

## WHO TO VOTE FOR 9-11-16

We are only eight weeks from the presidential election of 2016. From everything I read on the internet or the newspaper the only two persons who have a chance of becoming president are named Clinton and Trump.

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We have known this for a long time but many of us still have a hard time believing it. We keep thinking we are going to wake up to a different reality. I mean, how on earth did we get here? More practically now, what do we do in this place?

As you might have deduced I am not a fan of either of our major options. From listening to folks in our body I expect most of you are not either. Studies show that in the last decade or more, church-going evangelicals tend to vote 3-1 Republican largely due to the more pro-life, pro-marriage platform of that party. But this year, to our astonishment, the Republican nominee is a man who has made his fortune building casinos, has twice divorced, has publicly boasted of his sexual immorality, has treated his political opponents within his own party like an 8<sup>th</sup> grade bully, and has made numerous outlandish comments that make some question his mental stability. How can we possibly vote for this guy?!

Some will say that we can vote for this guy because the alternative to him is worse. Mrs. Clinton has yet to see an abortion she didn't like and wants you to pay for. She is up to her ears in scandal related to her foundation and her "extremely careless" of state secrets. She is completely in favor of the LGBT revolution and would appoint Supreme Court justices who follow the secular progressive way and are dismissive of religious freedoms. Personally, she may have married only once but we expect the marriage is a fraud and she defended her man while he used women shamefully and committed deeds while president that would have ended the career of the local manager at Taco Bell. How can a Biblical believer possibly vote for this woman?

Houston, we have a problem. <http://www.usmessageboard.com/attachments/cartoon-jpg.60023/> And, like never-before we have an evangelical electorate that is divided over what to do. There are those I respect, read and hear who argue that, as bad as Trump may be, Hillary is worse and so we must vote for Trump. There are those I respect, read and hear who argue that a Trump presidency would be so bad that it's better to vote for Hillary.

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There are those I respect, read and hear who argue that we should put our vote toward a third-party candidate. And there are those I respect, read and hear who argue that we should simply not vote at all. Some are quite vehement on these matters and suggest that a vote for A or B is an act of spiritual betrayal for a believer. Yikes! My impulses to self-preservation would incline me to avoid the matter altogether, but my instincts as a pastor and teacher persuade me to take advantage of this teachable moment to offer, in the context of our current dilemma, some perspectives from Scripture that apply to this day and to many days that lie ahead. So, here, offered humbly and hopefully are some things to think about as we approach what is to be an election day of monumental consequence.

First, as we prepare to cast our votes, I encourage you to think about how blessed we are. When you go to the polls on November 8 or turn on your TV to get the results, give thanks to our God for His mercies on us as a nation. The election process in our country is certainly not perfect. There is probably more fraud than we think. There are certainly lies being told. But, we have a process that remains mostly legitimate. So, be thankful for that, for the opportunity you have to influence the direction of our nation. Give thanks that all citizens of all races, all genders, and all religions have equal rights to cast a ballot and even run for office. Be grateful that you can walk into a polling place without fear of violence. Even if the election provides disappointing options, there is much for which we can be thankful to God who has blessed us far beyond anything we deserve. Amen?

Secondly and differently, think about what our candidates for president say about us as a people. We have a gracious and patient Lord, but think about how we have abused our privileges, how we have insulted our God, how we have invited his judgment upon us. Think about what it means that in our day a majority of our children are born to unmarried mothers. Think about what it means that our government expects its citizens to not only allow, but to pay for a million abortions a year and for sex-change surgeries. Ponder what is going on that would make Planned Parenthood a government supported agency while Catholic adoption services are shut down for non-compliance with mandates that favor same-sex couples. Ponder what it means that transgendered people can choose any bathroom they wish but a homosexual man cannot choose to have therapy designed to re-orient his passions. Ponder all this and grieve. Grieve, but not without hope. Grieve and pray and repent. This is where we are and the church is complicit. We have failed to be salt and light – not

entirely, but our influence is way out of proportion to our numbers in a negative way. However, we still have access to the throne room and may I suggest we follow the prayerful example of Daniel in Daniel 9: **3-10** *I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, 5 we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. 6 Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land. 7 “Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You. 8 Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. 9 To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; 10 nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God. The prophet goes on in verse **13** all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth.* Notice here his recognition of the righteousness of God in the judgments brought upon the people.

