

The CHRISTIAN	
and the VOTE	X
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THE CHRISTIAN AND THE VOTE

In those countries where any form of democracy exists, there comes a time when the people are given the opportunity to vote. Around the world at local, regional and national levels, there are occasions when the populace may choose their leaders, and elect those who will hold authority over them. The attention and importance attached to these events increases with the significance of the office at stake, and the power which the office-holder will ultimately wield. The selection of Presidents and Governments, for example, becomes something of a national obsession, in which vast amounts of time, money and energy are expended. Long before Election Day, competing candidates labour for the success of their cause, by means fair and foul, persuading and cajoling their constituents, hoping to win the majority vote and so achieve pre-eminence. Political parties clamour for popular support; the news media amplify and exacerbate their campaigns; the thoughts and conversations of the people are absorbed with the current controversy.

In the midst of this national furore are those who call themselves 'Christians'. They too are the target of much political campaigning; perceived as a demographic group whose votes could significantly affect the outcome of the contest. A vital question thus stands: **How should a Christian vote?** Or indeed, should a genuine Christian vote at all? Is there a Biblical stance to be taken in the event of secular elections?

This is a subject upon which the opinions of believers are divided and confused. It is an issue that many are content to overlook or ignore, until election time comes, when they follow the masses to the polling booths, claiming 'liberty of conscience' in such matters. This unthinking attitude is common amongst Christians in 21st Century Western society, where for many years political engagement and the outcome of elections have had little effect on their personal freedom or religious practice. What modern-day believers need to realise is that in past generations,

party affiliation was a much more serious business. It was often rigorously enforced, accompanied by armed conflict, and literally became a matter of life or death. Saints of old have laboured with this vexed issue, in times of international crisis, civil war and revolution, and were persecuted for their refusal to participate. And still today, in certain parts of the world, the ‘democratic process’ may have negative implications for those who profess Christ – particularly in lands where false religion holds sway.

On this important subject, it is not enough to talk of ‘pragmatism’, ‘expediency’ and ‘personal choice’, or to bring arguments that apply only to the limited circumstances of Britain in the present day. A truly Biblical answer to the question of the Christian’s political allegiance will be as timeless as Scripture itself – relevant for saints in every place, at any time. Should the people of God involve themselves in the world’s politics? Do Christians have a moral obligation to cast their vote for secular leaders? What saith the Scriptures?

The Sovereignty of God

From the very earliest times, the Devil has deceived man into thinking that he has the power of self-determination. The Adversary’s ploy in Eden was to convince Adam and Eve that it lay within their means to take the fruit of the tree, and become as gods. From that point on, man has continued to labour under the delusion of Free Will; the notion that he may be the master of his own destiny, if he will only take the initiative. The modern democratic process is a manifestation of this same, fallen mindset. Humanity wants to feel empowered and ‘in control’; able to appoint its own rulers, and direct its own affairs. Bible-believing Christians should know that this is **not** the case. Scripture makes it clear that there is a sovereign God in the heavens, who rules over all the affairs of men. This especially includes their leaders and rulers, since He is ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’. *“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”* (Romans 13:1). The prophet Daniel

expresses the same truth: “*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings*” (Daniel 2:20-21). Christ Himself, confronting the highest human authority in Judea in the early years AD plainly stated: “*Thou couldest have no power at all... except it were given thee from above*” (John 19:11).

Successful politicians flatter themselves that the strength of their manifesto or force of character won them their office. Supporters of the winning side imagine that their votes are the primary reason for the result. Such is not the case; these are merely the secondary causes that God has sovereignly overruled in the accomplishment of **His** designs. These facts have serious implications for the believer. Will they adopt the attitude of the world, or acknowledge the truth of Scripture?

