

The Christian Citizen in a Year of Clear Choices
Selected Scriptures
Reading: Isaiah 40:21-26

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Bethany Baptist Church
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...pray...

This **Tuesday** our nation will go to the polls to **select our leaders**.

Our process for the **orderly transition of power** by the **voice of the people**, while imperfect and even threatened, is still the **model for the free world**.

Yet some Christians are **opting out** of the process! **Refusing** to make *any choice at all*, or any choice that will make a *real difference*.

In **2016 25%** of Christian voters didn't go to the polls...**25 million** votes!

Christian, this morning I want to **urge you** to **participate in the process**.

I want to **argue from Scripture** that you need to **vote** based on **issues** instead of (despite) *individuals*.

I believe that voting is the **Christian's responsibility**, even in a year of bad choices.

Here is what we'll examine this morning as **we apply Scripture to Election 2020**:

1. What does the Bible teach about the **Christian citizen** in **secular society**?
 - a. We will survey the **key NT texts** on the Christian's **civil duty**.
2. What are the **issues** that demand our attention & our action, and what does **Scripture** say about them?

Your Bible has a lot to say about being a Christian citizen under secular rule.

We are going to turn to **six NT texts and draw some brief summarizing conclusions from each.**

1. **Mark 12:13-17** (read; cf. Mt 22, Lk 20). This is the Passover week in Jerusalem leading up to Jesus' arrest, rigged trial & undeserved suffering/crucifixion. He would face Pilate & Herod & Jewish Sanhedrin.
 - a. In the midst of a large crowd Jesus is approached by a Jewish teacher seeking to turn the Jewish crowd against Him by asking Him about paying the unpopular Roman census taxes.
 - b. His well-known answer stunned the crowd & silenced his enemy.
 - c. *"Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's & unto God that which God's."* **Tiberius Caesar Augustus.**
 - d. *Pay your taxes.* Even to an unpopular (pagan) king. Jesus' principle to *"render unto Caesar"* underlies every other NT teaching on Christian citizenship. It also sets the tone for our responsibility to rightly participate.
 - i. If you *must* pay your taxes, why would you **not** cast your vote on how they'll be spent?

2. **Romans 13:1-7** (cf. Titus 3:1). Paul's instructions spell out how to live the *surrendered life* (cf. Rm 12:1&2) as a *Christian citizen*.
 - a. The **basic instruction** is given in **v.1** & applied in **v.7** – *be subject to the governing authorities*. E.g. *taxes/honor*, Paul echoes Jesus' words!
 - b. The **underlying truth** is given in **v.1&2** – *the authorities that exist are appointed by God*. Even the *pagan emperor!* (2X)

- c. And even a *secular ruler* will normally realize the *benefits* of an *ordered society*, which benefits *us*, too. So just (3) “*do what is good*”!
 - i. Now consider **this**, the *good* your government asks of you this week is to *participate...to vote*! **Voting** is not a *law*, but it’s a *civil duty*...
 - d. And because you should know that *God is sovereign* over *who rules among men*, to *refuse civil authority* (duty) is to *question God’s wisdom*. Christian, that should *arouse your conscience*!
 - e. So recognize that God is always *in control*... and just *do good*.
3. **1Timothy 2:1-4**. Paul (*just been released from prison*) commands you to pray for everyone & specifically for *kings & all who are in authority*. **Two observations**:
- a. **#1** - Our prayer (2) is that civil leaders will *rule* in a way that allows Christians to lead *quiet & godly* lives. *That’s the ideal*!
 - b. **#2** - Our prayer (4) is that our civil leaders come to *saving & life-transforming faith* in Jesus Christ.
 - c. Christians have a uniquely powerful mandate to *participate in civil affairs* by *praying* for those who lead us, for *our good* and *theirs*!
 - d. But *praying & doing* **are** not polar opposites! If you’d *pray* for a *quite & godly life*, shouldn’t you also *vote* for one!?!

