

# CHRIST-CENTERED VOTING

A Practical Guide for Bible-Believing Christians

## **PART ONE: THE VOTER**

For many Christians, the practice of voting in political elections has come to be regarded as a religiously neutral exercise. From a biblical standpoint, however, this is incorrect. If the chief end of man is “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever” (WSC 1), then surely all of life, including the act of voting, must be self-consciously aimed at His glory.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul declares, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Speaking in Colossians 1:16 of our Lord Jesus Christ, he asserts that “all things were created through Him and for Him”, including everything “on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers” (Col. 1:16).

Civil government, therefore, exists for the glory of God in Jesus Christ. As Romans 13:1-7 makes plain, every lawful civil ruler is “appointed by God” to “bear the sword” and “execute wrath on him who practices evil”. As “God’s minister”, he is under the sovereign authority of God Himself, who has bestowed the exercise of this authority upon our exalted Savior and Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18). Our Lord presently sits enthroned as “King of kings and Lord of lords” and “Ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5; 19:16).

Psalms 2:10-12 solemnly warns all “kings” and “judges of the earth” to “be wise” and to “be instructed” so as to “serve the LORD with fear”, to “kiss the Son, lest He be angry”. It likewise calls them to receive the blessing of eternal life promised to “all those who put their trust in Him.” Every ounce of civil power exercised in this world will ultimately answer to King Jesus.

In a democratic society, the right to elect government officials grants each voter a share in both the privileges and responsibilities of civil rule. Dictionary.com defines democracy as “government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system.” Therefore, while a Christian voter living in North America may not think of himself as a “king” or “judge of the earth”, this is precisely what he becomes, in principle, the moment he enters the voting booth. No less than a king, a judge, or a president, he is exercising civil power under the supreme authority of King Jesus. Every vote cast on his ballot is subject to the judgment seat of the One who declared, “To whom much is given, much shall be required” (Luke 12:48).

While the issue of voting to appoint public officials is not a major theme of the Bible, it is undoubtedly addressed. In Exodus 18:21, Moses commands Israel to “select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers.” According to David, “He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Sam. 23:3) and “he who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me” (Ps. 101:6). While in foreign exile, Daniel appointed three God-fearing believers named “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon” (Dan 2:49). Some years later, Nehemiah “gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many” (Neh. 7:2).

Following these scriptural examples, each Christian citizen should select godly leaders who will promote God's glory, honor His Son, and obey His Word. Just as employees must answer to a supervisor for their conduct on the job, so must each voter answer to King Jesus for every candidate, platform, or initiative that he or she has supported. We must all, therefore, strive to be Christ-centered voters.

Being a Christ-centered voter involves at least two things.

**First**, it means embracing your moral duty to obey God's Word, subjecting yourself to His revealed will in all things, including how you vote.

**Second**, it means taking God at His word that "those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:30). In other words, compromise is never ultimately beneficial or advantageous. To disobey a sovereign God is to invite His devastating displeasure. Therefore, the Christ-centered voter no longer entertains the naïve hope of achieving political reform at the expense of loyalty to Christ, since it is Christ Himself who determines the outcome of all his efforts.

Sadly, in the world of politics, it would appear that "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (Lk. 16:8). Most mainstream politicians today believe that their success or failure is determined by the will of the voting public, big corporations, and party elites. For this reason, they structure virtually all of their activities around the goal of pleasing the voting public, big corporations, and party elites. Their all-consuming endeavor is to please those whom they expect to determine their success or failure.

As "sons of light", we must learn from these results-oriented politicians! If, as the Bible teaches, political agendas ultimately rise or fall according to the sovereign rule of God in Christ, then pleasing Him must be the only sure foundation for any political reform movement that hopes to experience lasting success!

## **PART TWO: THE CANDIDATE**

On January 1, 1651, the Scottish Parliament crowned Charles II king of Scotland. As a prerequisite for this coronation, Charles solemnly declared his public acceptance of the Scottish National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant, documents outlining the nation's commitment to biblical doctrine, biblical worship, and the furtherance of Christ's kingdom on earth.

Tragically, the king's signature was insincere. Soon after his coronation, he disavowed his oath and began prosecuting supporters of the covenants. This sad turn of events demonstrates that no matter how righteous a candidate's self-professed agenda may appear at face value, it means very little if he cannot be trusted to follow through with it. For this reason, it is crucial that we understand the following two essential marks of a vote-worthy political candidate.

### **Essential Mark #1 – The candidate must be a credibly professing Christian.**

Ultimately, there are only two kinds of individuals in this world: (1) those who have been made alive by the Spirit of God and are being conformed daily into the image of Christ, and (2) those who remain dead in their sins, blinded by Satan and dominated by selfish lusts.