In our previous point I spoke positively about the blessings of our democratic republic but let's not kid ourselves. Democracy is no better than the “demos” than the people who exercise the power. John Adams wrote: *Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.* Now, our nation was not founded to be a distinctly Christian nation. But it was founded largely by Christians and with genuine Christian underpinnings. Calvin Coolidge, our president ninety years ago said this: *the foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.* Clearly now, with the overthrow of Biblical sexual ethics, the acceptance of evolution, the blurring of gender distinctions, the growth of a non-religious citizenry, the foundations of our society are weakened and ready to crumble entirely. It should be no surprise. We are in a terrible place with negative indicators about the future all around us. There is not much to be hopeful about. Unless,

unless we believe in a God who is involved in the affairs of men. Daniel, who watched his own once-favored nation crumble and was carried off into captivity as a result had this to say in 9:**18** *O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion.* Wherein is found our hope? Not in clever political strategy, not in the “American spirit,” not in our current leaders, but in the compassion of our God who, as we saw last Sunday, invites us to humble ourselves, repent of our sins, seek His face and pray. Things may get far worse before they get better. We have a God with a history of showing up at some of the darkest points in history, but He tends to show up around the cries and petitions of a band of faithful praying believers. So, as you go to vote think about how bad things have gotten but think too about how much bigger than our problems is our God.

Thirdly now, as we approach November, I encourage you to think about your responsibility as a little king or queen. What do I mean by that? I mean that, in our system of government, you have power. As Lincoln put it in the Gettysburg address – ours is a government of, by and for the people. We do not have a king. We all participate in the governing process so that laws are not so much made by “them” but by “us.” The implications of this understanding are enormous. For one, it means that when God speaks in the Bible to rulers – to governors and kings, he is speaking to you. For instance, I Peter 2:**13-14** *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.* There God speaks to the governed and says to be subject. That applies to us. But so too does the last part. We read that the responsibility of government is to punish the evil and praise the good. Romans 13 says we have the sword to minister God’s vengeance. Throughout the Old Testament rulers are admonished to dispense justice and to rule according to the word of God. As little kings in a republic, we must hear these words of God as directed toward us. We are responsible. Now, there are some voices in the church urging believers to basically ignore politics and focus entirely on gospel ministry. They would point out that in the New Testament believers are not exhorted about political responsibilities. I grant that. But I would note that the New Testament was written in the context of a monarchical system in Rome. But in a government of, by and for the people, political passivity or disengagement is pure negligence. We have an opportunity in November to promote what is right and just and good or to

be indifferent to what is right and just and good. Our duty is to be good rulers. When we read the Bible we must not just identify with the subjects but also with the king. So, we aren't just to obey just laws, we are to make just laws.

Our Declaration of Independence speaks of how governments derive their power from the consent of the governed. The declaration is a document committed to the idea of self-government. Therefore, the question of whether Christian Americans should be involved in politics is already answered. Should the ruler be involved in politics? Certainly! And that's what we are – collectively. And I love those words by which the declaration ends. *For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.* Christian men signed that knowing it may cost them their lives. And for many it did. And they didn't do it so that we could sit here 240 years later and say, *I just don't think Christians ought to get caught up in politics.* They did it so that we would have a share in the governing of this fair land. That is our inheritance as Americans and as believers in Christ. How are we doing in stewarding that inheritance? How are we, the family of God, doing as rulers? Aiy, aiy, aiy. The report card does not look pretty. Harvard sociologist Peter Berger said this: *The most religious nation in the world is India. The most secular nation in the world is Sweden. America is a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes.* Wow! America is a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes. What's he talking about? He is talking about how American Christians have ceded to the unbelievers the reigns of influence. We have abdicated. And this is seen in government for sure, but even more so in education and the media and the arts where a Christian is hard to find in places of real influence. But our numbers as professing believers in Christ are huge. What gives?

The story of early America was the exact opposite. In colonial America, church membership was a fraction of what it is today, but those church people ran the country. But what do we hear from just about every side in the church these days? *Oh, we don't want to get political. Oh, we can't try to force our religion on people. Oh, you can't legislate morality.* Really? My friends, if we don't fight for what God teaches about truth and morality and justice, then we are simply giving the ungodly and the deceived their way. Edmund Burke said it well: *all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do what? Nothing.* And we have done that for too long and the nation is suffering for it. Proverbs 29:2 *When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.* 28:12 *When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, But when the*

*wicked rise, men hide themselves.* Maybe that is our problem. The wicked have risen and now the followers of Christ are hiding themselves. In 1776 there was a significant group who decided it was time to come out of hiding and they changed the world. It can be done again. Dear ones, love the gospel, yes. Please love the gospel and let nothing deflect our focus from that. But, if we allow the enemies of the cross to run our government, we may soon wake up to discover our gospel mission greatly impeded. Our freedoms as Christians are eroding before our eyes. I have little confidence that in thirty years Taylor Brown will be able to preach as freely as I have. So again we are reminded that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. As you look to November, think about your power and responsibility as a little king or queen in a free America.