4. **1 Peter 2:13-16.** When Peter wrote this letter **state persecution** of the Church was **looming on the horizon**.

- a. Peter's call to *submit & do right* in the *civil arena* is very similar to *Paul's*. He underlines that you do this "*for the Lord's sake*" because rulers are "*sent*" by the Lord & generally benefit *right behavior* (14).
- b. In **v.15** the apostle emphasizes the *evangelistic power* of *doing the right thing* in the public square. When *culture* criticizes Christians, Christians can *silence* our critics by *consistently & conspicuously* obeying God...
 - i. ...*doing right the right way. W/ love, humility, longsuffering & openly identify ourselves as followers of Christ.*
- c. And don't miss our **duty** to "*act as free men/women*" (**16**) and to "*honor the king*" (**17**). Would not those duties in today's environment include *voting*...?

But what do you do when the *king* tells you to *do* what *God* tells you not to do?

- 5. **Acts 4:19-20.** Not long after *Pentecost* the *Sanhedrin* arrested **Peter & John** for preaching about Jesus – "*death & resurrection to save sinners.*"
 - a. The *Sanhedrin* was the Jewish religious authority (under Roman oversight).
 - b. The truth taught here is that *God makes the final call on what is right & wrong, & therefore Who we must obey.*
 - c. So *civil obedience* should be the *norm*, but *civil disobedience* is required where it is a *biblical necessity*.

6. **Phil. 1:12-14** (6-7). You can't miss the idea of *imprisonment* here (**3X**; vv. 7, 13, 14). Paul is in prison in Rome as a result of *preaching Christ*.

- a. The apostle was imprisoned in *Caesarea* (Palestine) for **two** years, then (as a Roman citizen) *appealed* for a hearing before Caesar. He was *transferred to Rome* and finally released **two** years later. All for preaching Christ.
- b. He used it *all* (*arrest, imprisonments, appeal, trial*) to share the Gospel (w/ the entire *Praetorian Guard* & eventually *Caesar*)!
 - i. “**Caesar** thought he was *chaining* Paul to his guards, but in fact, **God** was *chaining* Caesar's guards to the Gospel!” 😊
- c. Paul never compromised his *calling or convictions*, yet he **worked inside the system** to create *opportunities* to preach Jesus!
- d. If you are **at odds with the authorities**, are you *sure of your convictions* (are they truly biblical)? Are you willing to *suffer for them*? To use them **for Christ**?

Surely it is clear that God cares about your conduct as a Christian citizen!

Now let's *summarize* what these six texts teach:

1. *Citizenship has **civil duties***: submission, obedience, taxation.
2. *Citizenship has **spiritual duties***: intercession for our rulers.
3. *Citizenship has **privileges***: ideally we live in a society, even if pagan, in which we can live *quiet & godly lives*. We are *protected* from evildoers. We can even appeal for *due process*.
4. Which leads me to conclude that *citizenship* implies the *duty of **participation***. *Obeying the laws, paying taxes, praying for the king, appealing to the system* are all aspects of *participation*. **And so is voting...**
 - a. Consider the important civil roles of *Joseph, Daniel* (three colleagues), *Esther & Mordecai*, and *Ezra & Nehemiah*.
 - b. Consider how God used *all of them* as they **took part** in secular (*pagan*) societies.
5. *Citizenship admittedly has **problems***: a **pagan king** is not always *just*, **taxes** are not always *equitable*, at times you may **suffer** for *doing what is right*.
 - a. *Paul & Peter* died under *Nero*. *Aging John* was *tortured & exiled* under *Domitian*.
 - b. The state demands your *obedience & resources*, *complicates* your life, & *doesn't* always make *biblical decisions*.
6. Finally, your *earthly citizenship* is only **temporal**: even as you *honor* the king, God is **bigger** than your king!
 - a. God Almighty sovereignly appoints both **good** rulers & **godless** rulers to **order** nations & to **judge** nations.
 - b. A Christian holds **two** passports, **dual** citizenships; one *temporal* & one *eternal*. You are a subject of the *King of the Universe*!
 - c. Never forget this (Phil 3): “*for our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

How do these truths help you *do the right thing* as you go to the poll?