In other words, there is the Christian and the non-Christian, the believer and the unbeliever, the regenerate and the unregenerate. As Bob Dylan famously declared, "It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody!" A person is either a servant of Christ or a bond-slave of the devil; there can be no middle ground (Eph. 2:1-6). "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24). Of course, God alone infallibly discerns the heart. All we can do is seek to obey our Lord's command to "know a tree by its fruit" (Luke 6:44). But what exactly does this entail?

**First**, it means that politicians who profess no allegiance to Christ and have no interest in His church must be taken at their word and regarded as spiritually dead (1 Tim. 2:12).

**Second**, it means that those who profess allegiance to Christ, while remaining indifferent toward His Word and unresponsive to His church, must be regarded as religious hypocrites rather than brothers in Christ (Matt. 18:17).

**Third**, it means that those who profess allegiance to Christ, but who belong to secret societies, heretical groups, or false churches (e.g. Mormons, Freemasons, Romanists, etc.) must be regarded as under the dominion of Satan, who is himself the author of every false religion (1 Cor. 11:1-15).

By contrast, the vote-worthy candidate will produce clear visible fruit of saving grace and godly maturity. He will be unashamed of the gospel and hold active membership in a true Christian church. His sworn allegiance to the God of Scripture will be public and unmistakable. He will be a diligent student of God's Word, who openly avows the supreme authority of King Jesus, even in the hostile public square.

Experience confirms that some Christian candidates will be godlier than others. However, any politician who lacks a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as His Savior and Lord cannot be considered vote-worthy. Electing such a candidate — no matter how right he may be on this or that particular issue — is extremely dangerous, because it puts the civil sword into the hand of Christ's enemy. No matter what "values" a Christ-less candidate may profess to uphold, he remains under the dominion of sin and Satan, who has blinded his mind (2 Cor. 4:4).

In many instances, for the good of His church, God chooses to restrain unconverted rulers from being as wicked as they might otherwise be. Some Christians appeal to this fact in order to justify voting for non-Christians. However, when God's people themselves, in reckless violation of His Word, seek a political ruler "like all the nations", no such restraint is promised (1 Sam. 8). Instead, having robbed God of His glory and suppressed the truth in unrighteousness, they are likely to see their society given over to even more extreme violations of moral law (Rom. 1:26-32). This is precisely what we see happening in our society today.

When we vote for an unregenerate person, we are voting for an enemy of Jesus Christ: someone whom our Lord has promised to violently obliterate in His righteous anger. According to Psalm 2:10-12, every civil ruler must "trust in Him" (saving faith) and "kiss the Son" (worshipful obedience). All who refuse will be "dashed to pieces as a potter's vessel" and "perish in the way". Of our ascended Lord, Psalm 110:5-6 states: "The Lord is at your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations; He shall fill the places with dead bodies; He shall execute the heads of many countries." That is, while presently seated at His Father's right hand, King Jesus reigns over every detail of divine providence, including the destruction of rulers and nations who refuse to heed His Word and advance His kingdom.

All of this serves to raise a number of probing questions concerning our union with Christ and its implications for the voting booth.

1. Are we maintaining our loyalty and solidarity with Christ when we vote for the very same rulers that He has promised to shatter in pieces?
2. Is it consistent for us, as the members of Christ's body, to support the avowed enemies of our Head?
3. How can we, who are presently seated with Christ in heavenly places (Col. 3:1), lend our support to His antagonists while sitting in His very presence?
4. What faithful bride would help to advance the cause of her husband's enemies (Eph. 5:25)?
5. Why is it that we would refuse to give our daughter to an ungodly man in marriage, yet we will happily vote to deliver our entire city, county, state, or nation into the hands of ungodly civil rulers?

As regards Christ Himself, the Bible is clear that the Father "put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). A very real chain of command has been established by God, obliging every civil ruler to submit to Jesus as a superior civil officer. Too few Christians recognize the significance of Christ's universal exaltation. Think about it: How many church members would vote for a deacon who did not recognize the authority of the elders? How many corporations would hire a CEO who refused to

acknowledge the authority of its board of directors? How many Americans would vote for a President who refused to acknowledge the authority of the legislature or judiciary?

Common sense tells us that no individual is fit for any office in any context if he does not openly acknowledge all legitimate authority to which he is accountable. How then can Christians, who confess Jesus to be “Ruler of the kings of the earth” vote for politicians who deny His lawful authority over them? If the rejection of the Supreme Court’s authority would disqualify a candidate for the office of the presidency, how much more so a denial of the supreme authority of the Judge of all the earth!

In itself, the ungodly character of a civil ruler does not negate our moral duty to obey his lawful authority and to pray for his restraint and illumination (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2). Nevertheless, it is one thing to honor the God-given authority of a Christ-less magistrate who is already in office. It is quite another thing to actively support his candidacy in the election.

