

Politics and God's People

Note from ***Blow the Trumpet***

The article that follows was written by Dr. Robert J. Thiel, a longtime member of God's church and a well respected authority on a variety of issues effecting God's people today. Dr. Thiel attends the Living Church of God and is the architect of one of the most visited COG websites (COGwriter). Additionally, although Dr. Thiel is not affiliated with ***Blow the Trumpet*** we feel his writings with respect to Biblical subjects reflect a forceful yet mature perspective. This particular article was selected by ***Blow the Trumpet*** because of its thoughtful analysis and succinct approach to an issue that profoundly impacts the lives of God's people. The article has been formatted to be consistent with the design of our website. However, virtually no edits of the text were made.



Should a Christian Vote?

By Dr. Robert J. Thiel

The world is a complicated place with many types of problems. In the world's so-called democracies, politicians campaign to persuade us to vote for them so that they can help solve these problems. In the U.S.A., election issues and problems usually include the economy, environment, crime, international leadership, defense, and a host of social concerns. Community leaders with different ideas wish to persuade us that their group's choice is the one that will be best for the country.

Many of these leaders bring religion into the campaign.

Should a Christian vote? The Bible teaches that Christians should follow Jesus' example (Phil 2:5). So if Jesus was an American citizen, would he vote? Some seem to think that Jesus would vote for members of the Democratic party, because Democrats are perceived by some to be more compassionate than Republicans. Others feel certain that Jesus would vote for Republicans because Republicans are perceived by some to be more "pro-life" (anti-abortion) than Democrats. Still others feel that Jesus would vote for the candidates offered by the smaller political parties due to their views on different subjects.

Democracy

Democracy was known before the time of Christ. In ancient Greece, all the male citizens were expected to vote on the issues facing their society. The Greeks introduced the concept of democracy to the Romans. The Romans (who were somewhat skeptical of the Greek model) set up a modified form of democracy called a republic. In a republic, elected representatives are supposed to vote for their interpretation of the will of the people. The U.S., other "democracies" of the world (with Switzerland as perhaps the most notable exception), and even many churches are patterned after the Roman model.

Most people in western societies seem to feel that some form of democracy is the best form of government. Would God agree? The Bible warns us, "there is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Prov 16:25). It also warns us, "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer 10:23). In Genesis 2:17 God warned Adam and Eve to not partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam and Eve did not listen to God. After

listening to Satan, they decided that they did not need to listen to God but that they should decide for themselves (Gen 3:1-6). This is the first recorded act of human democracy in action. Nowhere in the entire Bible do we see God sanctioning democracy.

The Bible shows that God appointed his leaders and made them known to his people. From Enoch to Noah to Moses to David to the Prophets to Jesus and even to the Apostles, we read nothing about God encouraging democracy. Actually according to the Bible, democracy is condemned. When Samuel was God's appointed leader/judge, the majority of the people wanted a king like the rest of the world. Even though there appeared to have been legitimate criticisms of Samuel's leadership, God told Samuel that the people had rejected God and not Samuel (I Sam 8:1-9). The Bible says it was evil in the sight of God for the people to ask to have a government like the other nations around them (I Sam 12: 17).

The Bible teaches that God sets up as leaders whomever He wants (Dan 4:17). The Bible records incidences of religious leaders who felt that they were as good as the ones that God appointed, but God had other ideas. For example, Korah (who was a religious leader and a Levite) was apparently in favor of voting and a republican form of government. After assembling 250 supporters (who were community leaders/representatives) he said to Moses and Aaron, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (Num 16:3). God clearly did not agree with Korah's assessment and God decreed death to Korah and his followers (Num 16:32). When some of the people thought that God's punishment was excessive, God also severely punished them (Num 16:49). God did not sanction voting in a republican form of government.

The New Testament

If democracy was to be sanctioned in the Bible for Christians, most certainly it would be sanctioned in the New Testament. Greek and Roman ways were widely known. In the New Testament we read of Jesus appointing apostles. Paul writes that God first appoints apostles, secondarily prophets, etc. for the edifying the body of Christ (Eph 4:11,12). When Judas needed to be replaced (after his betrayal of Jesus and his suicide), the apostles did not have an election, they followed the Biblical example of seeking God's will: "You, O Lord, who know hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen...And they cast their lots." (Acts 1:24,26). Notice the apostles did not decide that they were qualified to see into a person's heart.

