

---

*“For the Lord’s Sake”*

ROMANS 13:1-7, PT. 4

OCTOBER 20, 2024

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

---

## AT A GLANCE

Christians belong first and foremost to God and to Christ. We are called to advance His Kingdom and pursue His righteousness. One of the ways we do this is by voting according to biblical principles. We are called to submit to governing authorities with humble hearts, but a Christian cannot in good faith vote for those whose policies advocate for what the Lord calls evil and encroach upon what the Lord calls good. Steward your vote in faithfulness!

## INTRODUCTION

If this is your first Sunday at Wildwood Church, I want to welcome you and tell you this is a little different than our normal sermon. We are currently studying through the book of Romans verse by verse, as we typically do here. We have spent 77 weeks studying Romans and the last three weeks studying Romans 13:1-7. This passage happens to address the Christian’s relationship to governing authorities. While I’m thankful for the timing and see the Lord’s hand in it, it’s just how the series fell on the calendar.

In today’s sermon I do not desire to alienate or isolate any of you. Instead, my motive is to inform you of biblical principles and exhort you to live accordingly. I know that some of you have come here this morning because our youth group led our worship service. You came to hear your niece or nephew sing, not to hear a message on the biblical principles related to the upcoming election. You may be wondering what you’ve gotten into.

You are welcome here even if you disagree, but perhaps you’d prefer to leave. You are free to do that. In just a moment I’m going to pray and that will give you an opportunity to slip out without anyone noticing.

## WE BELONG TO CHRIST

Wildwood is a church, we belong to Christ, and our hope in Heaven. Nevertheless, as this passage, and lots of others, reveal, how we live here on Earth is no secondary matter. It is our duty to live as salt and light and to do everything in our power to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Before we get into the biblical principles that should govern our vote in two weeks, I’d like to recap a few things from the last three weeks. In Romans 12:1-2 we see that our lives are a representation of our response to the Gospel. We are called to lay down our lives as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. We are to be transformed by the renewing our minds and not conformed to the world. Every part of our lives is to look different from the world. The Gospel should impact not only our church life, which Paul addressed in 12:3-8, but it’s also to impact our lives outside the church.

In Romans 12:9, Paul tells us to “let love be genuine” and he returns to the concept of love in Romans 13:8-10, saying, “Love is the fulfilling of the Law.” Romans 13:1-7 falls within what we call a “literary envelope” with love as the focus of the entire passage. Since how we relate to governing authorities falls within that love envelope, I take this to mean how we relate to government is one way we live in surrender to God with genuine, law-fulfilling love.

## BE GOOD CITIZENS FOR THE LORD’S SAKE

Recall from last week that in Romans 13:6 says, **“For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.”** Paul addressed what was a political hot-button issue in his time by applying a biblical worldview in verses 1-5. We covered those verses two and three weeks ago. Allow me to summarize: as a gift of common grace, the Lord has granted to us civil law and order and He authorizes governing authorities to enforce that law and order. Along with the authority to bear the sword, God has authorized government to collect taxes from its citizens to protect them by restraining evil and rewarding good, government’s primary responsibility.

In Romans 13:7, Paul broadens the biblical principle beyond the financial considerations of governing authorities. We are to honor and respect those who govern over us, not because of who they are personally, but because of the office they fill and the responsibility they are entrusted with by God.

Peter echoes Paul’s instructions, *“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”* 1 Peter 2:13–14

I want you to see what is on either side of these verses because Peter’s primary concern is not that Christians lockstep with government for the sake of getting along. Peter begins his instructions in chapter two by telling the readers that they are being built up on the cornerstone of Christ as a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people for His own possession. First and foremost Peter has in mind that the Church belongs to Christ, and we are His prized possession. Because of this, Peter exhorts the readers to fight their flesh for the glory of God.

*“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”* 1 Peter 2:11-12 The glory of God is magnified by Christian’s honorable conduct.

Then comes the admonition to be subject to governing authorities in verses 13-14, which we’ve already seen. What follows is an explanation of why we should be subject to governing authorities, *“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”* 1 Peter 2:15-17

When you show honor and respect and when you honor the emperor and live as servants of God, you are living in such a way that Christ is glorified. This, I believe, is the primary concern for both Peter and Paul and should be our primary concern as well. Here’s my summary of both Peter’s and Paul’s exhortations – be good citizens for the Lord’s sake.