**Essential Mark #2 – The candidate must demonstrate wisdom and godly character.** In Deuteronomy 1:13, God issues the following instructions to Israel for the election of civil elders over their tribes and clans: “Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.” In Deuteronomy 17:18-19, Moses advises Israel concerning their future election of a king: that he must write out his own copy of the Scriptures and “read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left.”

Left to ourselves as fallen creatures, our selfish tendency is to abuse whatever power or authority we possess. Therefore, a vote-worthy political candidate must have a proven track record of unselfish leadership and God-fearing personal integrity, both at home and in the workplace. If a man has been an unfaithful husband or a negligent father, can we really expect him to be a faithful and diligent steward of civil power? If he has involved himself in questionable business transactions, filed dishonest tax returns, or refuses to be forthright about major public accusations, can we really expect him to enforce the law equitably upon others?

The vote-worthy candidate must also bring a measure of wisdom and experience to the table. He must be familiar not only with the Scriptures, but with all of life, including the society and people which he is to govern. Anyone who reads the Proverbs of King Solomon will be struck not merely with his knowledge of God’s Law, but also with his knowledge of human nature, human relationships, economics, and the created world. Without a working knowledge of these other important subjects, a ruler’s familiarity with Scripture is unlikely to produce real, concrete, practical solutions to the problems of the day.

In Jeremiah 23, God rebukes the “shepherds” (i.e. rulers) of His people for abusing their authority. Rather than tending to the needs of the people, they oppressed them for personal gain. When evaluating a political candidate, therefore, it is important to observe his sensitivity and care for the needs and liberties of even the most vulnerable members of society. A vote-worthy candidate will show equal concern for every class of people in society: defending the cause of the oppressed, opposing envious class warfare against the wealthy, attending to the genuine needs of the widow and orphan, and seeking to curb all unnecessary government expansion and taxation.

### **PART THREE: THE PLATFORM**

Electing a credibly professing Christian to civil office cannot, by itself, guarantee God’s blessing. He must have a platform or stated agenda to implement. Moreover, as Christian voters, we have a duty to evaluate this platform according to an objective biblical standard. When asked to define this standard, Christians today offer a variety of answers.

## Approach #1 – “The Lesser of Two Evils”

What happens when a Christian candidate with explicitly Christian principles is nowhere to be found on the ballot? Should we simply read through the platforms of the two major party candidates and vote for the (so-called) lesser of two evils? According to most Christians today, this is precisely what we should do. There are, however, several major problems with this approach.

1. **It is a proven failure.** Despite its best efforts to appear “pragmatic”, this approach has proved an utter failure, particularly in the United States. As a 19th century Presbyterian minister once observed, “American Conservatism is merely the shadow that follows Radicalism as it moves forward towards perdition... It is worthless because it is the ‘conservatism’ of expediency only, and not of sturdy principle.”

At best, voting for the lesser of two evils merely places society on a slower road to perdition. Such gradual declension, however, often proves to be more dangerous in the long run, since it occurs at a less disturbing, less noticeable pace. The triumph of lesser evil is of great use to Satan, because it allows moral decline to press onward, cleverly disguised as moderation.

Consider the effect of this philosophy on American politics. For the most part, today’s conservatives are less biblical, less moral, and less dignified than yesterday’s liberals. We have inadvertently created a market for wily politicians, who know full well that as long as they can appear slightly less evil than their opponents at election time, they are sure to garner the support of most evangelical voters, notwithstanding their numerous unbiblical policies and immoral habits. This approach is clearly not helping our cause.

2. **It leads to absurdity.** If Christians are required to support the lesser of two evils, then they would technically be required to vote for Stalin over Hitler (or vice versa), which is patently absurd. Incidentally, if the current trend of moral backsliding continues, the prospect of seeing a Hitler or a Stalin on our ballot may not be so far-fetched!
3. **It hinders real change.** This approach typically opposes third party Christian candidates on the supposition that they have no chance of winning. Godly men with Scriptural principles are thereby discouraged from running for office, since they cannot even count on their fellow evangelicals to vote for them. This effectively guarantees the political dominance of evil candidates and perpetuates the status quo of moral declension. What could be more evil than that?

## Approach #2 – “A Few Key Issues”

Some Christians argue for a more objective standard by which to evaluate a candidate’s platform. They seek, as it were, to draw a line in the sand with respect to vote-worthiness. This standard, they contend, is to be defined by a few key moral issues. In order to achieve reform on these crucial issues, however, great latitude is afforded with respect to a candidate’s religious and moral convictions. For instance, such a person might refuse to vote for *any* candidate who lacks a basic Biblical stance on the few key issues of abortion and homosexual marriage. Moreover, so long as a candidate *does* oppose this short list of societal sins, he is regarded as voteworthy, even if he is a non-Christian with no allegiance to Jesus Christ and no desire to implement explicitly biblical principles across the board.