The Secret Will of God

It is tempting for Christians to think that they ‘know what God wants’ in terms of national government, and that they should vote for those who appear to be the godliest option. This is both presumptuous and wrong. The Scriptures do not favour any one form of administration, or political philosophy over another; nor do they intimate God’s Divine purposes for the various countries of the world. These matters pertain to the **secret will** of God. None can predict the rise and fall of kingdoms that He has appointed. To those who ask, “*Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this [or that] land?*” the answer is: “*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God*” (Deuteronomy 29:24, 29).

Many historical examples of this principle exist. No sensible Christian, given the choice, would have voted into power that Pharaoh who knew not Joseph, and so grievously enslaved the Hebrews. Yet of him God said, “*Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth*” (Romans 9:17). Similarly, no exiled Jew in their right mind would have

welcomed the invasion of Babylon by the tyrannical Persian king Cyrus; but in these matters, God “*turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish... That saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure*” (Isaiah 44:25, 28)! God’s secret purposes in world affairs always prevail; every ruler who has ever wielded power – even the most wicked, despotic or dictatorial – has been fulfilling His greater, undisclosed Divine Plan.

The Christian who casts a vote for a losing party is in an unhappy and discouraging position. They thereby demonstrate their own ignorance of God’s will, and more seriously, are shown to have **opposed** His will by their conduct! Let the believer who dares approach the ballot box beware, “*lest haply ye be found even to fight against God*” (Acts 5:39).

The Judgments of God

In the absence of knowledge concerning God’s secret will, some believers decide to vote for those candidates who show the best character, and seem likely to do moral or social good for their constituency. This is also a flawed policy. For it may be God’s intention to bring judgment upon a particular place or people, and to accomplish this by raising wicked men to positions of authority, for the chastening of whole nations at a time. Such was the situation at the close of Israel’s history, when in consequence of their disobedience they were given incompetent and unstable rulers (cf Isaiah 3:4-5). A heathen monarch rightly observed: “*the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the **basest** of men*” (Daniel 4:17). These are things which Christians cannot predict or know, nor can they hasten or prevent the process by casting their vote. This is a realm in which they must not interfere. For God “*doeth His will... among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?*” (Daniel 4:35). God in His justice will see to it that every nation gets the government and leaders it deserves – whether good or evil.

The Righteousness of God

Another position often taken by Christians in the matter of politics is that of supporting the party which has the greatest number of good principles when compared with its rivals. This is sometimes called the ‘lesser evil’ approach (a contradiction in terms) – electing those who have the most redeeming policies, while overlooking their errors. Some Christians are inclined to support the party that defends family values, or promises to tighten licensing laws, or has the strongest stance on law and order. These subjective selection criteria can never be reconciled with the objective standard of God’s Word, which requires absolute compliance, and condemns **all** sin.

Take the situation as it exists today. Most Christians would reject at once a political party which espoused false religion, such as Islam or Roman Catholicism; yet they seem oblivious to the rampant secularism that dominates the supposedly ‘moderate’ parties today. The atheistic and humanist philosophies that underpin modern political movements are just as pernicious and dangerous to the Church as those more obvious historical antagonists. And though one side may superficially seem to be more favourable than another, they all fail on countless vital issues. All have within their ranks and on their benches men and women who are godless, carnal and unbelieving. All fall desperately short of the standard set by the Law of God. Christians who vote for a given person or party are tacitly supporting **everything** for which that candidate stands – not just the beneficial and positive aspects – but also their errors, follies and sins. This ought not to be. The Christian’s standard is the unmitigated righteousness of a holy God, as expressed in the Scriptures. Anything or anyone which fails to meet those requirements is not worthy of their support, or their vote.