While we wait for Christ’s return, we should live here as good citizens for the sake of Christ’s glory. We should not remove ourselves from the normal, regular, civic life of the nation in which we live. Rather, we should do all we can in our power to live honorably, doing whatever we can to advance the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

## WATCHMAN WITH A WARNING

It's no secret that today I'm going to address the moral issues on the ballot in our national election. I want to reiterate what I have said the last three weeks, it is not my intention to tell you what to do or for whom to vote. I state emphatically that I believe Christians who are eligible to vote have a duty to vote biblical principles. We should steward what we've been given, a democratic republic.

I believe we owe this to our Lord, who instituted government to serve His purposes and has granted that we should be born at such a time and place that we have the right to select those who govern over us.

However, I do not presume to tell you what you must do. My duty is to exhort you to follow biblical principles and I trust the Holy Spirit to lead you in its application, for, *"...whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."* Romans 14:23

My intention today is to take my cue from the Apostle Paul by addressing the political issues of our day, which are really moral issues that have been politicized, from a biblical worldview. I also hope to expose the enemy's schemes, how I see him advancing evil in the world. I hope that when you walk into the voting booth after hearing from me, you can do so with a clear and informed conscience.

Finally, I approach this sermon with the words of Ezekiel ringing in my ears:

*"...if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand."* Ezekiel 33:2-5

In the New Testament elders are called "overseers." We are tasked with watching over the souls of those entrusted to our care. As an overseer, one who is called to watch over your soul, I have five questions I hope will help you navigate the next few weeks.

### 1. Other than Jesus, when has God ever relied upon a perfect person to achieve His will?

Paul tells us, *"No one is righteous, no not one."* Romans 3:10 He referred to himself as the chief of all sinners and exclaimed, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* Romans 7:24 No one is good.

What do Abraham, Samson, David, Hezekiah, and Nebuchadnezzar have in common? They were all used by God despite major character defects. Twice Abraham gave his wife to a king, claiming she was his sister. Samson, David, and Solomon all had a weakness for women, Hezekiah was self-centered, and Nebuchadnezzar was full of pride. Jonah ran from God and only relented after three days inside the belly of a great fish. After Ninevah repented, Jonah wished he were dead because God was merciful toward people he despised.

These men were arrogant, lustful, abusive, self-centered, and vengeful. Yet, the Lord used them to achieve His purposes. Until Jesus returns, we will never be governed by a perfect person. In our vote, we have always had to choose between sinful people.

One of the two sinful people on the ballot will govern this land for the next four years. The question is not which of these candidates is a good person, but rather, which candidate's policies most closely align with biblical principles of restraining evil and rewarding good? As we've seen in Romans 13:1-7 the last three weeks, this is why God instituted governing authorities.

Biblical principle: Government's moral duty is to restrain evil and reward righteousness

In an effort to subvert this, the enemy appeals to our emotion. King Saul was a man everyone fawned over; tall, handsome, & charismatic. On the surface, he had the kingly vibe. Everyone was hyped about King Saul. And he was a disaster.

Enemy's scheme: Get people wrapped up in superficial emotion so they overlook policies

Ultimately, the election of our governing authorities is not a congeniality contest nor an expression of our undying affection. Instead, it is an endorsement of policies you believe most restrains evil and rewards righteousness.

## 2. Which candidate's policies foster conditions most favorable for the protection of the unborn?

The bible is unequivocally pro-life. We alone, of all God's creation, bear the image of God. *"So God created man in his own image..." Genesis 1:27* In Psalm 139 we read that we are knitted together in our mother's womb and that we are fully known by God even there. The very first person to recognize the Lord was John the Baptist while they were still in their respective wombs. In Genesis 9 the Lord clearly tells us that human life is so sacred that whoever takes another person's life loses the right to theirs because we are made in God's image.

Biblical principal: life is sacred from conception

In all fairness, we do not have a pro-life candidate on the ballot. One candidate advocates for abortion up to 15 weeks, during which about [96%](#)<sup>1</sup> of abortions in America occur. The other had a Planned Parenthood mobile [abortion van](#)<sup>2</sup> outside their party's national convention. One party has made abortion the center of their campaign while the other party appointed three pro-life justices to the Supreme Court and can be credited with the long-awaited overturn of Roe v. Wade.