Almost without exception, the few key issues valued by these voters are taken from the second table of God’s moral law (Commandments 5-10), which defines and demands love and peace toward our neighbor. “If we just could elect more candidates who stand against abortion and homosexual marriage,” these voters contend, “then we might be able to make this nation great again!”

Meanwhile, such voters tend to minimize the essential significance of the first table of God’s moral law (Commandments 1-4), which requires supreme love for God and His glory. “Many of the candidates in the Pro-Life Voter’s Guide adhere to false religion,” they reason, “but we must do *everything we can* to end abortion!” As you might imagine, there are several glaring problems with this approach.

**First**, by lowering the vote-worthy threshold to just a few moral issues, it leaves the door wide open for candidates who lack a credible profession of faith in Christ. The Pope, for instance, opposes both abortion and homosexual marriage; but would any devout Protestant ever suggest coming under the civil authority of the Papacy?

**Second**, this approach is inconsistent with the sovereignty and holy jealousy of God. In this fallen world of sin and misery, societal blessing is attained solely by God's goodness. It is pure folly and arrogant presumption for a society that robs God of His first table prerogatives to expect a steady stream of peace and liberty from His sovereign hand of providence. That's just not how it works.

**Third**, this approach reverses the clear order and priority within God's moral law. In Matthew 22:37-39, our Lord differentiates between the *first* great commandment (loving God) and the *second* (loving others). First and foremost, we must love God. Our love for God is the ultimate foundation of our love for others, whereas godlessness is the mother of injustice. Any society which seeks to maintain horizontal morality (at a human level) without self-consciously recognizing its vertical relationship to God in Christ, will eventually be overrun by horizontal wickedness. This is because horizontal sins are merely the symptoms of the underlying disease of godlessness and self-deification. We will never have lasting success in treating the symptoms until we prioritize the eradication of the underlying disease.

**Fourth**, this approach ignores the fact that these symptoms represent a providential judgment of God against societies that refuse to honor and worship Him aright. According to Romans 1:18-32, God will not permit his creatures to get along well without Him. Nations seeking to maintain justice, peace, and order without honoring Him will be "given over" to increasingly vile forms of injustice and perversion.

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, some misguided Christian leaders suggested that God was judging America for homosexuality and abortion. Biblically speaking, this is incorrect. Romans 1 informs us that sins like abortion and homosexuality are not so much the underlying *reason* for God's judgment as the *judgment itself*. A more accurate diagnosis of contemporary American culture would stress the remarkable indifference (if not hostility) to Jesus Christ and His gospel in both "red states" (political conservatives) and "blue states" (political liberals).

Concerning the cities which refused to hear the gospel, Jesus declared, "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" (Mark 6:11). If, as this verse teaches, our Lord truly *does* view a society's rejection of His gospel as *more* heinous than the violence and perversion of Sodom and Gomorrah, then the political priorities of most American evangelicals stand in need of serious correction.

The fact is that until we abandon our unhealthy obsession with a "few key issues" in favor of our Lord's holistic, Gospel-centered outlook, abortion and homosexual marriage are likely to continue as tokens of divine wrath upon a godless and unbelieving society.

### **Approach #3: "Scriptural, Confessional, and Christ-Centered"**

According to the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPT), there are at least three general qualifications that must characterize the platform of a vote-worthy candidate. We will now attempt to consider these qualifications and how they serve as helpful guides for the Christ-centered voter.

1. **The candidate must publicly state his intention to "kiss the Son"**. RPT 23:4 asserts that "Every nation ought to recognize the Divine institution of civil government, the sovereignty of God exercised by Jesus Christ, and its duty to rule the civil affairs of men in accordance with the will of God. It should enter into covenant with Christ and serve to advance His Kingdom on earth. The negligence of civil government in any of these particulars is sinful, makes the nation liable to the wrath of God, and threatens the continued existence of the government and nation."

The engine of national politics has no neutral gear. Every vote cast brings a society one step closer to reformation or one step closer to destruction. Electing a candidate, whether liberal or conservative, who is indifferent toward the legal recognition of King Jesus is a step toward divine judgment. It may serve to provide temporary earthly advantages, such as lower taxes and more equitable laws, but, in the long run, it threatens the very existence of our nation. By contrast, our Lord calls us “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). If we truly believe this verse, we will not seek to purchase temporarily earthly benefits at the expense of our supreme loyalty to Jesus Christ. Rather, by God’s grace, we will remain faithful to our Christ-centered principles, seeking first the kingdom and righteousness of the God who alone has the power to safeguard of our life, liberty, and private property, and who promises to grant us “all these things” as we have need.

2. **The candidate must appeal openly to the authority of Scripture.** RPT 23.15 affirms every citizen’s duty to “vote for civil rulers who fear God, love truth and justice, hate evil, and are publicly committed to scriptural principles of civil government.” RPT 23.29 then declares that “the Christian should support and vote only for such men as are publicly committed to scriptural principles of civil government.”