1. **First**, remember the idea of *civil duty & participation*. This week I believe you have a **duty** to *participate by voting*. But not *simply by voting*...
2. *Vote* based on achieving the best outcome with respect to *biblical issues*, not based on the *questionable individual* who will take *office*. This is **not** a *beauty contest*!
 - a. This is **bigger** than a *face*, a *name* or a personal *track record*.
 - b. You need to think of the *issues* now, & the issues going forward...
3. Here are contemporary *issues* that are clearly spoken to in your Bible:
 - a. *Abortion*. The Bible has always been clear & contemporary science increasingly agrees: *life begins at conception*.
 - i. Which means *abortion* takes the life of mankind's most *helpless, voiceless* members. It is an abuse of power. **It's murder**.
 - ii. Don't cast a vote that will *protect/promote abortion*.
 - b. *Marriage & sexuality*. God *invented* marriage; it's *His* deal (Gen 1&2; Jesus affirms in the Gospels)! Other relationships are **not** simply *non-traditional*, they are *unnatural*.
 - i. Don't cast a vote that will *champion redefinition of marriage & celebration* of what God calls *unnatural*.
 - c. *Supreme Court appointments*. The *Supreme Court* makes rulings on *laws & legal disputes* that set a *powerful & enduring* legal precedence. This Pres appointed **3 new justices** in **3 years**!
 - i. *But what does that* have to do w/ the *Bible*. The *Supreme Court's* incredible amount of *influence* (has/will) directly relate to issues like *abortion, marriage, religious freedom, interpretation of the constitution*.
 - d. *Israel*. We should remain Israel's ally because God *isn't* finished with *Israel*.

There are additional critical issues at stake Tuesday:

1. *Freedom for religion & expression.* The church must not be *censored* for teaching its convictions. The *state* should not suppress/punish the *church* through means such as *coercive taxation* and *unjust mandates*.
2. *Constitutional freedoms.* Our Founding Fathers were clearly & positively informed by biblical values as they *founded* our nation and *crafted* its constitution.
3. *America's international stature.* Every time a nation *slips from power*, another nation steps-up to *fill the vacuum*. Thought might doesn't make right, *someone will be strong*; who would be *best*?
4. *Secure borders & citizenship concerns.* God commanded Joshua to drive out the Canaanites (trouble when he didn't). Jerusalem had walls! The Temple had "No trespassing" zones! **OT** – the alien was encouraged to live under the protection of YHWH and thus submit to Jewish society.
 - a. *Yes it's true:* when the *world* comes to our gates the Church gets to *share the Gospel*.
 - b. But **nothing** in Scripture decries *guarding the gates* carefully.
5. *Fiscal health.* Both sides of the aisle need this reminder: *do you spend money the way Washington does?* What do you see in *Proverbs*?
6. *Limited government.* And both sides of the aisle need **this** reminder : what more is the state needed for than *national security, major infrastructure (?)*, & *civil justice*?

I believe we have a *duty to vote*; I believe the *issues are clear*.

I can't tell you *who* to vote for; I can urge you to vote.

As your pastor, I **urge** you to **vote** for the candidates that will encourage biblical *values & outcomes* on issues like *abortion, marriage, sexuality, religious expression*, and a *judicial interpretation of the law & constitution*.

Beloved, know *this*:

God is the *King of the Universe* no matter who wins the election.

You are a *citizen of God's kingdom* no matter who wins the election.

So on *Tues*, *get out of bed &* go vote.

Then on *Wed*, *get out of bed &* just keep following Jesus.

...pray...