

# How to Think Biblically about Voting

## Two Kingdoms

The Bible describes Christians as citizens of two kingdoms. Jesus is Lord over all of heaven and earth; therefore, He is authoritative over both kingdoms. As subjects of King Jesus, our primary citizenship belongs to heaven (Phil. 3:20–21), a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36). Our secondary citizenship belongs to the governmental jurisdictions in which God has placed us on earth. Jesus taught us to pray for the Father’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Therefore, we are to seek to do the will of the Father and of King Jesus on this earth (Matt. 6:33).

## Then and Now

Advancing the Father’s will has been the duty of God’s people since creation, although their participation in governing has varied by era. Throughout biblical times, civil authority expanded and was passed among family leaders, religious leaders, regional chiefs, local judges and other magistrates, kings and queens, and emperors. Although few people had direct influence over their form of government or its decisions, God held not only civil leaders but also His people accountable for their country’s obedience to God’s will (2 Kings 11:17–18, 23:3).

In modern times, God’s people have drastically greater direct influence over their government than ever before by voting in free elections in select parts of the world where this is allowed. With the vote comes a greater opportunity than most Christians have ever had: an opportunity to uphold—or to undermine—God’s design and purpose for government.

## God’s ‘Good’ Design

Although Scripture does not directly address the topic of voting, it extensively addresses human government. The Scriptures make it clear that God’s intention for government from the beginning has been to protect good and punish evil (Gen. 6:11, 6:13, 9:1–7, 9:13–16; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:14). The “evil” God punished with the Flood, and which He established government to punish and deter after the Flood, included widespread violence, sexual promiscuity and abuse, and other forms of wickedness and corruption (Gen. 6:1–13, 9:6, 9:13–16).

Scripture likewise identifies the “good” God established government to protect (Rom. 13:4–7). Though appointed by God, human authorities do not define the good to be protected, the evil to be punished, or God’s purpose for government. These are defined by God’s character and revealed to us by creation and in

Scripture through the Holy Spirit. God's covenant with Noah confirmed that the good to be protected chiefly includes the family unit (Gen. 9:7–8), godly worship (Gen. 8:20–21), man's dominion over nature (Gen. 9:1–4), and human life (Gen. 9:5–6). Later Scriptures reveal God's expectation that government provide other goods: justice in court (Lev. 19:15; Zech. 7:9), deliverance from robbers (Jer. 22:3), protection for the weak, the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner (Deut. 27:19; Ps. 82:3–4; Prov. 31:8–9; Isa. 1:17), and peace conducive to quiet, dignified, godly living (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

This is God's unchanging design for government. God's Word cautions against expanding its scope (1 Sam. 8:9–22). If we are to honor God with our vote, we will vote in a manner that supports His purpose for government.

## Voting on Issues

When deciding how to vote (or how to make any other decision), we must start with asking our King, "What do you want in this matter?" As citizens of God's kingdom, we need not blindly guess the will of our King. He has revealed His will to us through Scripture. Therefore, in order to know His will, we must open the Bible, read it, study it, discuss it with fellow believers, and come to an understanding of His will.

Scripture defines God's values on many subjects. Here are just a few that are foundational to God's design for government, and to the human flourishing government exists to protect:

- A. *The creation and value of human life (Gen. 1, 9).* Therefore, we should vote in a way that is pro-life, with a special concern for protecting those who are most vulnerable and least able to protect themselves, such as the unborn, the elderly, and other potential victims of euthanasia.
- B. *The establishment and function of the family according to God's design (Gen. 1–2).* Therefore, we should vote in a way that supports the natural order of God's design for family, childbearing, gender, and sexuality. Both the Old and New Testaments of God's Word command proper relationships within a family: honor, respect, love, unity, understanding, and patience (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 5:21–6:4).
- C. *The understanding of right and wrong (Gen. 3).* Therefore, we should vote in favor of those who understand right versus wrong as described in God's Word, and who will appoint justices, civil servants, and military leaders who enact justice accordingly.
- D. *The worship of God and multiplication of His people (Gen. 6, 8, 9, 12).* Therefore, we should vote in favor of those who support religious freedom and global evangelism, while fully understanding that God uses Christian persecution and suffering to advance His cause.