Because of this, Texas and many other states now restrict abortion in almost all cases. Pray that more states would be like Texas. Minnesota, on the other hand, boasts of its progressive abortion laws, having removed all restrictions on what they call the "fundamental right" to abortion. A woman can kill her baby up to the moment of birth for any reason in the state of Minnesota as well as in [eight other states, plus DC](#).<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the narrative, in no state is it against the law to provide the mother [life-saving care](#),<sup>4</sup> even if it leads to the death of her unborn baby.

What we have seen in our country is in the last 60 years is Satan pulling out the same tactic to destroy the image of God he used in ancient times. Child sacrifice is nothing new. It has always been a staple of the worship of pagan gods. Molech was a god of child sacrifice. Ishtar, Asherah, Baal, Artemis and others were gods and goddesses of fertility whose worship involved sexual immorality.

Enemy's scheme: Sexual liberation leading to unwanted pregnancy leading to child sacrifice

As you consider who to vote for, ask yourself who will foster conditions more favorable to the pro-life cause? Which policies will most effectively reduce abortion and set us up down the line for its elimination?

Abortion is demonic and Satan loves when image-bearers are sacrificed on the altar of sexual liberty. Which leads me to my next question.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/press-release/what-the-data-show-abortion-later-in-pregnancy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/the-dncs-callous-abortion-van/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gutmacher.org/state-policy/explore/state-policies-abortion-bans>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/a-guide-to-abortion-laws-by-state>

### 3. Which candidate's policies best aligns with God's design for marriage and sexuality?

*"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply... Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.'" Genesis 1:27-28, 2:24* Jesus affirmed this design in Matthew 19:4, confirming this is not only an Old Testament standard of human sexual morality, but an enduring one.

Let's break God's design for marriage and sexuality down a little. First, there are only two sexes: male and female. By God's design two people, one of each sex, commit their entire lives to one another and enjoy each other and produce lots of babies. They then raise those children to the glory of God as little image-bearers who, Lord willing, then choose a partner of the opposite sex and make and raise more little babies.

Biblical principle: God's design for marriage and sexuality is that one man and one woman commit for life and perpetuate the human race

This is a radical position today on just about every point. Romans 1 explains why. Because man refuses to acknowledge the Creator and worships the creation instead, God gave man up to dishonorable passions, including homosexuality and other sexual immorality. Some people might think, what's the big deal? Let people do what they want to do!

In Ephesians 5, Paul speaks about sexual immorality and tells Christians we are to have nothing to do with it in verses 3-12. Then after giving instructions to husbands and wives, he reveals to us why marriage and sexual morality is such a big deal. *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."* Ephesians 5:32

God's design for marriage and sexual morality is so important because it ultimately points us to Christ's union with the Church. No wonder the devil is trying to subvert it in any and every way he can. Whether that be through homosexuality, transgenderism, no-fault divorce, fornication, adultery, pornography, or whatever, the enemy despises God's design for marriage and sexuality.

Enemy's scheme: Remove all barriers to sexuality to distort the image of Christ and His church

Unfortunately, we don't have a candidate whose personal life demonstrates a historical biblical sexual morality. The question we must answer is which one's policies restrains sexual immorality, and which promotes it? Consider states such as Minnesota, which is now a "trans-refuge" state. Minnesota [law](#)<sup>5</sup> allows, "children, regardless of age, to seek and receive radical [sex-transitioning] medical treatments...all without their parents' guidance and love."

These children need spiritual and mental healthcare, not puberty blockers and body mutilation. There are [states](#)<sup>6</sup> that allow girls under the age of 18 to have double mastectomies. They cannot get a tattoo of a butterfly on their ankle, but they can have their breasts removed. This is demonic. It is an affront to God's created order and the beauty of our bodies as God created us, male and female.

As you consider who to vote for, ask yourself if a certain political party occupied every office in every municipality, county, district, state, and the White House, and the entire nation was governed by their policies, what would we see? Would this party promote biblical marriage and sexuality or sexual immorality? Look at the cities, states, and districts habitually governed by that party now and examine the fruit of their governance.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.house.mn.gov/sessiondaily/Story/17865>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.healthline.com/health/what-age-can-you-get-top-surgery#younger-age>

#### 4. Which candidate's policies best regard the sovereignty of our nation's borders and protects our citizens while also caring best for the sojourner?