Some have written that various forms of democracy are now acceptable because they believe certain scriptures in the book of Acts imply it. The primary verses appear to be in the story of Acts 15. In Acts 15 many of the apostles and elders met together to discuss circumcision and Gentile believers. A multitude of counselors was used to discuss the matter. Some feel that using counsel is indicative of democracy. However, the fact that a multitude of counselors was used does not change God's form of government. In the Old Testament we read that not only has God always encouraged this practice (Prov 11:14), we also read that God himself engaged in it (II Chron 18:18-21); thus the fact that some of the Church leadership followed this practice only shows that God's governmental practices from the Old Testament were to be continued.

It is interesting to note something else mentioned in the Book of Acts, "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:38-39)--those who vote in worldly elections apparently believe they know aspects of the plan of God that there is no human way they could know. Look at what God said to Samuel, one clearly called and appointed by God, when Samuel thought he knew who should be the next king over Israel, "So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:6-7).

It is also interesting to note that many who believe that the New Testament sanctions democracy also believe that God's future ruling government (in the Kingdom of God) will not be a democracy. Jesus told the apostles that they would be rulers over the twelve tribes of Israel in his kingdom (Luke 22:30). Jesus chose the disciples, they did not get their positions from any form of democracy (John 15:16; 6:70). God, not man, chose David to be king over Israel originally (Acts 13:22) and has also chosen him to be king over all Israel in the world ahead (Jer 30:9).

By the way, Jesus said that God the Father has reserved who will have certain positions of authority in the kingdom of God (Mat 20:23). The rewards in the kingdom will be Jesus' to give (Rev 22:12); they will not be for the people to take for themselves.

Democracy will not be God's form of government in His kingdom. Why? One of the many problems of voting is that no human thinks the way God does. "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways', says the LORD" (Is 55:8). When Jesus was on Earth he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God and told people to repent (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus refused to participate in even the most elementary governmental decisions while he was on the earth (Luke 12:13-14).

Although Jesus taught that we were to pay taxes (Mat 22:17-21), he also taught that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Jesus taught his disciples to go into the world and preach the gospel to everyone (Mat 28:19,20). Jesus said that his disciples were to be in the world, but not of it (John 17:16). The apostle Peter clearly understood this. He wrote that being part of God's people made one part of a holy nation (I Pet 2:9). The apostle Paul wrote that this present world was evil (Gal 1:4). The Bible warns of the consequences of being part of the world's systems and its governments and tells us to come out of it and to be separate (Rev 18:2-5).

Look at what the Bible teaches will happen in the Last Days and what Christians are to do about it, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Tim 3:1-5). Note that God's word does not encourage voting as the solution.

Paul said that Christians are to be ambassadors for Christ (I Cor 5:20). Ambassadors often live in alien nations, some of which are clearly hostile to their beliefs. Ambassadors, though they live in other societies, do not involve themselves in the politics of the societies that they live in. There is a time for God's people to take over the governments of this world, but it is not yet (John 18:36, Dan 7:17-18). It will be after the second coming of Jesus (I Thes 4:16, Rev 11:15). To Christians, Peter wrote, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, **I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world**, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:9-15). Aliens, of course, do not vote.

What About Leaders?

God has not left us without any guidance to know who his leaders are. Jesus said that his leaders on the earth would be known for their fruits (Mat 7:15-20). Jesus said, "Not everyone who

says to Me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Mat 7:21). Those leaders who do not preach obeying the laws of God are false prophets even if they talk about Jesus (Mat 7:15,22,23). Obeying the laws of God certainly includes preaching the gospel to all the world (Mat 28:19,20) in order to bring forth good fruit (Mat 7:17-20). Therefore, the true leaders that God has appointed preach the gospel, do not preach lawlessness, and obey the laws of God themselves.

Should a Christian vote? Christians are not to be part of this world (Rev 18:1-4), but are to be ambassadors for Christ (I Cor 5:20). True Christians "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17). Jesus did not vote while he was on this earth. A Christian ambassador should follow the leadership of Jesus Christ and the Bible and not vote.

Bob Thiel 1998/2004.