The Kingdom of God

The political situation is further clouded by those Christians who think it is necessary to infiltrate national Government with as many regenerate persons as possible, in order to prosper the cause of Christ. There are those who imagine that if Parliaments or Senates could be filled with believers, then society could be ‘Christianised’ from the top down, by the passing of legislation in keeping with the Bible. This philosophy has existed among certain denominations for centuries, some even thinking that the Kingdom of God could be established in earthly nations if only the Christian Faith had sufficient political support, and Biblical precepts were enforced by law. Whilst this prospect might seem attractive, it is also a **delusion**. The heavenly Kingdom is something entirely separate from – and superior to – the governmental systems of this fallen world. It cannot, and will not be engineered upon earth through political lobbying or agitation; not by a democratic process, or a military one; not by the sword, or the ballot box. Christ Himself made this clear: *“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence”* (John 18:36). To give this verse further application: if Christ’s Kingdom were of this world, then would His servants vote, that it should be delivered from the control of the ungodly; but His Kingdom is not from hence!

The misguided notion of a heavenly kingdom wrought by earthly power, (held by Jews, Romanists and Millennialists among others) is still popular today. Yet the Lord’s own words are unequivocal on this point, *“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you”*. (Luke 17:20-21). There will never be such a thing as a ‘Christian Country’ on this fallen planet. God’s Kingdom – the Church – is universal, spiritual and invisible. It is not a political or material entity that can be instituted on earth by Christians voting in a particular way.

The Christian's Citizenship

There are certain prerequisites that make a person eligible to vote. First among these is that they be a constituent, or citizen of the country concerned. Many Christians are of a patriotic disposition, and immediately think of themselves as citizens of the nation in which they live, who may legitimately engage in the democratic process. God's Word states otherwise. It is birthplace that dictates a person's citizenship, and every Christian has been **born again**, which has effected a radical change: "*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*" (Ephesians 2:19). The saints of God are no longer classified or distinguished by the spot on this fallen earth where they happen to reside; they collectively belong to another place, and have become strangers to their former homelands. This was Abraham's experience who, "*By faith... sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country*"; those who emulate his faith have all likewise "*confessed that they [are] strangers and pilgrims on the earth*", "*But ... they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city*" (Hebrews 11:9, 13, 16).

Abraham showed no patriotic affection for Ur, or Canaan. Moses, who might have had a glorious career in the Egyptian ruling class, had no sentimental attachment for that land, "*choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God... Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*" (Hebrews 11:25-26). The Lord Jesus and His Disciples rejected the causes of Jewish Nationalism and Roman Imperialism alike. The idea of these apostles and patriarchs, or indeed the Saviour, becoming caught up in the world's petty politics is unthinkable. They realised that they were **not of this world**, even as Christ is not of this world (cf John 17:16). The Christian's position today is exactly the same. The believer who truly appreciates this will also realise that he is ineligible to vote. He is 'of no fixed abode' (cf Hebrews 13:14); and belongs to a different nation (cf 1 Peter 2:9).

The Christian's Allegiance

There are believers who think they are justified in supporting certain political parties, and do so with considerable enthusiasm, particularly at Election time. But for Christians to align themselves with worldly organisations, and declare their allegiance to human leaders, is dangerous ground. *“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?”* (Romans 6:16). It is a basic principle that fealty to a cause brings the obligation of service. The Christian already owes his service, indeed his life, to a Higher authority. Political affiliation will inevitably bring a conflict of interest, and a division of loyalty. All the legislative systems of this sinful world are, by definition, at enmity with God (cf Psalm 2:1-2, Romans 8:7); and it is impossible to have a foot in two opposing camps. Occasions will arise when it is necessary to *“obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29), or when men will demand precedence over God and His law. *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other”* (Matthew 6:24). Ye cannot serve both God and the world's politicians. Those believers who attempt it become tied into an ungodly partnership, and sadly impeded in their Christian walk. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Christ teaches His followers: *“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”* (Mark 12:17). The world's authorities may legitimately demand certain things of the saints: *“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”* (Romans 13:7). Taxes, civil obedience and respect should be instantly and diligently yielded to those who require them. But the Christian's love, devotion and service are God's by right, and must be rendered to Him alone.