First, I would like to establish that God separated mankind into ethnicities and tongues and appointed for them the time and place of their birth and that borders are His idea. *“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,” Acts 17:26* Even when the nation of Israel was inheriting the land of Canaan, the Lord established borders.

Next recall Romans 13:1-7, a passage that emphatically affirms the right and God-given responsibility of governing authorities to enforce its laws, even under penalty of death, to protect its own citizens.

##### Biblical principle: Government is responsible for protecting its own citizens

While we can and should advocate for legal immigration and we should be kind to the sojourner, nowhere in scripture are we encouraged to aide and abed those who break just laws.

But, doesn't the bible also tell us to love our neighbor? That's a good question. Yes, the bible does tell us to love our neighbor and I believe well-meaning people mistake reckless immigration policies for compassion. Restrictive immigration laws appear to lack compassion to them. But I argue this is a scheme of the enemy.

##### Enemy's scheme: Conflate open borders with love of neighbor

What some fail to consider is that citizens of this country are also our neighbors, and their safety and well-being should also be considered and that government's first duty is to protect its own citizens. We understand this personally.

You are called to love your neighbor but you lock your doors at night. You open your home to strangers, but only on your own terms. You govern who enters your home and for how long and for what purpose. When someone fails to respect your rules, you remove them, even if by force. You are justified in doing so because your primary responsibility is to provide for and protect those entrusted to your care, namely yourself and your family. Every government has the same responsibility.

In [data](#)<sup>7</sup> provided by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer to Representative Tony Gonzales of Texas, there are an estimated [20 million](#)<sup>8</sup> illegal immigrants at large in the United States, including over 13,000 convicted murders, almost 16,000 people convicted of sexual assault, plus an additional 630,000 convicted criminals and 350 terrorists. Even if that number is dramatically lower, say 6 million as some suggest, that is three times the size our entire military.

The FBI quietly adjusted their crime statistics this past week, revealing the heralded 2.2% decrease in violent crime in 2022 was untrue and there was actually a 4.5% increase. It is reasonable to associate this increase in violent crime at least in part to the [increase in illegal immigration](#).<sup>9</sup> Americans are less safe today and we should care about that.

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://gonzales.house.gov/2024/9/rep-tony-gonzales-confirms-over-662-000-noncitizens-with-criminal-histories-released-in-u-s-communities>

<sup>8</sup> <https://thehill.com/opinion/4423296-matthews-illegal-immigrants-double-under-biden-and-thats-just-the-start/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/crime-and-justice/commentary/increased-illegal-immigration-brings-increased-crime-almost-23-federal>

Furthermore, there are some 325,000 unaccompanied minors in the United States illegally. According to a [report](#)<sup>10</sup> from the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security there are 291,000 who cannot be accounted for and there is no guarantee these children are “safe from trafficking, exploitation, or forced labor.” Innocent children are being exploited because of failed immigration policies.

James tells us that we will know wisdom from above by its fruit. *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” James 3:17* When there are significantly contrasting philosophies of governance, it seems necessary for the believer to consider the fruit of each to discern whether that “wisdom” is from above or in the words of James, *“...earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” James 3:15*

I would argue that rather than loving our neighbor, the policies governing our border right now create conditions that endanger the lives of Americans and foreigners, including hundreds of thousands of unaccounted children, and many men and women who die trying to get here on the black market.

This is to speak nothing of how illegal immigration demoralizes those trying to enter the country legally, or of the strain it places upon cities who are overwhelmed by illegal immigrants, including some of the wealthiest and largest cities like Chicago and NYC, which are being pushed to a [breaking point](#).<sup>11</sup>

As you consider who to vote for, consider whose policies best embrace government’s God-given responsibility of protecting its own citizens? Whose policies create conditions that encourage orderly, lawful, and safe immigration into our country?

Finally, one of the most important duties of the President of the United States is the appointment of federal judges and Supreme Court justices. In this way, the influence of the president continues for generations to come. While my primary emphasis today is the top of the ticket, no doubt legislators have a major part to play in this as well.

