

Politics, Polls, & You

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Unless you get paid to talk about it, politics seems to be one of those forbidden topics of conversation these days, especially in church-world. But with the stakes being what they are, and the levels of apathy, bigotry, fear, and irrationality on the rise (on both sides), I believe this “untouchable” issue merits our attention, especially as it relates to the Bible.

Let me say from the top that I’m not going to tell you who I’m voting for. Nor am I going to tell you which party I favor. What I am going to do is encourage you to consider what God says about all this, and then urge you to act accordingly. To act with God as your audience, the Holy Spirit as your guide, and the Bible as your grid. That means remembering the role of government, considering the qualifications for leadership, and fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship.

Remember the Role of Government

Foundational to a biblical view of politics and our role in it as believers, is to remember the role of government.

Romans 13:1-2 says,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (ESV)

- That means the role of government first of all, is to *exercise authority*. Authority it has been given by God. That’s pretty clear from verse one. The government’s role is to exercise its God-given authority, and our role is to submit.

That’s right. Even if you don’t like the government or those leading it. Because to resist them is to resist God. “Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.” (Rom 13:2) As long as we’re not forced to participate in what is wrong, or prevented from doing what is right, our role is to submit, and the government’s role is to rule.

- The second role of government is to *restrain evil*. Continuing on in Romans 13:3-4, the Apostle Paul says, *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, ⁴for 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. (ESV)*

Government is one of God’s instruments, God’s means, to carry out his wrath on the wrongdoer. 1 Peter 2:14 is equally explicit about this, saying that those who are sent by God to govern, are to “punish those who do evil.” So one of the roles of government is to restrain evil through punishment and protection – protection from within and protection from without.

- The third role of government is to *promote the common good*. The Old Testament is filled with examples of this, summed up in Rom 13:4 where it says, “He [referring to the ruler(s) of the government] is God’s servant *for your good*.” And once again, 1 Pet 2:14 says that God sends governors to “praise those who do good.” So the final role of government is to promote the common good of its people by preserving order, maintaining infrastructure, and protecting our liberty.

Notice, it’s *not* the role of government to solve all of your problems, even if it could. Government according to God’s design in the Bible was never intended to be a cure-all. That kind of attitude stifles productivity, discourages ingenuity, and fosters an atmosphere of complacency. “If all else fails, the government will take care of us; it will solve all our problems.” Or so the thinking goes.

That’s not the role of government in the Bible however, and we shouldn’t expect it from our leaders in this election or any other. Government exists to *promote* the common good, not *be* the common good.

So foundational to a biblical view of politics and our role in it as believers, is to remember the role of government.

Consider the Qualifications for Leadership

Next, is to consider the qualifications for leadership. In Deuteronomy 1:13-17, Moses says:

Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads. ' 14And you [the Israelites] answered me, 'The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.' 15So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers, throughout your tribes. 16And I charged your judges at that time, 'Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. 17You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.' (ESV)

What we find here are 6 qualities or qualifications for those in leadership positions, especially positions of government. The same qualifications that Moses looked for in choosing the leaders of *his* nation.

- The first of which is *wisdom* from verse 13. Referring to insight, good judgment, understanding, and discernment. While government is no place for novices or rookies, neither do they have to be career politicians. But they do have to be wise.
- The second qualification for leadership in government is *competence*, referred to in verse 13 as “experience.” Why experience? Because given the other qualifications, experience increases competence. Especially the experience of multiple responsibilities, or the experience of being exposed to a wide variety of circumstances and situations, whether in business, non-profits, or the military.

We should look for “able men” just like Moses’ father-in-law advised him. Men of ability, who are competent to assess situations and make decisions.

- The third qualification is *integrity*. Political leaders should possess the integrity to judge and lead righteously, without partiality. Moses said in verse 17, “You shall not be partial in judgment.” Likewise, our leaders must be able to perceive and measure the truth of a situation, and then act on it without being influenced by personal relationships or prejudices, especially relationships with those who are rich and powerful.

They must listen to both the “small and the great alike;” the powerful *and* the weak; the rich *and* the poor. Giving equal consideration to both. Nor should they ever play favorites with those who fill their campaign coffers. Including special interest groups who hold out the carrot of money if they will only support their cause. In Exodus 18:21 this kind of integrity is described as being “trustworthy” and “hating a bribe.”

You don’t have to look very far in our government for shameful examples of a lack of integrity. Making it all the more critical that we look for it in our political candidates.

- Fourth, is *courage*. Again, Moses said in verse 17, “You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God’s.” In other words, as part of the government instituted by God, our political leaders are making judgment calls on His behalf. Which means politicians, of all people, must have the courage to stand firm in their convictions, and firm in the face of intimidation as they carry out God’s appointed work.

Unfortunately, that’s lost on many of our leaders, because they have no fear of God and no sense of his presence. So intimidation and manipulation rule the day, which is one of the reasons we see so much pandering, waffling, and changing of minds. Look for leaders with firm convictions, and the courage to stand up for them.

- Fifth, is *humility*. Moses counted on those under him to know when a case was beyond their wisdom and discernment, and to have the humility to admit it by sending it to him. “The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.” (v17)

Instead of acting like they have all the answers, political leaders must have the humility to ask for help when they need it. Otherwise, the fall of pride is inevitable. And the political landscape is *littered* with that. Leadership requires humility, and we should require it of our leaders.