In order to understand this statement, we must appreciate the meaning of the phrase “scriptural principles of civil government”. This phrase does not simply mean that a candidate’s platform must contain one or two positions agreeable to the Bible. For instance, a professed atheist candidate might oppose high taxes and advocate capital punishment for convicted murderers, both in keeping with the Bible. Such a candidate, on this interpretation, would qualify as vote-worthy simply because he holds certain positions that can be traced back to Scripture. But surely the Testimony is requiring more here than an agreement with the Bible on a few matters of public policy. If this were the case, every political candidate in human history would be vote-worthy, since every man, by the light of nature, holds to one position or another which is traceable to God’s moral law (Rom. 2:14-15).

When the RPCNA Testimony speaks of a candidate holding to “scriptural principles of civil government”, it is referring to an entire platform that is consistently grounded in the divinely revealed truths of historic, biblical Christianity. It is describing a candidate who aims to glorify God and obey His precepts in every aspect of his life and office, not merely in connection with one or two key social issues.

According to RPT 23.29, such a candidate will not seek to conceal his true colors but will “openly inform those whose support he seeks of his adherence to Christian principles of civil government.” While Christian principles may yield a variety of perspectives on key issues, a vote-worthy candidate will always ground his platform on the ultimate authority of Scripture as the infallible Word of the Triune God. As God’s servant for our good (Rom. 13:4), this is the very least we should expect from him.

3. **The candidate must testify openly against anti-Christian principles.** Consider the following statements from the RP Testimony relating to civil oaths:

- **RPT 23.26:** It is the duty of the Christian to ascertain whether any prescribed oath of allegiance to the civil authority involves acceptance of the unchristian principles stated or implied in its constitution of government. If the oath of allegiance to civil authority explicitly or by clear implication requires support of anti-Christian, atheistic, or secular principles, then the Christian must refuse on these grounds to take the oath of allegiance. Acts 5:29; Acts 4:18-20.

- **RPT 23.28:** It is the duty of the Christian Church to testify to the authority of Christ over the nations, against all anti-Christian, atheistic, and secular principles of civil government, and against all sinful oaths of allegiance to civil governments. When the Church by orderly processes in her own courts determines that the oath of allegiance to a civil government compromises the Christian’s loyalty to Christ or involves the Christian in the support of sinful principles of civil government, the Church must require her members to refuse such sinful oaths.

The RP Testimony is quite clear that all Christians must refrain from taking unlawful oaths and (by implication) from putting others in a position to take them. It also asserts that all Christians must strive to bear

a consistent witness against all anti-Christian principles of government. This includes every citizen, including all voters, candidates, and elected officials. All of this serves to raise a very difficult question: According to the above principles, is it lawful for a Christian to swear unqualified allegiance to the U.S. Constitution or to vote for someone who would do so?

Historically, the RPCNA has given various answers to this question, including (a) strictly prohibiting the oath, (b) allowing the oath alongside an “explanatory declaration” of Christ’s supreme authority, and (c) allowing unqualified acceptance of the oath (as is our present practice).

The chief concern regarding unqualified oaths to the U.S. Constitution has always been that this document establishes human government upon the authority of “We the people” rather than “the LORD and His Anointed” (Ps. 2:1-3). Apart from a casual reference to “Anno Domini” (i.e. “In the year of our Lord”) and some borrowed Christian notions of limited government, the entire document is utterly “without Christ” and “without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Instead of covenanting with God in Christ to advance His kingdom and enforce His law, it establishes a form of pluralistic “religious freedom” which places Christ and His truth on equal footing with all other religions (See Article VI; First Amendment).

During an era when virtually every state in the union required legal witnesses, jurors, and magistrates to swear an oath to the Triune God and His Word, and when the state constitution of Massachusetts required its municipalities to fund local Christian congregations, the U.S. Constitution charted a new course of secular humanism. Before long, these principles of supposed religious neutrality found their way into most state constitutions as well, leading our nation precisely to its present state of agnosticism.

Without a divinely revealed foundation for truth and morality, it should not surprise us to witness the unprecedented ethical chaos that has enveloped our society. The false religion of pluralistic secular humanism which today dominates our government and nation is largely the result of the principled secular humanism of the U.S. Constitution.

Nevertheless, this issue of swearing an oath of allegiance is a difficult one, worthy of all due caution. It is not our desire here to draw dogmatic conclusions, but simply to raise a number of pertinent, respectful questions in order to stimulate careful biblical thought and consideration.