Fourthly, as you go to vote, think about the golden rule. Think about the great commandment to love your neighbor. Think about Philippians 2:4 *do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.* And yes, think about those words of John F. Kennedy who famously said, *ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.* The basic point here is to not vote according to what will promote your personal interest. Sadly, so much of political speech is along just those lines – how *a vote for me* will help you. What should matter is what is right, what is just, and what will serve the interest of the entire republic. Older voters are to vote with equal concern about younger voters. The wealthy vote with concern for the poor. The poor vote with concern for the wealthy. It is not about what advances my group. And most of all here, we should vote with regard for the disenfranchised – those citizens who have no vote – and primarily I think here of our children.

Now, how does this speak to the tough decision on the presidential race? In this way – our vote is to be shaped by our best judgment regarding which candidate will do the most good, or the least harm to our nation. Let me say that again. Our vote is to be shaped by our best judgment regarding which candidate will do the most good, or the least harm to our nation. That is a different question than asking, which candidate is a better person, or which candidate can I feel good voting for, or which candidate do I like. I am hearing some friends in Jesus speak of how they cannot vote for a candidate because it would defile their conscience. Hmm. If this is how you feel consider this. A fallen world sometimes puts us into positions that are highly uncomfortable with respect to this matter of conscience. How does the soldier in WWII decide what to do when he is face to face with a German on the battlefield? If he shoots him will his conscience be okay with that? If he doesn't

shoot him, if he lets him live to fight another day, will his conscience feel okay? Either way you go you are likely to feel dirty, polluted, ill-at-ease to say the least. Do you think Truman slept well after ordering the bombing of Nagasaki? I can't imagine. Life throws enigmas our way and the guiding question is not, *what will least disrupt my conscience?* The guiding question is, *which option will best promote human flourishing?*

That means that if I believe the presidency of candidate A will do more good or less harm than that of candidate B, I vote for A even if I don't like him or her, even if I think he or she will be a relatively bad president. My conscience is not responsible for the options I am presented. It is also not my goal to feel good as I vote. It is my goal to do what is in the long-term best interests of the most people. Can I know for sure what that is? Absolutely not. We are dealing with changing humans in a changing world. All one can do is listen to what the candidates have said, watch what the candidates have done in order to predict what the candidate will do in office, in order to assess what impact the candidate will have on current and future generations. That may not be easy for you to do. Some argue that a Clinton presidency will promote a leftist financial policy that will further bankrupt the republic; that a Clinton presidency will smooth the way for more babies to be killed in the womb and will guarantee a Supreme Court that, for decades, will rule in ways that grieve Christians. Most of us believe all of those things. But some of us believe a Trump presidency could be worse. How? Two arguments make sense to me. One says that a Trump presidency will be so bad that it will discredit Republicans for years to come and it would be better for conservatives, in the long-run, to have a Democrat in office for another four years than to have a bad Republican. I get their point. It's a sad case to have to make, but I get it. In addition, some find Mr. Trump so erratic, so bizarre at times that they fear he will lead us into international conflicts that could result in war and all the horrors that go with that, especially in a nuclear age.

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They compare a secular progressive supreme court to nuclear war and find the latter worse than the first. I understand that position as well. I can respect a variety of votes and arguments about our two candidates, but as a voter, I am to listen to what they say, watch what they do, and make an informed but fallible judgment the goal of which judgment is to promote the common good, not to protect my interests, my conscience or my reputation. That is applying the rule of love to our political life.

Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will deal with the responsibilities of civil leaders, what principles are to guide their governance, how the platforms of our two main candidates stack up on those points and what else to ponder as we head into November. We will conclude with who to vote for -- but let's close remembering that our fate is not ultimately on the line in this election. We are in the hands of a Sovereign, wise, Lord who loves us. Every leader of men who has ever lived has been flawed and everyone has died or will die – except for one. His name is Jesus, Jesus. Sad hearts weep no more. He has healed the broken-hearted, opened wide the prison doors. He is able to deliver ever more. In Him alone is our trust and our salvation and we are so very glad that although foolish men voted for Him to die like a thief, God appointed Him as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and He shall reign forever and ever.