

Should your Pastor tell you How to Vote?

I have been a pastor for over 40 years, and very rarely have I wondered what political party, if any, people prefer. As a follower of Jesus, I am much more interested in one's faith. That has not changed.

But whether I like it or not, the politics-free-zone in public life is growing ever smaller. Political labeling happens quickly, and then pigeonholing soon follows. Neighbor love gets shut down because of allegiances to politicians six time zones away from Hawaii. Shouting replaces sharing. Attacks stifle exchanges of ideas. Lord, have mercy on our nation!

Government under God is part of the Lord's plan for His original, very good, creation.

Governments, of all varieties, have one thing in common: the legal use of force.

Government is a blessing, especially when it sticks to the tasks that God has given it. Most politicians used to stay in their own lane. Back in the day, politicians focused mostly on civic and economic affairs. Schools, businesses, media, churches, health care, and families were usually free from political over-reach.

Now those walls of separation have fallen. The political world has invaded God's jurisdiction. Did God create men and women? That basic assumption was a fence for generations. Today both political parties have declared war on the worldview of Genesis chapter one - the origin and purpose of life, male and female made in the image of God, marriage and family, and the authority of God the Creator.

Government now tells schools what to teach, hospitals who to save – and kill, businesses who to serve, people who they are, media what to say, families what they are, and churches who to fear. Politicians boldly attempt to occupy the throne of God. Do they know God made King Uzziah a leper when he thought the Holy Place was his lane?

Here are some thoughts about Christians and politics.

First, all of us Christian citizens should engage in the political process. Vote! The statistics are embarrassing! Voter turn-out in Hawaii is woefully low. And we Christians are not setting a good example. Many of us do not vote. Voting is not just a privilege but a responsibility. Joseph and Daniel faithfully honored the true and living God while serving pagan empires. To not be political is to be political - casting a vote for the status quo.

Dayna and I worked thirty years in nations where their citizens have limited opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions. Our dear friends in Uganda, Kazakhstan and China would envy our opportunities to freely think, speak, act, and vote as we are privileged to do in the United States. Those we vote into office will spend our money, shape our thoughts, disciple our kids, dictate our healthcare, defend our safety, and protect our freedoms. Strive to know what that politician will do – and has done - as your government employee. It can be hard to turn

your head from the shiny objects of their sound bites to examine their substance. It is not easy to hear through the spin and find what a candidate really believes. But find out we must! How did they vote on key issues? Who funds their campaigns?

Second, I have no interest in telling anyone how to vote. I agree with the Johnson amendment of the U.S. tax code that prohibits non-profit organizations – like churches - from endorsing or opposing political candidates. Martin Luther said the church should be a “mouth house” of the good news of Jesus Christ. People of all political stripes and colors should feel welcome into God’s family. God forbid that His Church become a red zone, or blue zone, or a rainbow zone. Jesus and the cross should be the only “stumbling block” to enter– not our allegiances to frail men of dust. We declare, and should be ready to die for, a Kingdom that endures forever – established through the blood and righteousness of our Redeemer. God forbid that any person or party should rival our loyalty and witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the world.

Third, New Testament Christians are trusted by God to be led by the Spirit. We are exhorted to be mature, not childlike, “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God” (Romans 8.14 ESV). “The law was our guardian until Christ came...but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Galatians 3.24-26 ESV).

Believers in the Old Covenant lived under a law system that detailed much of their daily lives. But Jesus in His New Covenant summarized that “guardian” with two commands – love God and neighbor. Peter’s bullet point for God’s extensive Mosaic law for the “elect exiles” was, “Be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1.15 ESV). Now, the way God intends us to glorify Him is to grow in our knowledge of Christ, be filled with the Spirit as we study the Scriptures and spread His Good News. Do all that in all you do.

The Bible does not tell us how to vote. As Christians we need to do our homework and make our choices for God’s glory. And as family members with all Christ’s followers, we need to respect each other’s political choices. In Christ you are trusted by God as His child and ambassador. Voting for creatures of dust in this passing world is small stuff compared to the eternal impact of Christ’s Kingdom.