1. Can a Christian consistently bear “testimony against all... secularistic principles of civil government” if he publicly takes (or votes for someone who takes) an unqualified oath to “support and defend” a secular-humanist constitution?
2. Can a Christian consistently swear an unqualified oath to “support and defend the U.S. Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic” if he himself is at enmity with its most fundamental principles of pluralistic secular humanism?
3. If it would be unlawful for a Christian to swear unqualified allegiance to an Islamic constitution, what makes it lawful for him to swear unqualified allegiance to a secularist constitution?
4. May the Christian swear allegiance to the U.S. Constitution with the implicit understanding that his oath is subordinate to the Scriptures? (If so, where does one draw the line?)
5. If a Christian states an “explanatory declaration” qualifying his allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, should this satisfy his conscience, or must he simply refuse the oath altogether?

It is to be admitted that reasonable Reformed believers, church officers, and even denominations may disagree on how best to answer these questions. Nevertheless, they are questions that should be thoughtfully considered by all who desire to engage in Christ-centered voting.

## **PART FOUR: WHAT THE RIGHTEOUS CAN DO**

In Psalm 11:3, David responds to the widespread moral decline in Israel by asking a very simple, yet immortal, question: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” This is a question that echoes throughout our own backsliding culture, as Christians lament the current state of affairs and long to know what they can do to make a difference. Sadly, however, few take the time to observe David’s answer to this question in the very next verse: “The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven.” In other words, the answer to the moral chaos of our world is a solemn recognition that the Lord reigns over all. Indeed, as New Testament believers, we confess that our *Lord Jesus Christ* reigns over all at God’s right hand of power.

When the moral foundations of the family, the nation, and even the church appear to be disintegrating before our very eyes, we must turn our eyes to King Jesus and recognize His sovereign command of the situation. He has given us a Great Commission to preach the gospel to every creature, to disciple the nations, to baptize and to instruct. He has promised *personally* to see this enterprise through to completion, even to the end of the age. He has promised to destroy godless rulers and nations, and to bless all those who trust Him, and that is precisely what He is doing. The foundations of our society may be in jeopardy, but His foundation stands eternally sure.

Nevertheless, we recognize instinctively that it is not enough that we simply look to Christ. We must *also* urge our friends, neighbors, and civil leaders to look to Him. Until our society turns its eyes away from the pleasures and treasures of this life and looks to King Jesus in all His glory, the foundations will continue to deteriorate. Things will inevitably go from bad to worse and Western Civilization will be dashed to pieces as a potter’s vessel. These are desperate days that leave every true Christian, clothed in the righteousness of the Savior, asking with David, “What can the righteous do?” Indeed, what *can* we do? What *should* we do at a time like this?

### **WHAT THE RIGHTEOUS SHOULD *NOT* DO — They should not compromise.**

Before answering this question, let us simply reiterate what the righteous should *not* do. The righteous should not seek to compromise the *truth* of Christ in an effort to advance the *cause* of Christ. Psalm 45:3 tells us that King Jesus rides forth “because of truth, humility, and righteousness”. In other words, His truth *is* His cause. To compromise His truth, therefore, is to undermine His cause. This may seem obvious on the surface, but when applied to the scriptural principles of Christ-centered voting, it is a stumbling block for many otherwise godly Christians. You see, from a merely human standpoint, it makes little sense to spurn popular consensus in the name of honoring Jesus. In our own day, political coalitions that refuse to “kiss the Son” usually prove far more competitive than those that truly honor Him. In fact, it is often difficult to find *any* political coalition or *anyone* on the ballot who meets the scriptural threshold of vote-worthiness outlined above.

The dearth of qualified voteworthy options creates a strong temptation for Christians to compromise their principles for pragmatic reasons, and to support ungodly candidates. While such believers desire to make a tangible, discernible impact upon their world *now*, they fail to appreciate the high cost of unbiblical compromise. Their attempt to help advance Christ’s *cause* by compromising His *truth* has actually placed them in opposition to *both*. Thankfully, there is a more excellent way!

God calls each generation of Christians to honor His Son in their society, regardless of whether it produces an immediately discernible impact (Phil. 2:15; Dan. 3:17-18). As the saying goes, “Duty is ours; consequences are of the Lord.” As loyal subjects of King Jesus, it is our *duty* to honor Him in every aspect of our lives, including at the voting booth. It is also our *duty* to be good stewards of the political voice God has given us in our society. However, the consequences are the Lord’s. Whether or not our efforts lead to the election of a godly Christian leader is ultimately determined by God’s all-wise eternal decree, not by our efforts.

### **WHAT THE RIGHTEOUS *SHOULD* DO — They should Pray, Disciple, Participate, & Wait.**

We have seen the danger of unbiblical compromise. Let us now proceed to consider four practical and proactive ways that we, as North American Christians, can seek to impact the political process in a Christ-centered manner.

**1. WE SHOULD PRAY.** According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1-5, our instinctive response to ungodly civil rulers ought not to consist in harsh criticism or crude mockery, but in genuine prayer for their conversion. “Therefore,” he writes, “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” He goes on to assert that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” and that there is “one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” In other words, we should pray that our civil rulers would come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and that, in obedience to their Mediator, they would rule in a manner conducive to the peace and progress of the gospel.