Many issues important to Americans (Christians included) do not seem close to God's heart, such as economic prosperity and equity, the advancement of educational systems, and winsome and inspirational personalities. We must determine what we believe matters most to our King, starting with His design and other desires He has revealed. Then we should advocate (by voting) for what we believe to be His will.

## Imperfect Candidates

In a sin-tainted world, no one is without sin. No candidate will perfectly align with God's purposes and priorities or with your preferences. In that sense, every candidate choice is between the lesser of two evils. Thus, we must prioritize what we believe God has called us to care about most. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for straining gnats while swallowing camels (Matt. 23:23–24). In other words, they became too concerned about the lesser things of the Law and not concerned enough about the greater things of the Law. We must not repeat that mistake. Instead, we must give greater care and concern to God's priorities.

## Platforms over Personalities

In no case should we vote blindly. A likable candidate with strong charisma may be committed to evil planks in his or her political party's platform (i.e., stances on various issues). A political party may stand for different things today than it used to stand for.

Votes often have implications beyond individual candidates. We should vote for candidates who will uphold God's purpose and scope for government. Candidates will normally push forward their party's agenda. Many of them will have the opportunity to appoint unelected officials who *also* advance their party's agenda. It would be wise to consider whether you can support not only an individual *candidate* but also his or her *party platform*. Again, no party will perfectly align with biblical priorities. Therefore, choose a candidate and a party that align most closely with the will of your King.

## Trust in the Lord

God is sovereign over rulers and kings (Dan. 2:21; John 19:11; Rom. 13:1–2). If an ungodly or unpreferred candidate gets elected and takes our country down a harmful path, God permits that harm for His sovereign purposes. When He allows people and nations to become ungodly, He allows them to reap the consequences of their own ungodliness. This is part of His judgment on them. He gives them what they ask for along with the consequences of their desires (Rom. 1).

If the results of an election go against our vote, we should trust God and remember that we aren't here to make this world perfect. Only God can do that, and He will in the end. We are here to glorify God and share the gospel of Christ. And take heart: in God's perfect plan, the display of His glory and the advance of the gospel may actually happen better in a culture that is moving in a direction different than we prefer.

## Biblical Balance

When it comes to politics and voting, American Christians walk a path flanked by two ditches we must avoid. We are to avoid complacency toward political issues, which trivializes God's design for government and His revealed will about many subjects. The New Testament's emphasis on proclaiming the gospel does not negate the order God previously established and revealed. Voting ignorantly or not at all squanders a historically rare opportunity God has granted us to promote His purposes for a civil society.

We must also avoid giving undue priority, misplaced allegiance, or disproportionate attention to politics (Mark 12:13–17), which constitutes just one sphere of our obedience to God. God commands our entire affection, Jesus commands that we make disciples, and the Spirit blesses us with gifts to use for building up Christ's bride, the church. Moreover, Christ prayed that His bride would experience unity (John 17). Paul longed for Christians everywhere to unite in prayer, "lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling," urging them to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim. 2:1–2, 2:8). These instructions imply that believers who are walking in obedience to God, yet who disagree with each other politically as a matter of conscience, should still strive to be at peace with each other.

## **Prayerful Obedience**

As dual citizens of both God's kingdom and the earthly jurisdictions God has placed us in, we bear responsibilities to each. At all times and in all places, King Jesus commands our first allegiance and obedience. We should prayerfully consider how to obey His commandments: to love God wholeheartedly, to love our neighbor, and to make disciples.

We should also honor God while living within our earthly jurisdictions. Naturally, this starts by recognizing what God has revealed as His purpose and design for government. Then, we should prayerfully evaluate candidates, parties, and party platforms in preparation for casting our vote in line with God's purposes.