Fourth, we need to balance the tension of our dual citizenships. The Apostle Paul wrote Philippian Christians who were proud of their favorable status with Rome. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3.20 ESV). Birth in Philippi gained them Roman citizenship, a privileged status held by a minority in the Empire. Like us, Philippian Christians had a dual citizenship.

We should be loyal to both. But our primary loyalty is to the King of kings, and Lord of lords. The Apostle urged these citizens to glory in their eternal, blood-bought, citizenship. He will “make all things new” (Revelation 21.5 ESV). His policies manifest God’s wisdom, enforced by God’s power, and applied by God’s love – forever and ever! He alone is worthy of

our hope, love, and loyalty. As we await the coming of Jesus, let us grow in knowing Him. Do you spend more time listening to your AI designed political newsfeed than reading your Bible? Do you know more names of politicians than books of the Bible? How does prayer shape your life and thoughts? Do those who know you identify you as a follower of Jesus or a voter for _____?

Tim Keller made the helpful point that key pillars of our Christian responsibility mean we do not fit neatly into either major American political party.

“Christians should be committed to racial justice and the poor, but also to the understanding that sex is only for marriage and for nurturing family. One of those views seems liberal and the other looks oppressively conservative. The historical Christian positions on social issues do not fit into contemporary political alignments...The biblical commands to lift the poor and to defend the rights of the oppressed are moral imperatives for believers...However, there are many possible ways to help the poor. Should we shrink government and let private capital markets allocate resources, or should we expand the government and give the state more of the power to redistribute wealth?... The Bible does not give exact answers to these questions for every time, place and culture...thoughtful Christians, all trying to obey God’s call, could reasonably appear at different places on the political spectrum, with loyalties to different political strategies.” (Timothy Keller, “How Do Christians Fit into the Two-Party System?” *New York Times*, September 29, 2018)

Fifth, our Twenty-first Century West is sinking to be very much like the First Century world – a minority of Jesus-followers surrounded by an aggressive, idolatrous, and immoral majority. The light of the Risen Jesus grew and flourished amidst the dark moral, civil, and political world of Rome. As Jesus prayed, His followers were “in the world...but not of the world...and sent into the world as His witnesses” (John 17.11,14,18 ESV).

The Early Church proclaimed two truths we often miss in our day. One, have no fear, our God reigns as Sovereign! Too many Christians today throw up their hands in panic, crying, “What can we do, the world is so terrible!!” The Apostle Paul’s back was massively scarred by whiplashes, ever reminding him of the darkness of the human heart and the fierce opposition of Satan. But he continued his Gospel death-march in kindness and love. The Apostolic record shows believers were more afraid for the world than of the world. “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20.7 ESV).

Two, many American Christians place too much hope on politicians. Whoever we elect will be mortal, fallible, and disappointing. Even the best government employee will never live up to the hype of their campaign spin. Brothers and sisters, we are loved by Almighty God! “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1.13,14 ESV). We have the only real Good News.

Finally, the Church especially needs to be ready to serve our nation after November 6 and beyond. After this consequential election half of our nation will be upset! It is very important for Christians to show up and vote November 5. But it will be equally important to serve King Jesus faithfully after the election.

There is no Biblical command to vote. But we are clearly commanded to pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2.1-2), and submit to them (1 Peter 2.13). Once we have chosen a leader, we must respect the office they hold. Our nation will move forward best when all citizens strive to help our leaders succeed, even those we did not vote for. It is hard to pray sincerely for someone and talk stink about them. Everyone in our nation needs grace and mercy, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Psalm 127.1 ESV). If God gave us what we deserved, we would all be in hell! That grim reality should humble us and move us to extend kindness.

We can thrive in earth’s kingdoms when we are fueled by the vision of God’s Kingdom. As we Christians share our broken world with those who do not know the Lord, we can point them to solid hope. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9.6,7 ESV).

Jesus came to earth and accomplished His mission. God’s Kingdom was purchased. He will come again soon and perfect it. The prophets saw it from afar, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2.14 ESV). John saw it in a vision, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11.15 ESV). And one day all citizens of the Kingdom of our Lord will fully see, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13.12 ESV).

“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. 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 3.13-17 ESV)

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