

# Commentary: When the church picks teams

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Lately, I've felt a quiet grief rising in me, not primarily over immigration policy itself, though I hate the pain and suffering and assault on God's image I've seen, but over what it's doing to the church.

I'm watching Christians choose sides and then choose suspicion. Choose caricature. Choose political teams over the Lord's table.

The temptation is strong: You're passionate about what you believe, and if you want to "win," you pick a side with power. In our context, that essentially means Republican or Democrat.

And once you pick a team, the script writes itself. You inherit the talking points. You inherit the outrage. You inherit the algorithms. You inherit the enemies.

And you don't love your enemies.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, you begin fighting the wars of the powers and principalities.

And immigrants continue to suffer, seen as issues of policy and not images of God. ICE agents get dehumanized and hated. Other innocent people get caught in the crossfire. And the church looks just like everyone else.

I'm realizing the real issue that concerns me is, not immigration policy, not ICE, not woke versus anti-woke. It's ecclesial fracture under political pressure.

I'm not afraid of a beastly state as much as I'm afraid of a beastly church.

# The greatest danger

I don't think the greatest danger in this moment is that Christians will disagree about immigration enforcement. The greatest danger is we will lose the ability to love one another while we disagree. That's a far deeper spiritual crisis.

The problem is, some who have already chosen a team will insist true Christians could never disagree with them and be faithful. But in many issues, faithful believers can land in different places on policy details, because issues are usually more nuanced than we let them be.

Even if they aren't, you can be faithful and wrong, or right and unfaithful.

Faithfulness isn't measured by accuracy but by love. Even for our enemies.

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

If you're right and you're not loving, you're wrong.

## Romans 13 and Revelation 13

In Romans 13, governing authorities are described as servants of God, restraining evil and maintaining order. Authority is real. The state has a limited but necessary role. It bears the sword. It keeps the peace.

But Revelation 13 shows us something else. There, political authority becomes beastly because it demands ultimate allegiance, mimics divine imagery, and persecutes faithful witness.

Government can function as servant or as beast. What makes the difference? Allegiance.

Romans 13 describes delegated authority—authority under God. Revelation

13 exposes idolatrous authority—authority that competes with God.

The beast is not simply powerful, it demands allegiance. It is worshiped. It receives devotion. It shapes identity. Here is where the church must be very careful.

When we begin to speak as if our political tribe is the guardian of righteousness; when we treat policy disagreement as spiritual betrayal; when our emotional energy, imagination, and hope are tethered as tightly to a party or a policy as to Christ, we are drifting from Romans 13 into Revelation 13 territory.

Not because we vote or protest or counter-protest, not because we care about law, but because our allegiance has shifted.

## **How political tribes train us**

What troubles me most right now is not that Christians are thinking deeply about immigration. It's that we are letting political tribes disciple us in how to think, feel, and treat others.

Political tribes train us to simplify complex realities. They teach us which stories to amplify and which to ignore. They teach us how to view the other side. They reward outrage and punish nuance. Once we absorb that formation, loving across disagreement becomes nearly impossible. Demonization follows quickly.

If you support stricter enforcement, you must hate immigrants. If you criticize enforcement methods, you must be anti-law and unconcerned about trafficking or drug trade.

Motives are assumed. Minds and hearts are judged. People's relationship with Jesus is questioned. That is spiritual poison.

# The church's higher call

The church is called to something more demanding.

We are not called to abandon civic engagement. We do not withdraw from public life. But we must refuse to give our allegiance to nations and parties—things that were only ever meant to serve.

The state is a peacekeeper. It restrains harm through force and law. That role is limited and external. The church is called to be a peacemaker.

We embody cruciform love. We honor the image of God in every person—immigrant, citizen, officer, protester. We tell the truth. We refuse propaganda. We grieve suffering wherever it appears. We do not trade a person for a policy.

This does not mean we avoid hard conversations. It means we have them differently. It means we can hold strong convictions and still break bread. It means we can say, “Help me understand what you fear,” instead of, “You are the problem.” It means we refuse contempt, even when we are convinced the other person is wrong.

That kind of love is not sentimental. It is costly. It requires dying to the need to win. It requires humility—the recognition we, too, are vulnerable to the powers.

## Our most radical witness

Perhaps the most radical witness the church can offer in this moment is not a unified immigration platform, but a unified love, a community where sharp disagreement does not fracture fellowship, where political loyalty never outruns loyalty to Christ, where Caesar may have his coin, but God always has our lives.

Immigration policy will continue to be debated. Elections will come and go. Nations will rise and fall. But the credibility of our witness depends on whether we love one another in the midst of it all.

We are to be known for our love for one another. Christians must lead the way of love in all things. Not because love wins arguments. But because love is how we follow Jesus and make him known to the world.

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