The Christian's Identity

In some quarters, political sentiments run so high, that people become defined by them. They wear the appropriate party colours and badges, and proudly display bill posters in their cars and houses. It becomes a 'label' and identity. When this mentality enters the local Church, considerable trouble ensues. Divisions that ought never to have arisen run like fault lines through a congregation; and where felicity and fraternity ought to be, come instead partisanship and unnecessary strife. Scripture denounces such behaviour in the strongest terms; it is shameful and infantile, *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"* (1 Corinthians 3:3).

The process of Regeneration is about the abolition of previous definitions, and becoming a 'new creature'. The former things are passed away; the new Christian identity transcends all the earth's categorisations. This should be reflected in the local Church: nationality, ethnicity, social standing, employment status and prior associations are all eradicated and forsaken: *"ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all "* (Colossians 3:9-11). Perhaps it ought to be added that once 'in Christ', there is neither Conservative nor Liberal, Socialist nor Monarchist, Democrat nor Republican. Worldly political persuasions were the deeds of the 'old man'. Now Christ is all, and they are nothing.

The Christian's Responsibility

What response should Christians adopt then, in relation to the political systems of the countries in which they live? All God's people are engaged in that spiritual warfare which began at their conversion, against the principalities and powers of darkness. It is tempting to think that this

conflict can also be pursued at the ballot box, by supporting that which seems good, and opposing what appears to be evil within the democratic process. Such a notion is wrong. This is not the Christian's territory, nor is it part of the real battle: "*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*" (2 Corinthians 10:4), and, "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood*" (Ephesians 6:12). Involvement in worldly politics is a distraction from the true spiritual campaign; a feint and ploy of the Adversary's, whereby he diverts the believers' strength and attention. God's Word says, "*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*" (2 Timothy 2:4). The saints should be content to "*let the dead bury their dead*" (Luke 9:60), let the unsaved vote for the unsaved, while they concern themselves with the Kingdom of God. When polling day comes, the instruction to believers is clear: "*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment*" (Exodus 23:2). The only proper attitude for Christians to adopt toward politics – Biblically consistent and appropriate in every time and place – is one of **godly abstention**.

There is **one** Government alone which is of interest to the people of God: namely, their spiritual leadership. It does not vary or change; it does not falter or fail; it has no need of human intervention or support; it cannot be voted in or out of power. Its authority and administration is flawless, because it is entirely vested in one wholly righteous and perfect individual. The government is on His shoulder, "*and His name [is] called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end... to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this*" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

WHEN THE WICKED BEARETH RULE

True Christianity, if practised in accordance with the Word of God, is not subversive or injurious to the State. When there is a proper relationship between the Church and the secular authorities – namely one of mutual exclusion and respect – the two may co-exist harmoniously.

Having established in the foregoing article the principle of godly abstention from political affairs, it is necessary also to guard against the opposite extreme: that of antipathy toward national government; civil disobedience or rebellion. Sadly, there have been periods in the Church's history when this unjustifiable behaviour has occurred. The Bible has a surprising amount to say on the subject of complicity with earthly administrations. Sometimes a reminder is necessary: *“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work”* (Titus 3:1). This is an important part of the Christians' witness, that they might be clear of any false accusations: *“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors... For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”* (1 Peter 2:13-15).

If the believer truly appreciates God's sovereign appointment of world leaders, they will be inclined to obey: *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”* (cf Romans 13:1). A still broader and more searching command is quoted by Paul: *“Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people”* (Acts 23:5). This is a particularly pertinent word to those who regularly berate and criticise authority figures. *“Curse not the king, no not in thy thought”* (Ecclesiastes 10:20), but rather, *“Honour the king”* (1 Peter 2:17).

As is so often the case, such words are easier to quote or say, than to perform. This is especially so when the rulers concerned are godless or wicked men who abuse their power, and use their office to do wrong; but in this connection, Scripture does not discriminate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ leaders: **all** are to be respected on account of the authority they hold. Let it not be forgotten that when Paul and Peter penned the verses just listed, the kings and governors of whom they spoke were the Caesars and Roman Procurators of evil memory, many of whom violently persecuted the Early Church. The moral condition of these heads of state did not change the Biblical instruction.

