

## Churches, Christians and Politics

by Ron Stullenbarger

Surely local churches should not endorse specific candidates, nor sponsor or finance their campaigns. And individual Christians should not become so involved in politics that they neglect other God-given duties. But should Christians refuse all involvement in any issues that surround modern politics and elections?

Consider some of the practices that government officials currently debate, legalize, or even finance with our taxes: abortion, gambling, divorce, pornography, homosexuality, contraceptives for unmarried teens, and "*education*" that justifies some or all of these.

Should Christians, gospel preachers, and even churches speak out about such issues, or should we remain silent? If we do not speak out, how do we fulfill our God-given duty to preach the truth and rebuke error? See Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; I Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

Does the Bible contain examples of faithful servants of God speaking out when government officials practiced or encouraged moral or religious evils? The following passages show that we may and should do so: Matthew 14:1-4; 2 Samuel 12:1-15; 1 Kings 13:1-9; Acts 24:25.

In our society individual citizens have several ways to tell rulers we agree or disagree with their practices. One way we may speak out is by voting for or against the rulers in elections.

Many current government decisions will have major impact on our families. Men are responsible to provide for their families, including protecting them from harm (1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 5:28,29). Parents are responsible to provide a wholesome upbringing for our children (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 22:6). If my vote can help protect my family from evil government decisions and can help provide a more wholesome environment in which to raise my children, why should I refuse to vote?

The apostle Paul often used his rights as a Roman citizen to work for his own protection from evil and to help further the gospel. See Acts 22:24-29; 23:12-33; 25:10-12; 16:35-40; Esther 7:1-6.

Our government gives citizens the right to voice their views about who should govern us. If Paul used his rights to protect himself and help further the gospel, why should we not use the right to vote given us by our government? Can we not thereby help protect ourselves and our families from harm, while also helping maintain our freedom to preach and practice the truth?

1 Timothy 2:1,2 shows that we should pray for rulers. Some claim we should not vote because we might be working against God's power to

choose rulers according to His will. Yet God also tells us to pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11). Does this mean we should just sit back and let God do it all, or should we try to find a job and let God use us as the means to answer the prayer? Should we avoid looking for a job because we might take a job other than the one God in His providence wanted us to take?

3 John 2 shows that we should pray for good health. Some people mistakenly believe that going to a doctor shows a lack of faith in God's power to answer prayer. Yet Christians know that the doctor may be the very means God uses to answer the prayer! We all realize that there may be situations in which God does not will for us to get better, but that does not prevent us from going to the doctor. If God has not revealed His will in such specific cases, then we must do what we believe to be best, while yet being willing to submit to a different outcome if that is what results.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul prayed three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh. Later he learned that God did not will to remove it, but did that mean Paul did wrong in praying the prayer? Would Paul have sinned if he had gone to the physician Luke to help remove the thorn before God revealed His will in the matter?

When God has not revealed His specific will regarding affairs on earth, we must pray to Him, but we should also do what we can to bring about the answer to our prayer. We should act according to what we believe is best, acting in harmony with the general principles God has revealed. If we do, God will not be displeased with us, even if He does choose some other outcome of events, because He did not reveal His will in these matters. Nevertheless, we should pray for His will to prevail, even if it turns out to differ from our own (Matthew 26:36-46). Consider Esther 4:13-16.

When Christians become active in speaking out against evil in government and voting accordingly, some people claim we should keep our religion out of politics. I deny the premise on which that view is based, but my main point here is that such a view is not a proper statement of the issue. Christians are not the ones who have left our sphere of interest. The problem is that politicians have made a full-scale invasion into the realm of religion and morals! In that realm Christians are not only permitted but obligated to act. I believe this includes the right to vote. But whether or not an individual Christian chooses to vote (one does not have to vote), we must all find some means to speak out for decency and Divine truth. Again, a Christian does not have to vote. But if we choose to do so, we cannot vote for abortion (or any other evil).

And, regardless of how the government responds to our efforts, we must continue to live faithfully before God, even if we must suffer at the hands of government officials.