingling didn't end with the biblical era. The church, at its best, and its worst, has always been political. We're at our worst when we imagine Christ is aligned with one political party or another. Or when we cut deals. Or when we trade faith for power. We're at our best, however, when like MLK, we strive for the soul of the whole nation.”<sup>1</sup>

Given our conversation last week about keeping our patriotism in check with our allegiance to Christ, let's proceed, but let's agree that we will do so with mutual respect. We all want to seek Christ's best for our lives, our church, our community, our nation, and our world. Because, if we are honest, we will find that at times Jesus acts like a conservative, and other times he acts like a liberal. You might want to think that Jesus was apolitical, or didn't choose any side, but usually people don't get crucified for *not* taking a side. Jesus came to disrupt those in power and to emphasize God's Kingdom and his love for everyone. By the time he was through, he had offended just about everyone. Those in power were challenged to give up their power for God. Those who were oppressed and had no power were challenged to quit seeking to take over power. Those who were rich were called to give up their wealth. Those who were poor were called to stop trying to get rich and instead be rich in God's Kingdom.

Before we get too far ahead, though, let's look at a very revealing passage of Scripture that is going to guide our conversation today. It's from the Old Testament book of Joshua. I've shared some of this with you before, but it's worth repeating again.

Let me set the stage. God's people, now being led by Joshua, have crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land of Canaan, when they come upon the city of Jericho. They know they need to overthrow it, but they don't yet know how they are going to do it; it is a heavily fortified city. Many of us know that they marched around that city for seven days

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/7955/should-churches-discuss-politics>

and God himself destroyed the huge, multi-layered walls. But that hasn't happened yet in the story.

Joshua, the Commander of the Lord's people, is in the plains of Jericho when he encounters another Soldier, and it's clear to Joshua that this man is a Warrior. I'd like you to stand with me as I read this story from the Old Testament (This is such a great story!)

“When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a Man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to Him and demanded, ‘Are You friend or foe?’ ‘Neither one,’ He replied. ‘I am the Commander of the LORD's army.’ At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. ‘I am at Your command,’ Joshua said. ‘What do You want Your servant to do?’ The Commander of the LORD's army replied, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did as he was told.” (Joshua 5:13-15, nlt)

May God open his Word to our hearts, and may he open our hearts to his Word. You may be seated.

I think you can already see where we are going with this, but stay with me because the point of all this is powerful. From this amazing snapshot of a moment in time in Israel's history we are going to answer our question of today. So first, see...

## **The *One in Charge***

Joshua is the commander of Israel's army, and God has worked through them to do some amazing miracles already. But before they launch into their conquest of Canaan, Joshua encounters *his* Commander, the One in charge.

There are times in the Old Testament where heavenly warriors or messengers make appearances, and so the question then becomes in this instance, was this an angel appearance, or was this God? This is what's called a “theophany” (which is a theological term to describe when God appears in human form). Almost all scholars agree with this.

Notice that Joshua bows down to worship him, and the One in charge does not stop him. If he were an angel, he would not allow himself to be worshipped by Joshua, because angels know only God deserves worship. Then he commands Joshua to take off his shoes because he is standing on holy ground. Only God can make the ground holy. This is also the exact same thing that God told Moses to do when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:5).

Then the story goes from this encounter to say that the Lord (God) gave Joshua instructions about how to defeat Jericho by marching around it. In other words, Scripture records their conversation and calls the commander, “Yhwh” which is the name God gave for himself to Moses and his people (Exodus 3:14).

So this one who is talking to Joshua is the One (with a capital “O”) in charge; this is God himself.

This is important to realize, because how God responds to Joshua is going to teach us what God's perspective is on both conservatism and liberalism. The Bible says that one day everyone will have to face a higher political reality:

“For the Scriptures say, ‘As surely as I live,’ says the LORD, ‘every knee will bend to Me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.’ Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.” (Romans 14:11-12, nlt [Isaiah 45:23])

And again it says:

“Therefore, God elevated Him to the place of highest honor and gave Him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11, nlt)

Of course, it would be better if they would acknowledge Jesus now, instead of later. But let there be no doubt; Jesus is Lord of the conservatives and the liberals and every other party, race, tribe, and tongue. This is important, because right now, our society and our media are trying to convince you that you can only be on one side or the other.

