

# WHO TO VOTE FOR

## Part 2 9-18-16

Is the United States a Christian nation? That is a question that elicits a variety of answers that all seem to come at the issue from different angles. I'm not sure what it means to be a Christian nation. Are we talking about our government? Our culture? The majority of our populace? What does that mean? Clearly Christian ideas were very prevalent in the mind of our founders. Certainly too, we were established to be a nation that is not linked in some formal sense to a particular religious brand. Culturally, how Christian we are has varied over the years. At what point was our country at its Christian peak? Hard to say, but what is pretty clear is that never in its history has Christianity been as marginalized and opposed as it is in this day. We who swear loyalty to Jesus find ourselves, more than ever, living in a foreign place. The Bible calls us strangers and aliens in this world and we feel that more than ever, don't we? We live as a minority people in a strange land. So, it was in 2600 years ago for Israelites dragged off into captivity to Babylon. Next Sunday I plan to begin a series from the book of Daniel which is all about their experience. Today, I ask you to read with me from a letter. Not a New Testament letter, but an Old Testament one – a letter from Jeremiah the prophet to those carried away into Babylonian exile. Jeremiah 29:1-7 (NIV) *This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) 3 He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said: 4 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

In that last verse we have guidance for believers living in a hostile culture. We are not to isolate, not to disengage, but we are to seek for the well-being of our nation, of our society. This specific instruction is entirely consistent with the golden rule that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are to promote human flourishing in every sense of that word. For us, that means we want what is best for the United States of America. We want to do what we can to promote her peace and prosperity.

So far, you probably all agree with what I have said. But, as Bible-following people we are in a troubling cultural moment because we find ourselves unsettled and possibly confused by our cultural context. We are, more than ever in my lifetime divided over where to put our support politically - at least with reference to the presidential election that is now only seven weeks away.

In a room with over three hundred persons I am sure that some of you here are solidly behind Mrs. Clinton. I am sure that some of you are solidly behind Mr. Trump. I am sure some of you have opted for an alternative candidate. But, I expect most of us find ourselves in some degree of inner turmoil. Most of us are mightily displeased by our options and many are uncertain how to vote or even how to think about voting. That is why I began last Sunday to address this matter in what I hope is a Biblical and helpful way. You can find that message online at the North Park Church website – written or audio. My approach is to provide a list of things to think about as we approach election day in our nation. We already covered four things. First, we should think about how blessed we are to participate in an election that seems, for the most part, to be legitimate. Secondly, we were encouraged to think about what our candidates say about us as a people and, in response, to grieve over where we have come as a nation. Prayerful grieving, hopeful grieving, but grieving does seem in order no matter how you vote. Thirdly, we were encouraged to think about our responsibilities as little kings or queens. We live in a participatory governmental system. We have influence and are responsible to exercise it in a Scriptural way to pass and enforce just laws. Fourthly we were encouraged last time to think about the golden rule, not voting our own interests but the interest of the people as a whole with special regard for future generations.

So, we pick up today at point number five. As you go to vote, remember that character in a candidate does matter. It does. Some will tell you otherwise and say that all you really want to look at is their positions and their competence. Marital fidelity doesn't matter. Honesty is optional. Vulgarity is irrelevant. Sorry. God says otherwise. Jesus says in Luke 16:10 he who is faithful in a

very little thing is faithful in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. A man who can't keep a promise to his wife, can't be trusted to keep his promise to a nation either. That's the point. And the reality is that leaders get manipulated in all kinds of ways by the threat of being exposed. The private life and the public life cannot be separated. And, if you read the history of the Old Testament kings you see just how much God evaluates the rulers of his people based upon their personal morality as well as their public morality. Character matters and should be weighed in as you vote.

As we move to our next four points to ponder, we are going to focus on the values of Scripture which are especially relevant to the task of civil government. So, the sixth thing to ponder as you go to vote is the importance, or the sanctity of human life. This is the value upheld by the sixth commandment which prohibits murder. Human life, made in God's image, is precious and a primary role of government is to protect that life, largely by threatening the life of those who treat it lightly. With respect to our political persuasions and our voting – how does the sanctity of life enter in? Well – we want to advance candidates that seem to understand the issues and who will govern in such a way as to protect human life. The most obvious place of difference between candidates pertains to their view on pre-born human life. On the value of such life the Scriptures are unambiguous. David, in Psalm 51, confesses that he was with sin from the time of conception. Not birth, not some age of accountability. He says he was a human being with a moral status from the time of conception. And in Luke's gospel we read of how the first witness to the divinity of Jesus came from John the Baptist, who was filled with the Spirit of God and leapt for joy in his mother's womb. The abortion issue is very significant for those who believe in the value of human life, created in God's image. Sadly, whether abortion should be legal is not really much of an issue in our national debate anymore, but whether the public should pay for abortions, whether the government should subsidize our nation's leading abortion provider, whether private employers must pay for abortions is still very much a live issue. Neither of our leading candidates have been pro-life champions, but there is a clear divide between the Republican platform and that of the Democratic Party. A candidate's or a party's view of the pre-born may not be the only thing to consider, but it is certainly something weighty to ponder as you head to the polls.