- The sixth qualification of leadership is *virtue*. This, from Exodus 18:21 where Jethro tells Moses to look for *men who fear God*. Look for leaders, who at the very least, dare not step outside the bounds of moral behavior, and fear God's reprisal if they do. People who, at the very least, recognize and respect the God who made them and watches over them. It's called virtue, morality, uprightness. And it's crucial to being a good leader.

Having said that, I'm not saying that our political leaders need to be born-again believers. But given the choice, I'd rather be governed by a competent *believer*, than a competent *unbeliever* any time. Not only does the believer have the Holy Spirit to help them, but they rule in the fear of God. And 2 Samuel 23:3b-4 says,

When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth. (ESV)

So the qualifications of the leader make a huge difference in the quality of the nation. Which is the second reason we should consider them carefully when it comes to the polls.

Fulfill the Responsibilities of Citizenship

A biblical view of politics and our role in it as followers of Jesus Christ, requires that we fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship.

- The first of which is, to *think*. Responsible Christian citizens think critically, carefully, clearly, and biblically.

Critically, not as someone who looks for things that are wrong, but as someone who reads between the lines, ferrets out the facts, and then draws conclusions. Don't just take everything that is said by a politician or reporter as the gospel truth. And please, please don't make your decision of who to support based solely on their looks, charisma, or personality. Think critically.

And then think *carefully*. As in, don't be a knee-jerk voter. Think carefully about the issues of the day, and the implications of a person's policies. What would their election mean for the moral compass of our country? Would it result in laws that are *more* or *less* like the principles of God's Word? And what would a candidate's election mean for Supreme Court appointments, and the implications of *that* for the next 20 years? We must think carefully.

As well as *clearly*. Look past the glittering generalities, the pleasant platitudes, the clever clichés, and the glowing promises. Look past the silky-smooth sound-bites, and the pathetic politics that try to capture the most votes by offending the least number of people. Look past the political pundits, and turn off the TV if you have to, and think clearly for *yourself*. That's what a responsible citizen does.

Think critically, carefully, clearly, and *biblically*. If you profess to be saved according to the *truth* of Scripture, the Bible, then you should think and make decisions according to the *authority* of Scripture. According to what it says about the moral issues of life, which are by far the most important in God's eyes.

And it just so happens that the vast majority of the issues we're facing these days are moral ones. Issues like abortion, crime, religious freedom, judicial activism, law and order, assisted suicide, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, terrorism, school choice, internal unrest, racial strain, poverty, environmental stewardship, homelessness, war, and the list goes on and on. All moral issues, either directly or indirectly. Requiring biblical thinking on the part of our leaders, and those of us who elect them.

The problem is, most political candidates don't think biblically. At least not completely. And some don't think biblically at all. Which means we're left to choose the lesser of two evils in many cases. But choose we must, because less evil and less sin is *always* better than more evil and more sin. Especially if it's sanctioned by our government.

The first responsibility of citizenship is to think, and do so critically, carefully, clearly, and biblically.

- The second is to *vote*. When you combine the fact that God determines the allotted periods of each nation, including its boundaries (Acts 17:26); and that he has placed you in this nation, either by birth or immigration; and put this government in place, appointing its leaders – it means that you and I are here for such a time as this. And with that privilege comes responsibility. In this case, to vote.

Because in a democracy, *you are* God's primary means of appointing government leaders. So it's not only your civic *duty* to vote as part of being a good citizen, but it's also your God-given *privilege*, having been placed here by his divine appointment.

And if that's the last thing you want to do these days, you're in good company. I'm about as fed up as anybody with all the vain posturing and empty promises. Only God himself could keep all the promises politicians make.

But *not* voting is *not* an option – not before God and not before man. Because tyranny fills the void of apathy every time. So don't let anything keep you from the polls. Vote, and vote for the common good. Put the needs of our country ahead of your own. And then stay informed, supporting the good and opposing the bad. Because a healthy democracy and free country depends on it. It depends on the active participation of responsible citizens who think, and vote, and pray.

- And that's the last responsibility of responsible citizenship – *pray*. Pray that truthful speech among candidates and level heads among voters would prevail in the next few weeks. Pray that God would move people to think and vote. And when the final votes are counted and a winner named, pray for your new leaders, no matter who they are.

Like Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:1-2,

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. (ESV)

Key to a peaceful, quiet, godly, and dignified life (which has been the hope of every nation from the beginning of time), is prayer for our leaders. From the school board and city council, to the President and Congress – pray for wisdom, competence, integrity, courage, humility, and virtue. And if they're not followers of Christ through faith and repentance, pray for their salvation as well.

Because few things are more important in fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship, than prayer. Few things refresh your kingdom perspective, and remind you that God is in control. Which is one of the things so desperately needed right now, perspective. Especially with all the Chicken-little's running around (Christians included), saying that the sky is going to fall if so-and-so gets elected. They've lost perspective.

If that's you, get a grip. God rules. Daniel 4:32 says that, "The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." And there's nothing like spending time with him in prayer, to refresh your perspective on that. To realize anew that it's in *God* we trust – not politics, not polls, and certainly not people.

Having settled *that* in your mind, go to the polls and fulfill the responsibilities of your citizenship – remembering the role of government, and carefully considering the qualifications for leadership.