Why are the foundations of our society in danger of being destroyed? Perhaps part of the answer lies in the stunning words of James 4:2, where the apostle informs his audience that “you do not have because you do not ask.” Are we, as Christians, more eager to enter the voting booth at election time than we are to enter the secret place each day to intercede for our nation? If so, the state of our nation should not surprise us.

James goes on in verse 3 to tell his readers that “you ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” When we *do* pray for our nation, are we praying in a selfish manner, focusing chiefly on the earthly concerns of the Gentiles (Matt. 6:31-32): “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” Or, by contrast, are we praying according to the God-centered, kingdom-focused manner taught by our Lord. In expounding the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, the answer to Question 191 of our Larger Catechism (Q. 191) asserts the following:

In the second petition, (*which is, Thy kingdom come*); acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruptions, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted; that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.

In addition to praying for the conversion of our leaders and the spiritual revival of our land, the scriptures urge us to pray against evil and evildoers. The proper response of the private Christian to evil and injustice is not to cultivate a bitter and vengeful spirit, nor to take matters into his own hands through violent aggression. Rather, Paul writes “Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). He goes on to assert that this wrath is not only administered *directly* by God Himself, but also *indirectly* by civil rulers, who are to serve as “God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Rom. 13:4).

For this very reason, the Book of Psalms contains many *imprecatory* prayers, by which God’s people can bring their complaints before the Lord, seeking the manifestation of His justice and giving place to His righteous wrath. Obviously, the believer’s preference is always that oppressive evildoers would turn to God in repentance (Ps. 51:13), and his prayers should reflect this. Nevertheless, in the case of those who will not repent, he is prepared in his prayers to call for their restraint and, if necessary, with fear and trembling, their utter removal by the hand of God by whatever means necessary (Ps. 11:11-13; 94:1-2).

In conclusion, it is not an overstatement to say that, in seeking to impact the moral and political character of a nation, nothing is more vital or essential than fervent, believing prayer.

- 2. WE SHOULD DISCIPLE.** As we have already noted above, our Lord's Great Commission is a call to recognize His supreme authority over heaven and earth, and, on that basis, to "Go... and make disciples of all the nations". This entails preaching the gospel to every creature, baptizing those who believe (and their children) into the church of Jesus Christ, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded in the Scriptures (Matt. 28:18-20; 16:15-16).

Moreover, insofar as we remain faithful to this commission, our Savior has assured us that we *are* the salt of the earth and the light of the world; that the leaven of His worldwide kingdom *will* leaven the lump; that the seed of His kingdom *will* grow into a mighty tree, and that the gospel of His kingdom *will* be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations before He returns in glory (Matt. 5:13-14; 11:31-33; 24:14).

The gospel of Jesus Christ has not lost its saving power. It turned the first century Roman World world — in all of its paganism and perversity — upside down and, by the power of King Jesus, it can transform nations and societies today. The most effective way for Christians today to combat the problems in our society is to join a faithful, outreach-minded local church, to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ under His means of grace, and to bear a bold, joyful, and consistent witness to His Lordship in every sphere of life. There is nothing in this world so powerful as a revived, Spirit-filled church gathering in new converts by the power of Christ, personally mentoring them in the practical truths of the Bible, and equipping them to reach their children, their friends, and their neighbors for Christ.

In recent years, more and more Reformed Christians have been taking to the streets to proclaim the gospel in the open air at local bus stops, major public rallies, and even outside abortion clinics. As men and women are called to personal repentance from sin and personal faith in the Savior, they are also called to embrace Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. For those preaching outside abortion clinics there is a great opportunity to bring the gospel to bear directly on one of the greatest social evils in our nation's history. If every Reformed church had an outreach team proclaiming Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in their community, there is reason to believe that the national conscience among the voters in our land would be far more sensitive to the wickedness that prevails all around us.

Of course, the primary goal of true biblical discipleship is never to influence culture or politics. Jesus is building His Church, not an earthly political kingdom. At the same time, there can be no denying the *indirect* influence which a more widespread proclamation and acceptance of the gospel would have upon our society. History has demonstrated again and again that righteousness exalts a nation and that the nation is blessed — both spiritually and temporally — whose God is the Lord (Prov. 14:34; Ps. 33:12). In other words, if every church in North America took the Great Commission more seriously, our society would almost certainly be heading in a better direction.

- 3. WE SHOULD PARTICIPATE.** Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Lk. 12:48). Therefore, to the extent that we can remain loyal to Him, we should use our God-given voting privileges for His glory and seek to exert political influence as we are able (RPT 23.15). However, participation should not be confused with compromise. If we consistently apply Christ-centered voting principles, there will be very few candidates for which we will be able to vote with a good conscience. For this reason, some might suggest that Christ-centered voting is inconsistent with active political involvement. Nothing could be further from the truth.