So Joshua is confronted with the One in charge, and he asked Jesus the question that we get asked: “Whose side are we supposed to be on?” Joshua asked:

### Whose *side* is *Jesus on*?

Notice that Joshua asked him, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” Embedded in that question is the implication: “God, we are right, aren't we? You are on our side, aren't you?” It's not really a question, it's an assumption, much like what we see today; it seems that those who are conservatives think Jesus is on their side, and liberals assume he would be on their side. So which is it?

Well, if you were to read the Bible looking for either liberal or conservative viewpoints, you'll find plenty of both. For example, the Bible clearly teaches that we are expected to work for what we get:

“Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: ‘Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.’” (2 Thessalonians 3:10, nlt)

That's clearly a conservative approach to the economy. That seems to rule out things like welfare. But wait – Jesus said:

“Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven!” (Luke 12:33, nlt)

This is more in line with the liberal view that it is society's responsibility to care for the poor among us.

Sometimes, the Bible's viewpoint is one, the other, somewhere in between, or all of the above. A pastor friend of mine recently posted this on Facebook that makes this point: “Pro-life is a good description of the politics of Jesus: pro-life for the unborn, the born, the immigrant, the refugee, the infirm, the imprisoned, those who we might call ‘enemy,’ the

future generations, and the planet. Our ethic of life should be shaped by no other agenda than the agenda of Jesus Christ.”

There are many examples you can find in Scripture of both viewpoints’ agendas. So what does that mean? It means that while the Bible is definitely political (because it is all about people and their relationships to each other in community); the Bible was never meant to be a political party platform for one viewpoint over another. The Bible describes the character and nature of a God who would go to every length possible for people to know his love, to be called his children, to be free from sin, and to be citizens of heaven; it was never meant to be used as a blueprint for partisan politics! We learn from the story of Joshua’s encounter with God that God is on *neither* side, and at the same time he is on *both* sides. God is on the side of *God*. But here’s the thing: God is *for* you! He loves *you* more than anything:

“I have loved you, My people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to Myself.” (Jeremiah 31:3, nlt)

God is *for you* and for every one of us. If you are a liberal, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a conservative, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a somewhere in between, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a human being, *a person*, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life.

“What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31, nlt)

So Joshua asked Jesus, “Whose side are you on?” and Jesus said, “Neither one. I am the One in charge.”

And that declaration causes an immediate reaction from Joshua:

“At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. ‘I am at Your command,’ Joshua said. ‘What do You want Your servant to do?’ The Commander of the LORD’s army replied, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did as he was told.” (Joshua 5:14-15, nlt)

*That*, my friends, is the point of all of this: Joshua wanted to know which side Jesus had allegiance too. And Jesus answered it by saying, “Neither side. What I want to know is, will you be on *my* side?”

So that’s where we need to start:

## **Be on Jesus’ *Side***

We’ve really been talking about this all along throughout this series; if you haven’t figured it out yet, let me give you a clue that will help you through the rest of the summer: in all of these issues, the place for each of us to start with is the Lordship of Christ in our *own* lives: are we willing to submit to Christ as Lord, and allow him to shape our values, our thoughts, our traditions, and our viewpoints? *When preaching about these isms, our goal is not to inform government policies, our goal is not to give you ammunition against someone who*

holds to what you think is a wrong “ism.” Our goal is to help YOU examine YOUR heart, and to make sure YOU are loving God with your whole heart and loving others, and doing so from an informed understanding of what the Bible says about these things. So sometimes it will mean you’re taking a stand one way, on one side, and sometimes on the other, and sometimes it will mean taking a stand in a middle way between the two. But it means we will always be on God’s side, which means we will always be *for* people who he loves so much, and we will take responsibility *only* for our own attitudes and actions.

So there are a couple of things we know for sure (there are many, but I’m going to just point out the biggest ones): one is, if we are going to be on Jesus’ side, we are going to...

### - **Love All**

This is a recurring theme; it has come up in our conversation about racism, about pluralism, about our attitudes, and I can promise you it will come up in the isms that we have planned ahead – things like sexism, ageism, attitudisms, heterosexism, materialism. Jesus was very clear about this as he’s quoted in John 13:34-35 –

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35, nlt)

If you are conservative, make it your number one priority to love a liberal! If you are a liberal, love a conservative! Love everyone! Jesus said,

“If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.” (Matthew 5:46, nlt)

I can’t give you five easy steps or three quick ways to do this; all I can say is do it. It’s not easy, but you must do it. If you are like me, it will certainly require you to...

