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Citizenship Stewardship

by Freddy Davis

Well, the election is over and we are now in the process of moving forward to the next phase of political life in America. I hope you voted. Regardless of your personal point of view, if you are a Christian, you have a responsibility to vote in every election.

When it comes to any kind of political involvement, the process can be messy and unpleasant. Sadly, that very fact is often used by people who self-identify as Christians as a reason for not engaging the political process at all.

But there are many parts of life that are messy and unpleasant. If we avoided our responsibilities in every part of life which can be characterized that way, we would be dropping out of a lot of things. In fact, our thinking should be just the opposite. Our example should be Jesus himself. He didn't avoid coming to earth because dealing with humans was messy and unpleasant. Instead, he stepped out of paradise and dropped himself right into the middle of the mess in order to help us get out of it. We should be willing to do the same to help others.

But beyond that, there is another reason we should become engaged. We should do it because we have an actual responsibility from God. Christians in America are God's stewards of their elected representatives. We need to vote for people who hold Christian values, then observe their service to make sure they are representing us rightly.

In biblical days, the types of government which were most prominent were various forms of dictatorship – whether it was run by a king, a dictator or an emperor. Under that kind of system, regular citizens were "subjects" and did not have much of an opportunity to impact the operation of government. In that circumstance, the Bible teaches that individuals are to obey God above any earthly ruler, but at the same time to be as obedient as possible to the ruling authorities in order that societal order may be maintained.

American society, though, was not set up to operate based on rulers. In America we have a representative government. The rulers are the people who elect others to represent them in government. As such, it is not the principle of obedience to rulers which is most important, but that of stewardship. God is the owner of all things, but on earth he has made man his stewards (managers). Since political representatives are responsible to the citizens for their work, it becomes our stewardship responsibility to manage this element of God's creation based on his will. Faithful citizens must monitor their representative's work and provide feedback and direction. If the representatives are not representing well, it is the responsibility of the citizens to replace them with different people who will.

While the process is the same for every citizen, the motivation for doing this is different for Christians. We don't do it simply because the government is set up that way, but because we have a responsibility before God. As such, it is not just the act of selecting a representative which is important, but the kind of representation we promote, as well. As Christian citizens, our primary responsibility is to elect representatives who will be faithful in carrying out particular principles

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God has revealed in the Bible. This does not in any way imply that believers are to elect people who will set up a theocracy. Rather, it is an admonition to elect representatives who are honest, full of integrity, and who will create, implement, and enforce laws which are consistent with the principles of life and liberty which God has revealed in Scripture.

As we get down to real life where actual policy is created, there are many specific policy matters which come into play. When it gets to these specifics, even Christians may disagree about some of them. But we should never disagree about the values themselves, and we need to make sure our representatives do hold Christian values. The policy decisions they make ultimately emerge out of their values.

Two Primary Sources of Values in America

In modern American culture, there are primarily two competing sources for the values we see in the public square. These sources produce very different values and even different ways of understanding what is right and wrong. The two are Naturalism and Christian Theism.

Naturalism is the belief that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality – no God and nothing outside of the material universe. Since Naturalists don't believe in the existence of God, it is impossible for values to have a source outside of humanity. Thus, there are no absolutes to base morality upon. All morality is, by necessity, based on a relative foundation. That is, those in power personally evaluate any given situation and determine what they believe to be the best course based on their own beliefs.

Christian Theism, on the other hand, is the belief that there is a transcendent God who is the creator of the material universe. More specifically, it regards the God of the Bible to be that God. And the teachings he has revealed in the Bible form the basis for the values which reflect right morality.

What Are the Particular Values Christians Should Promote?

There are, of course, many values which are dealt with in the Bible and politicians should use all of them as the starting point for developing public policy. That said, there are three which are foundational: life, family, and truth. There is a way God has created the world and mankind to exist, and these three foundation stones are key.

Life

When God made his creation, the most valuable thing he created was living creatures. The life he created was an expression of his own very existence. Because it is so valuable, life should be regarded as of highest value.

But there is one form of life in particular which holds the most value of all – human life. That is because humans are living creatures who were actually created in God's image. Human beings, thus, have the personhood characteristics of God himself.

Family

Beyond individual human life, another important value that needs to be protected relates to the family. The family is the most fundamental expression of relationship which exists among humanity. God established the union of one man and one woman as the foundation for all of the rest of human society. Anything which serves to break down this most important of institutions should be resisted.

Truth

The other critical value which needs to be protected is truth. Truth represents

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the way reality is actually structured and is the very basis for the living of life. This affects what people believe, what they say, the relationships they engage, as well as the lifestyle they embrace.

How Values Affect Policy Decisions

As politicians do their work, they develop laws and policies which establish the environment everyone must live in. The policies themselves deal with every part of life. But it must be remembered that the policies are not the root, they are the flower. Policies are established on something more fundamental. They are established upon a set of values. In order to develop laws and policies which are just and right, they must be founded upon the values which God has revealed to be the right ones – life, family and truth as they are expressed in the Bible.

There are many issues that humans in society must wrestle with. It is up to elected officials to develop policy which values individual life, strengthens the nuclear family and promotes truth. Some of the areas where politicians must develop policy include:

Social Issues - homelessness, poverty, hunger, mental illness, abortion, healthcare

Ethics and Morality - sexual practice, family structure

Biology - environmental stewardship
Law - rule of law, justice, fairness, citizen protection, church and state balance

Politics - political integrity

Economics - business integrity, individual property ownership

Education - accurate information, equal educational opportunity

Different values promote different outcomes. So, whichever worldview values are dominant in the culture are the ones which will be expressed in society.

If people who hold values consistent with Naturalism are running the show, you will end up with policies which promote such things as abortion, doctor assisted suicide, alternative family structures, sexual deviance, radical environmentalism, attacks on Christian expression in the public square, unequal justice, an "ends justifies the means" political philosophy, public ownership of property, government control of the content of educational materials, and the like. You get these kinds of policies because they are consistent with naturalistic belief.

On the other hand, if the people pulling the levers of government have biblical values, you get policies which promote such things as life, stable families, the rule of law, equal justice for all, promotion of the welfare of the individual, and access to equal educational opportunity.

How Do We Do It?

There is one thing we must keep in the forefront, though, as we engage our Christian citizenship responsibilities. Our reason for being good stewards is not for the purpose of accomplishing temporal policy objectives. Policy can only create an environment. The environment is important because it determines how much freedom citizens are able to have as they live life. But the shape of the environment is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to know a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The environment only creates the opportunity for individuals to work for God in the culture to accomplish the goal.

When the focus is primarily on policy, the policies themselves become the most important thing. But NO policy can possibly be good if it is not rooted in good values. Even what seems like ought to be good policy will turn

out bad if the values it is founded upon are not good.

As Christians, we have a responsibility before God to be good stewards of our citizenship. Since, in America, ultimate political power rests in the hands of the citizen, we have a responsibility to know the people we select to represent us in the political arena, and an equal responsibility to know how they are representing us. We need to know their beliefs before we vote for them. We need to follow their votes as they serve in order to make sure they are voting our values. If things seem to be amiss, we need to make contact and let them know we are watching. And if they do not represent well, we need to select a different representative.

None of this can be done by a non-engaged person. So, Christians have a responsibility before God to be engaged in the political process as responsible stewards. If every believer would take this responsibility seriously, the environment of our nation would change radically, and we would find ourselves in a position to be more effective in furthering the work of God in the world.

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