But, as hinted at last week, there are other life issues to consider. A president has the capacity of killing millions with weapons of mass destruction. Who should be trusted with that power? As

commander in chief, our president can send our military into war, putting their lives at risk. Not only our soldier's lives are at stake in this election, so too the lives of soldiers and civilians in other places. Foreign policy concerns are huge. The lives of Syrians, Iraqis, Koreans all matter. With the nation of Iran promising to wipe Israel off the map, the lives of people there could be affected by our choice. We don't always know how political decisions impact the preserving or the ending of life, but the importance of human life, the sanctity of it, from womb to tomb must be on our minds when we exercise our power to vote.

The seventh thing to think on as you go to vote is the importance or sanctity of private property. There is an interesting passage in I Samuel chapter 8. There the people of Israel are asking the prophet Samuel to appoint a king over the people. Samuel was disappointed with the request and he offered this warning from God. I Samuel 8:10-18 *So Samuel spoke all the words of the Lord to the people who had asked of him a king. 11 He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. 15 He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. 17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."* The Lord, through Samuel, warns the people about taxation, about how the king will take for himself the property of the citizens. Now, understand, the New Testament affirms the prerogative of the government to levy taxes, in a limited way, to fund its operations; but contrary to the socialist ideal, the Bible affirms the right of individuals to own property. This is the principle that lies behind the eighth commandment which prohibits stealing. Thou shalt not steal. And unless there is private ownership, theft has no meaning. But, is there real disagreement over the sanctity of private property among political candidates? Well, you may be able to detect a critical difference as you hear political figures refer to private wealth and the government's relationship to it. To what

extent does a leader see individual wealth as belonging to individuals, and to what extent is it perceived as belonging to the government to advance its agenda?

And how one thinks about the right to private property impacts our eighth point to ponder and that is the importance of justice for all. Justice is the primary pursuit of a proper government. 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.* This is the central idea. Justice, and justice for all. The “all” includes the pre-born. The “all” includes minorities. The “all” includes the poor. Zechariah 7:**10** *Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor.* Unlike the lands dominated by Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam, concern for the hurting has always been a mark of Christian societies, as it is today. Thankfully, every political figure and party is in favor of looking out for the poor. The disagreements come over how to best do so and over whether government should be about the task of forcibly redistributing wealth. As Christians, we know that the needs of individuals go far beyond the financial realm but they certainly include the financial. However you see the strategy debate, a concern for justice should be in your heart as you go to vote.

The ninth thing to think about as you vote, and the fourth of our values for healthy governing, is the importance of freedom to serve God. One of the most wicked kings of the Old Testament era, the most wicked kings of the New Testament era, the most wicked kings of our day – as God defines it – are those who, instead of praising those who do well, actually punish them. Coming to a state, a business, a government near you. Individuals, colleges, businesses that refuse to cooperate with the sexual revolution, out of their biblically-informed conscience, are getting sanctioned by state and federal authorities. The freedom to live our values is on the line and do you know where most of the major decisions on such issues end up? Not in congress where elected representatives vote on them, but in the Supreme Court. And our highest court, as currently constituted, is an 8-person oligarchy that demonstrates no sympathy for religious believers who won't cooperate with the sexual revolution or the maneuverings of an increasingly powerful federal government. The threats to our liberty are very real. The Supreme Court just recently ruled against a Christian family in Washington State that owns a pharmacy. They essentially have been told that they will sell abortion-causing drugs or they will be shut down. Think about that. They are telling a private business what products they must sell and it's no accident which product they chose. We must be

mindful as we vote for a president how our vote can impact the future of the Supreme Court. The political philosophy of Mrs. Clinton is abundantly clear. The philosophy of Donald Trump is less clear – but he has, at least, told us whom he is likely to appoint – whether you believe him or not. The appointment of judges, at all levels, is a means whereby the president can shape American culture and governance for decades. Judges hold their positions for life and are very hard to remove. For this reason, if no other, the impact of our upcoming elections will extend well beyond the four to eight years of a Trump or Clinton presidency. Followers of Jesus in 2050 will be more or less free to serve God without punishment because of how our next president governs and appoints judges.

One interesting approach I have encountered of late is the argument that it would actually help the church in America to be persecuted. The argument is that such an experience may make us smaller, but it will also make us stronger, more pure, more godly. So, there is no reason to get in the way of social movements or political figures that are hostile to Christianity. Hmm! I agree that persecution often has those positive effects. In the sovereign wisdom of God He can turn evil into good – but that is no reason to advance the evil. When Paul admonishes us to pray for our governing authorities notice the end he has in mind. I Timothy 2:2 (NLT) *Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.* We don't seek out persecution. Our goal is freedom for ourselves and others to serve God according to His word, not according to the dictates of an oppressive government. So, think on this, value freedom, value life, value personal property, value justice as you prepare to cast your vote.