To begin with, voting involves more than choosing specific candidates for office. In the United States, most ballots now include opportunities for citizens to vote directly on specific issues of public policy. Christians have a moral duty to participate in such ballot initiatives according to scriptural principles, even if they cannot support any of the candidates listed on the ballot.

Believe it or not, another effective way for Christians to participate in the political process is by refusing to vote for scripturally unqualified candidates. This may sound counterintuitive, but it is true. If every professing evangelical Christian immediately began practicing strict adherence to Christ-centered voting principles, the world would take notice. The major political parties would take notice. In the United States, the Republican Party would probably hit the panic button and begin scrambling for ways to regain their constituency. As it stands, they are more likely to hit the snooze button, because they know that, whatever else we may *say* about Christ and the Bible, they need only speak the magic words (“pro-life”) and, *abracadabra*, they’ve got our vote. Christians have become a special interest group rather than a political force to be reckoned with. The first step to increasing our influence, therefore, is making it clear that we are no longer willing to play the game. We are Christians and we demand consistent scriptural principles.

As noted above, a great hindrance to *explicitly* Christian politics has always been the refusal of professing Christians (by the millions) to lend their support and to get involved. Most would rather defer to a major political party and its unimpressive list of hand-picked candidates than actively support a Bible-based political candidate or party. By consistently applying the scriptural principles of Christ-centered voting, Christians would be empowered to participate actively in the political process like never before. It would not be easy, given the current two-party system, but real progress could be made over time.

Whether or not creating a Christian political party is the ultimate answer, the fact remains that there is a vacuum of political leadership and organization among Bible-believing Christians in North America. Quite naturally, this has led to an absence of Christ-centered political activity and influence at all levels of government. It is high time for those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord to band together *in some sort of organized fashion* (distinct from the church) in the active promotion of Christ-centered candidates and laws within our society. This is not to suggest, of course, that there are no groups currently striving to make this happen. It is simply to highlight the need for Christians to make a greater effort, according to their gifts and availability, to join them in the valuable work of Christ-centered political activity.

- 4. WE SHOULD WAIT EAGERLY.** As Christians, we must always keep in mind that this present world is not our home. It is true that we pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. However, it is also true that “here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb. 13:14). We are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth”, like the Patriarchs, who “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:10, 13). Ultimately, “our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Php. 3:21).

We are not “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing” of a Christian political movement that will make our nation great again. We are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us” and who has promised to “make all things new” in the glorious world to come (Tit. 2:13; Rev. 21:5).

Without this scriptural, heavenly-minded perspective, we will be of no earthly good. This was the perspective of the Protestant Reformers, the Covenanters, the Puritans (both English and American), and the preachers of the Great Awakening. Over the last five centuries, the Christians with the greatest positive impact on our Western Civilization were the ones who valued heaven above earth, Christ above country, piety above politics, church above culture, and the gospel above social justice. By honoring Christ supremely and fixing their eyes upon His glorious return, they were empowered by God to transform a whole host of nations, cultures, and societies for many years to come. What a powerful reminder that, even in this present life, by way of their godly influence, “those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9).

We live in a society that daily bombards us with reasons to be discouraged. Like Paul in Athens, our spirits are constantly provoked within us at the rampant wickedness and idolatry of our culture. Like Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee, our tendency is to lose sight of our Savior and instead to fixate upon the howling wind and crashing waves swirling around us, as we sink deeper into disillusionment and apathy. Nothing but a

constant looking to Christ and anticipating His return will ever enable us to overcome the many discouragements which threaten to stifle our faithful witness in the midst of a wicked and adulterous generation. At a time like this, we need to be reminded that our Lord is still on the throne and that He will soon be returning to make things right. As Psalm 37:1 reminds us, “Do not fret because of evildoers... for they shall soon be cut down like the grass...But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Whether we experience a great revival in our land during our lifetimes or whether we witness further declension leading to societal collapse, the Lord is still reigning, still working all things for good, still building His church, still discipling the nations, and still gathering His elect. He alone determines the times and seasons of national revival and reformation.

Therefore, while we should prayerfully labor to see these things take place, we must also be content to wait upon *Him* for *His* timing, not taking matters into our own hands by way of sinful compromise or an overemphasis on politics. This is far from an easy task. In fact, as one American poet has said, “The waiting is the hardest part.” Nevertheless, we can rest assured that “those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). As Christians, we are ultimately waiting for our Lord’s return in glory. This eternal, heavenly hope is the anchor of our soul and the source of our strength. Without it, all efforts to impact our society for Christ will be in vain. But with this living hope, we can labor to advance His kingdom in every aspect of our lives — including the practice of Christ-centered voting — trusting in “Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” and looking to the One who said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”