## 5. Which candidate will appoint, and which legislators will confirm, just judges and justices?

To give you a point of reference, presidents typically appoint over 300 federal judges in their two four-year terms. That is a lot of judges! That’s a lot of final decisions on legal matters and a lot of legislating morality!

These are the requirements God gave to Moses in selecting judges to help him, *“...you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain.” Exodus 18:21* Although we are not ancient Israel in the wilderness, this does reveal God’s standard for righteous judges.

Isaiah helps us see the correlation between God-fearing judges and righteousness in the land. *“And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.” Isaiah 1:26*

Biblical principle: Righteous judges bring righteousness to the land

When a president appoints men and women who fear God, are beholden to the truth, and hate dishonest gain, the effect is righteousness in the land. While there can be no religious test for federal

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2024-08/OIG-24-46-Aug24.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/surge-of-migrants-heading-north-has-chicago-new-york-at-a-breaking-point-80e4bbe7>

judges, we can hope for appointments of judges who are moral, uphold the Constitution, and rule without personal bias.

Consider the encroachment on religious liberties after cases such as Jack Phillips', the Colorado baker who was prosecuted for politely refusing to do a cake for a gay wedding. His case made it to the Supreme Court in 2018 where thankfully he was exonerated. But it would not have gone to the Supreme Court had he received justice at the hands of righteous federal judges in Colorado.

Mr. Phillips has since been [targeted](#)<sup>12</sup> two more times, both for refusing to violate his conscience and make a cake celebrating sexual immorality. Jack Phillips is an unfortunate victim of legislating from the bench.

### Enemy's scheme: Overturn righteous laws through unrighteous judges

Judges are hugely important to the nation and Christians ought to think rightly about which candidate will appoint the most righteous judges. Consider the most impactful Supreme Court decisions of 2015 with the Obergefell case and in 2022 with the Hobbs case. Justices appointed by liberal presidents nationalized the legalization of homosexual marriage via the Obergefell decision and justices appointed by conservative presidents overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022 in the Hobbs decision.

The judges and justices each president appoints have incredible impact on the moral direction of our nation. If Christians will not be salt of the earth and light of the world, if we will not be wise and discerning in our voting, who will? If we will not do our part to elect people who can be entrusted to appoint righteous judges, we should not be surprised when unrighteous judges overturn righteous laws and unrighteousness abounds.

Let's do a quick recap:

As you consider who to vote for...

Vote: Policies over personalities

Vote: Restriction of abortion

Vote: Restraining of sexual immorality

Vote: Protection of citizens and promotion of legal immigration

Vote: Righteous judges who will uphold righteous laws

Which of the two candidates do you believe will best live up to government's responsibility of rewarding righteousness and restraining evil? The answer is clear. You cannot deny that while both parties are weak in certain areas, one party promotes the things God hates. They platform demonic practices like abortion, homosexuality, and transgenderism. They promote, rather than restrain, what the Lord calls evil. I don't even have to say their name...you know who I'm referring to. And I believe you have a responsibility, not just a right, to do what you can to prevent that party from ruling over us and imposing its moral depravity upon us.

One final thought as you enter the voting booth...Government's God-given responsibility:

Vote: Reward righteousness and restrain evil

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://adfflegal.org/client/jack-phillips/>

## THE ANCHOR OF OUR SOUL

In just over two weeks we're going to elect a new president, a man or a woman who is going to govern our nation for at least the next four years. He or she is going to influence our lives. But neither of them is going to save us.

This statement is not simply a platitude, it's a confession into which we must tether the anchor of our soul; the rock onto which we must cling. We do not cast our hope upon the shifting sands of the political champion. We seek wisdom from above and we do our part to advance God's kingdom in pursuit of His righteousness. We do our Christian duty to advocate for the rewarding of righteousness and the restraining of evil.

But in the end, we keep entrusting our souls to Him who judges justly. We won't shrink back from the cause of Christ in despair if our candidate loses, and we won't sit back in complacency if our candidate wins. We will drive on in our Gospel mission until at last the great judge brings with Him His final judgement and our eternal reward.

We fight for the faith and for the glory of the King! But we confess that we fight a battle He has already won. No matter what happens tomorrow, we know how the story ends! Amen?

In the meantime, let us rise to the occasion before us and let us resolve to do all we can do to restrain evil and see righteousness reign in our land.