The tenth thing on which I encourage you to think is that our hope is in the Lord. Ultimately it is. We recognize that human government matters. It is important to be sure, but not the most important. Our hope is in the Lord and thus not in any party or politician or policy. Psalm 146:3 *Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation.* Psalm 121:1-2 *I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? 2 My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.* This means that we don't watch the election results with fear and trepidation. In my experience so far, the results of elections are never as bad or good as we tend to think they will be. But, even if they are, the Lord is bigger than any national calamity that may befall us. So, we pray. We pray. I Timothy 2 tells us how and why. We want rulers who will let us freely live as followers of Jesus and so we ask God for that. We can fill a bubble on a ballot, but we can also

move the arm that moves the world with our prayers. So, when you walk to the polls, would you do so with prayer on your lips and in your heart that the hand of Providence will move in mercy over our nation? And would you consider fasting as well. That is a way of putting your prayers in all caps, or in bold. Fasting conveys to our own hearts and to the Lord just how important an issue is for us. So, put your hope in the Lord and express that in fasting and prayer.

There is an eleventh thing to think on as you vote. We don't know who will be president in February, but we do know who will be King. We don't know who will be president, but we do know who will be King. And there is no vote on this one. God has appointed His Son as King. I remember sixteen years ago, sitting at a traffic light at a busy intersection in Palm Bay, Florida where we were living. And at this intersection there was an empty lot on which there must have been two dozen political signs. One sign particularly caught my eye. It said, "Ted Jensen for Supreme Overlord." I cracked up when I read that because Ted Jensen was a high-school kid in our church. And I loved the imaginary office – *Supreme Overlord*. We don't vote for one of those. God has already made His appointment for that position. In the very first Christian sermon in Acts 2 Peter made this his concluding point: Acts 2:**36** *Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.* This Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He reigns today and He will reign in 2017. So please understand, this is a gospel sermon today. I am preaching the good news of the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament says that all things have been put under Jesus, all things subject to Him, but not everyone can see it yet. Someday they will and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord and King. Praise Him! Crown Him Lord of All!

So, for whom shall we vote? Well, there will be several races calling for study, for prayer, for a decision. The Senate race in our state is a big one and a close one. These other races matter too – not just the biggest one. But on that one, if we are disappointed with our options, do we go with her or him or do we pick from the third-party alternatives? Let me comment briefly on the third party option – and this is entirely extra-biblical. I find many principled young people want to go that direction and I understand. But if you find people my age disinterested in that there is a reason. I have voted in ten presidential elections and they all had extra candidates, but only one, Ross Perot, got over 8% of the vote and even he won not a single state. Not one. The election process in our republic invariably leads to a two-party system because the secret to winning is carving out a

compromised coalition that can render a majority in the election. So, if you don't see the slightest difference for the future of our country if he is in office or she is in office, then it's fine to indulge yourself in a third-party option. But if you believe that one of the two major options is better or worse for the country, a third-party vote may be placing your personal feelings over the interest of the nation. Think about that.

And finally, the twelfth thing to think about as you go to vote is that although our national debt may continue to rise, the most important debt, the greatest debt, the most dangerous debt of all has, for believers in Jesus, been paid in full. I don't know what awaits our children if our national debt becomes thirty trillion dollars and the economy collapses. It concerns me deeply; but far more important is the debt of sin which can damn us for all eternity. But Christ Jesus, the servant King, has taken my debt upon his shoulders and born it all to Calvary. All nineteen trillion of my sins were laid on Him and the treasure of His righteousness has covered them all.

If a candidate in our day were to stand on national TV and announce that if we vote Him into power He will wipe out our national debt most everyone would mock and jeer. But this is the promise of Jesus to you. Make Me your King and your debts become Mine, My riches become yours. You go from being a spiritual debtor to eating at the table of the King, enjoying His riches, and, most of all, enjoying Him, whom to know is life eternal.

But Pastor – I'm still waiting for you to tell us who to vote for! Okay. Get your tomatoes ready to throw. Here we go. II Corinthians 5:14-15 *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* What do we live for? Who do we live for? For the King who died to be our Savior. We live for Him, we work for Him, we die for Him and so we shall vote for Him. That doesn't mean a write-in for Jesus. It means that whether you cast your ballot for Trump, Clinton, or McMullin do your voting, be a little king or queen, promote life, justice, freedom for the Lord, seeking His wisdom, trusting His power and asking always that God would bless America. *Oh, living dying, let me bring, my strength, my solace from this spring, that He who lives to be my King, once died to be my Savior.*