

The Righteous Decision

Is there ever a time when it is right to support unrighteousness? In 2014, I watched a discussion regarding the question, “Is there absolute moral law?” The considerations were moral relativism vs moral absolutism. One panelist made the point that there are very few pure moral relativists and moral absolutists. Rather, most folks live as moral compartmentalists, meaning that in some parts of life they are moral absolutists and in other parts they compromise and are relativists. On occasion, Christians might, wittingly or unwittingly, compartmentalize parts of their life. For example, an absolute moral is murder which is always wrong. So is breaking the speed limit, yet because the patrolman might, allowing for speedometer error, let a person go a couple miles faster. Because of this allowance, some folks rationalize going over the speed limit 3-4 MPH is OK. However the speed limit is still absolute, established by law. This person’s rationalization that he can speed is attempting to justify an imagined gray area between right and wrong – amorality. Has the person sinned in such compromise? Indeed!

Perhaps there is no greater wide-spread compartmentalizing of morals than in elections. The oft stated remark is that voters vote their wallet, meaning supporting the candidate who promises to give them the best financial advantage via their legislation. The candidates’ appeal is to covetousness and greed! How often do folks compromise their moral principles by compartmentalizing their vote, rationalizing this is just part of life? What must be the Christian’s attitude?

Further, oft heard is voters’ plea of “voting for the lesser of two evils.” This is acknowledging both choices as evil. Is this the right approach for Christians in voting? Shouldn’t we strive to vote righteous folks, rather than a lesser evil, into government?

Nearly 40 years ago, while visiting my parents, I was invited to a county Republican party breakfast, at which the US congressman, then candidate for governor, spoke. In his remarks he criticized the incumbent, citing the number of state employees had increased by umpty-ump percent during his tenure. Following his speech he entertained questions. To make sure the whole truth was on the table, I asked, “Wasn’t the majority of the new state employees the result of federal programs mandated by the congress of which you are a member?” In his stumbling, he finally admitted that was true. After my second embarrassing, clearing the fog, question, he no longer acknowledged my presence. After the gathering, we chatted privately in the corner. I wanted to know his stance on abortion. He was adamantly against it. He never compromised that moral position when he became governor.

Indeed, it is very difficult to make the right, yea “righteous,” decision when exercising this precious American right and responsibility to vote. The point is, Christians must realize all are sinful men and politicians tend to tell half truths to seduce your vote. It is our responsibility to know as much as possible about candidates so we can elect righteous representatives.

It has been said the US constitution was a divinely inspired document, the likes of which the world had never seen. To say it is inspired by God is a huge stretch to say the least, but it was written by men who had a deep reverence for God and acknowledged His hand in the affairs of nations. Fundamentally, they recognized the sinfulness of mankind, i.e., everyone sins. America’s founding forefathers knew that even men who revered God as the Sovereign, are tempted and frequently give in to temptations, if not in fact, they are governed by greed and the thirst for power – the outward expression of the demon of selfishness. The forefathers must have known the ages-old adage that men seek “wealth, power and fame,” and usually they are sought

in that order. Thus, they wanted to avoid the likes of Britain's King George's tyranny which the 13 colonies had experienced – power without restraint.

The three branches of government are graciously called a system of "checks and balances," but in reality it is an implicit admission that men, even a group of men, can not be trusted to exercise power without the temptation to be tyrannical. The founders sought what could be termed a governmental foundation of righteousness. That God's principles were known and revered by the forefathers is evident. Samuel Adams, known as the Father of the American Revolution, wrote, "Divine Revelation assures us that 'Righteousness exalteth a nation.' Communities are dealt with in this world by the wise and just Ruler of the Universe. He rewards or punishes them according to their general character...Public liberty will not long survive the total extinction of morals" (April 30, 1776). This attitude was evident two years earlier (September 6, 1774), when the Continental Congress met. Adams proposed that the congress open each session with prayer to God.

Some 75 years later, a gospel preacher named Alexander Campbell was invited to preach to both houses of congress on June 2, 1850. He preached for one and half hours on God's love (John 3:16-17). Later that afternoon, he spoke to the small Church of Christ meeting in the upper room of a Christian's home, being also attended by three congressmen. In late 1852, he was asked to speak to the Missouri state legislature on the "Evidences of the Christian Religion." Although there are hundreds of America's forefathers' quotes focusing on God, these few indicate their strong desire to be right with God. That a man could preach to any congress, let alone the joint assembly of both houses of the US congress, reflects the sense of righteousness and the desire for its prevalence in the governance of this fledgling nation, the United States of America.

Further, they understood that God is involved in the affairs of nations. In his address to the Continental Congress (June 28, 1787), Benjamin Franklin proclaimed, "I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God Governs in the affairs of men." Job answering his critics, acknowledged, that God "...makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them." (Job 12:23; cf Isaiah 26:15). And the prophet Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream emphasized God's role in the nations – "...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." (Daniel 4:32). Ultimately, God chooses who rules or governs a people. Knowing this, how should a Christian vote?

When the United States was just 50 years old, Noah Webster wrote to a young man instructing him of his citizen responsibility – "When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers just men who will rule in the fear of God. The preservation of a republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted;...If a republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the Divine commands and elect bad men to make and administer the laws." ("Letters to a Young Gentleman," 1823). The import is that God wants us to vote for men who revere Him. We might ask, "Where is the biblical command to vote for such honorable men?" There is no direct command, but Jesus taught the principle that we must be righteous and support righteousness – "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,..."(Matthew 6:33).

Webster continued his instruction to the young man, "When a citizen gives his suffrage [his

vote] to a man of known immorality, he abuses his trust; he sacrifices not only his own interest, but that of his neighbor; he betrays the interest of his country.” Additionally, he also betrays God’s instruction to us as Christians.

How should we as Christians vote? Vote for the most moral candidate! But what if both candidates support immorality? Personally, I do not vote for either, but rather trust God’s injunction to support righteousness. Perhaps this is un-American, but I know it is not against God (Acts 5:29). Is there anytime at which a Christian can oppose God’s standards of righteousness (Matthew 12:30)? How can a Christian vote for a candidate who supports abortion, the murder of the unborn or the day-old child, who supports homosexuality in any way (the destroyer of God’s ordained stable society), gambling, narcotics and all the moral vices ad infinitum? Can a Christian support a candidate who would erode or denigrate Christianity? When can a Christian support sin and claim to be faithful to God? Paul stated, folks who support those who walk in sin are also condemned (Romans 1:28-32).

In 2014, as we were opening the Church of Christ booth at the state fair, a man approached and introduced himself as a candidate for the US senate. He expressed his appreciation for our booth and the work in spreading the gospel and standing for God’s standard of morality. In discussion with him for about 15 minutes, he wondered how elected officials who believe in Jesus could forget their faith when they go to Washington. We discussed homosexuality and abortion as national destroyers. He promised that if elected he would not set aside God’s righteousness in any way. When I mentioned the threat of Islam, he took a step back, laid his arm on the counter and looked down, and in a pondering tone said, “God help us.” That encounter was like reading the quotes of the nations forefathers about the necessity of righteousness in life and government.

Christians must vote for righteousness. God told us He will appoint rulers whom He will, and for His purposes. However, He expects Christians to be righteous in every respect. The wise man declared, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

During his hearing before Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea, the apostle Paul “reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.” (Acts 24:25) Righteousness was at the top of the list! “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked man rules, the people groan” Proverbs 29:2). Grandpa says, Be true to yourself, but first be true to the Lord – vote righteousness...only.

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