What then is a proper Christian response to human governments in which sin and iniquity are rife, and much wickedness is perpetrated? A historical example of precisely this situation is given in the record of Samuel. He lived at a time when the monarchy was first instituted in Israel; and it began under very dubious and acrimonious circumstances. The people in their unbelief clamoured for a king, desiring to be rid of God, spared the ‘inconvenience’ of faith, and made more alike the heathen nations around them. God responded and judged the people’s transgression by giving them what they asked for, and the sort of king whom they deserved: *“thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath”* (Hosea 13:10-11). From the outset, Saul, the popular choice, was destined to be a flawed and godless ruler, whose behaviour would be greatly to the detriment of the nation of Israel.

Samuel was made fully aware of this fact, first by prophetic revelation, and then by bitter personal experience. Had he rejected, opposed and refused to acknowledge Saul, his actions might have been considered legitimate and understandable. The facts of the case are rather different. Samuel acknowledged the sovereign will of God in this difficult matter, and did not resist or prevent the appointment of the king. He also maintained three vital and necessary exercises:

1.) He continued to preach the truth: “*howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them*” (1 Samuel 8:9). Despite the weight of popular opinion, and the institutionalised sin of the administration, Samuel boldly persisted in the declaration of God’s Word. He did not cease to denounce iniquity.

2.) He stressed the need for obedience, without respect of persons: “*If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice... both ye and also the king*” (1 Samuel 12:14). The people and their monarch stood in need of righteousness, with which he charged them all, without fear or favour, or any partiality on account of their office or status.

3.) He prayed often and always. He prayed concerning the situation in the land at that time, and the evident degeneracy of its ruler: “*it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night*” (1 Samuel 15:11). This was his first, best and only recourse in those days of national emergency. He prayed too for the people and their king, saying, “*Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you*” (1 Samuel 12:23). This same practice is instructed in the New Testament, “*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour*” (1 Timothy 2:1-3). Amongst all the obligations which a Christian has toward earthly leaders, this is the highest – to pray for them – whatever their nature or quality.

Samuel is hailed in the Scriptures as a paragon of righteousness and faith (cf Jeremiah 15:1, Hebrews 11:32). May believers in the present day learn to emulate his godly example.

R. J. Steward
Bideford, April 2010

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

“When you elevate a bad man, you give to him a hundred-fold more power of example to corrupt your sons, and your neighbours’ sons by his evil acts. Those acts are a hundred-fold more conspicuous and weighty to attract notice and imitation than if you had left him in his deserved obscurity. When you delegate your money, influence or civic power to a bad man, you make his wicked official acts and influences your own; he is your chosen agent, and acts for you, and be assured a jealous God will not forget to visit the people for the guilt thus contracted... These misleaders of the people, while you so weakly connive at their indiscretions, may indirectly be preparing the weapon which is to pierce [your] bosom...”

R. L. Dabney (1820-1898)

“The office of a magistrate is ordained of God, even as we have always confessed, since according to our small talent we have served the Word of the Lord. And moreover, in the meantime, we have obeyed them when not contrary to the Word of God. We intend to do so all our lives. For we are not so [ignorant] as not to know what the Lord’s Word commands in this respect. Taxes and tolls we pay as Christ has taught and Himself practised. We pray for the imperial majesty, kings, lords, princes, and all in authority. We honour and obey them (cf 1 Timothy 2:2; Romans. 13:1)... [False brethren] say ‘yea and amen’ to everything the magistracy commands or does, whether it is agreeable to the Scriptures or not. Thus they by their pleasant doctrine lead these souls into destruction and loss. They seek not their salvation but their own enjoyment and gain. Therefore before God, it is the truth; love compels us respectfully and humbly to show all high officials what the Word of the Lord commands...”

Menno Simons (trans. L. Verduin)

Reply to False Accusations 1552