

# General Election 2017

by Philip Venables

The occurrence of the General Election in 2017 on June 8<sup>th</sup> necessitates that we, as Christians, focus on our responsibilities towards the government of the country.

## Basic Principles

It is important that we are initially aware of some of the “non-negotiables” that prevail upon us as believers. We are:-

- **To acknowledge** that all government is established by God. Paul in Romans 13:1b states that **there is no authority except that which God has established**. The authorities that exist have been established by God. We are not in a position whereby we assess the character of a government and then decide whether or not it is from God or not. Rather scripture says that all government, whether good or bad has been instituted by God.
- **To submit** to those in authority. Having established that all authority is established by God, Paul draws the logical conclusion that we should submit to those who are in authority (see Romans 13:1a). Paul further says that **whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves**. (Romans 13:2). Peter underscores this teaching when he says that we should submit ourselves **for the Lord's sake to every human authority**. (1 Pet. 2:13a). It is always the Christian's default position to submit to the rules and regulations that are imposed upon us by the authorities. Civil disobedience is not, therefore, something that the Christian advocates. We should not be thinking if such and such a party gets into power through this election then I am going to refuse to pay my taxes or whatever. Christians should be known as law-abiding citizens. However, in saying this we note that there are times when the injunction is to obey God rather than man (see Acts 4:19). If the government is asking us to go against God's Word then we must reject their regulations and obey God instead.
- **To pray** for those in authority. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul says to Timothy, **“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”** Throughout history there have been many times when the authorities have been hostile to believers in Christ. The natural reaction in such a situation is for Christians to become agitated and respond in a hostile way. Prayer by Christians prevents this. When we truly pray for someone, we want the best for them. You cannot pray for someone and hate them at the same time.

That is why the outcome of prayer is found in living **peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness**. Praying for those in authority does not necessarily change those in authority, but it does change us and give us a settled heart at

peace. It is our Christian duty right now then to be praying for the outcome of this general election. We pray for God's hand in the whole process. We pray for His working through the whole process. We pray for His blessing upon those who are elected.

## Voting

Having established these basic principles about how we should act towards those in authority, we need now to consider who we should vote for. At this point we need to fix in our minds the need to make sure that all of our actions are informed and determined by the Word of God. We do not "go with the crowd" in our decision making. Rather we work out everything according to the testimony of God's Word.

However, having got this far in this article you may now be yearning to have guidance as to where to put your cross on June 8<sup>th</sup>. However, there is a prior stage that we need to go through. We need to determine before God whether or not it is right to vote. Of course throughout much of history this has not been an issue because none or few people have had voting rights as regards to determining the authorities in their home country. However, in this country presently we, who are 18 or over have the right to vote. The question though is whether or not it is our Christian duty to exercise this right. Each of us must be persuaded in our own minds on this issue. Here are some biblical arguments on each side of the argument.

### Why the Christian should not vote:

- ***Separation:* Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."** (2 Cor. 6:14-17). We are called to a life of separation. Accordingly, we should be careful what we get involved with. Non-voting would seem to be more in accord with this principle than participating in the election.
- ***Pilgrimage:* All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them** (Heb 11:13-16). The focus here is upon the attitude of Abraham. As a servant of God in this world he lived as a foreigner and stranger destined for his homeland. Living as foreigners and strangers seems to be something we hear little about. There is a strong argument that I am more in harmony with this principle when I decide not to participate in the voting system.
- ***Stewardship of time:* Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.** (Eph. 5:16). If I am to vote; I should do it honourably before God and therefore I should research all the parties. Is this a wise use of my time?

- **Focus: No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs - but rather tries to please his commanding officer.** (2. Tim. 2:4). In the context of 2 Tim. 2:4 should our focus not be upon declaring the gospel and advancing the kingdom? Do we not lose focus when we focus on determining who should be in power? In saying this we remember the words of our Saviour who said that **"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."** (John 18:36).
- **Fellowship:** Does my cross in the box signify that I am allying with the policies of that party? If it does then as a Child of God, I am really precluded from voting for the majority of parties and people putting themselves forward for election because they have policies which are clearly against God's Word. We are called to **"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."** (Eph. 5:11).

### Why the Christian should vote:

- **Creation:** In creating man God said **"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock, and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."** (Gen 1:26). All of mankind has a mandate to rule. When we vote, so as to determine who is in government, then we are fulfilling God's purpose for us to exercise rule over the earth.
- **Government by man:** Previous to Genesis 9:6 judgement and punishment for sin was directly administered by God. We see this with Cain in Genesis 4 and the folly of Genesis 6-8. However, in Genesis 9:6 God says: **"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God, has God made mankind"** (Gen. 1:27). God is here delegating the role of Judge to mankind. By application we see that governmental responsibility is now in the hands of man. The system of government we have in this country is democratic and we support God's delegation of responsibility to man when we participate in the prevailing system by voting.
- **Love:** God calls us to **'Love your neighbour as yourself.'** (Matt. 22:39b). By participating in the electoral system and seeking under God to have the best party in government then we are showing our love for our neighbour.
- **Salt and light:** In Matthew 5:13-16 we are called to affect the society we live in by being salt and light. An election affords us with an opportunity to perform these roles. By voting in a certain way we can act as salt by holding back evil. Similarly by supporting standards of righteousness we act as lights in this dark place.

These are some pointers as regards to biblical principles which guide us as regards to whether or not we should vote. Let each of us consider these matters before God and act in good conscience before Him.

### If I vote who do I vote for ?

Should you be convinced in your mind that you should vote then the next question you have to face is who should you vote for?

In approaching this matter we have to be careful to evaluate the position God has given us in this world. Fundamentally we are not here for ourselves we are here for God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20 Paul says **"You are not your own; you were bought at a price.**

**Therefore honour God with your body.”** Similarly he says to the Philippians, **“For to me, to live is Christ”** (Phil. 1:21a).

When we go in to the voting booth we are not there to do what we want. Rather, we are there to do what God wants. In a sense we are serving Him in casting our vote. We must therefore be careful to be guided by the principles of God's Word as to who we should vote for. For the majority of people the thing that determines who they vote for is self-interest, for example, most would think, “Who will lead to me having the most money and best lifestyle?”

However, for us as believers we must vote according to who will lead to God being honoured. Most particularly we need to remember that **Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.** (Prov. 14:34). The prosperity of a country is not founded upon who has the best economic policies, but rather who does most to establish righteousness.

Knowing this we are faced with many difficulties because at least some policies of virtually all the parties are diametrically opposed to God honouring morals. Perhaps in such a situation we need to think about using our vote in a God honouring way to keep those who are most vehemently anti-God “out of power”.

For full guidance on voting with full information about each party consult the following site:  
<http://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/election-briefing-2017.pdf>

### Conclusion

Remember whether you vote or do not vote we are to acknowledge government is from God, we are to submit to those in authority and pray for those in authority.

We also need to remember that our hopes are not set upon this world. Our view is towards a, **'a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells'**. (2 Peter 3:13). If we look to men to solve our problems and bring in a golden era then we will be sadly disappointed.

Finally, in all these things we need to make sure that there is no division in the church. We can talk healthily and respectfully together about politics. However, we should always do so with respect for each other. A crucial part of Christian living is knowing when and how to disagree (see Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8). You may not understand perhaps how someone might vote (or not vote); you may not understand how a fellow believer can support such-and-such a party. However each of us stands before our master. So we need to be forbearing with one another.

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