### - **Pray Always**

I don’t know of any way to change my own attitude and my own ability to love others, then to pray. I ask God to change my heart, and I pray for the person I need to love. And for sure I pray for God to heal the divisions that are in our society today. That’s why the Bible tells us, in the middle of instructions about how we ought to treat others, that we should pray: to...

“Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other. Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. *Never stop praying.* Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:13-18, nlt, *italics added*)

Finally, and this is most urgent to today given our divided culture,

## - *Seek Peace*

Our priority is not to prove we are right and the other person is wrong. Our priority is to seek peace first. The Bible doesn't give us much wiggle room about this:

“Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18, nlt)

It doesn't say live in peace with those who share your own isms. It means to rise above politicism and be Holy Spirit-filled people of loveism, prayerism, and peace-ism! Jesus was very clear in his teachings from the Sermon on the Mount:

“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” (Matthew 5:9-10, nlt)

Seek peace; be a peacemaker. Work for peace. God will bless you for this. Will you be persecuted for it? Perhaps. But if you are, God will bless you for that, too. God's blessing does not mean it will be easy, or that it won't be hard. Blessing doesn't mean the absence of hardship or trial or persecution. It doesn't mean that you won't face conflict. In fact, the only way you can obey Jesus' command to be a peacemaker is when you are faced with conflict! You can't obey this when you are not confronted with an opposing view! Did you ever think about that? We seek God's blessing because we think it means he will take away conflict or trouble. But he says that when you get blessed is when you choose to seek peace with the other person while you are IN conflict. The blessing is IN it, the blessing is not to never have it. The blessing comes when you choose to love, pray, and work for peace.

And by the way, please think about that the next time you are about to post something on Facebook. PLEASE!

Again, we can only be responsible for our own actions and attitudes. Where Christians get into trouble is when we think other people's actions are our responsibility. It doesn't mean we don't warn or correct or encourage others, but it means we take responsibility for ourselves ONLY. Oswald Chambers, a great Christian preacher, teacher, and writer, said this: “Never look for right in the other man, but never cease to be right yourself. We are always looking for justice; the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is – Never look for justice, but never cease to give it.”<sup>2</sup>

Take responsibility for yourself. Don't expect someone else to act appropriately or think appropriately; YOU do so. And you might be surprised how it impacts the person who sees things differently than you. Christ is Lord of all. Submit to him as Lord – be on his side, then love others, pray always, and seek peace.

### *Pray*

Can I share something with you before we close? I mentioned that we need to do these things before we post anything on Facebook. I can't tell you how often I am appalled by the hate and anger and unloving posts that come from people that even claim to be Christian. I have many friends on Facebook who are not Christian, and I would expect those things

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<sup>2</sup> Oswald Chambers, “My Utmost for His Highest”



from them. But often they are more civil than some of my Christian friends. This issue is so important, that at our recent General Assembly, we voted to add a resolution into our governing document making a statement about how we should approach social media. This is now an official statement from the Church of the Nazarene to her people. Can I share it with you? It says this:

“The Use of Social Media First and foremost, the content that we share should be respectful. As in all interpersonal relationships, we believe that the content of our social media should also be a reflection of the sanctified hearts for which we strive. Clergy and laity alike must be mindful of how their activities on social media affect the image of Christ and His church and impact its mission within their communities. Our activities should be life giving and affirming and should seek to uplift all persons. (Proverbs 15:4, 15:28, 16:24; Ecclesiastes 5:2-4; Matthew 15:11; Galatians 5:13-15; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:62; Timothy 2:16; James 3:1-13)

REASON: The proliferation of social media in the lives of the members of the Church of the Nazarene cannot be understated. Outlets like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others have provided a new way for clergy and laity alike to engage with each other and with the broader world around them. The church cannot deny the cultural importance of social media nor the opportunity it affords us in broadening the scope of our ministry. But, we need to be mindful of what we publish for the world to read.”

Amen? If you want to reread this statement, you can download the sermon manuscript from our website – it is quoted at the end of the message.