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Biblical Political Values vs. Naturalistic Political Values

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During a presidential campaign season, like the one we are now in, we tend to pay more attention to the issues which relate to the governing of our nation. Of course, these issues are continually before us, not just during campaign periods. But it is during a time like this that we have the opportunity to select representatives who will promote the kinds of policies which correspond with what we believe. Thus, we pay more attention.

In the heat of a campaign, we often get caught up in personalities. The candidates who are best able to resonate with the public, both by their words and their personality, are generally the ones we gravitate to. But we must be careful at this point. While words and personality are important, what is more important are principles and character.

We now live in a world which is dominated by a naturalistic worldview. As such, the principles which are most prominent in the public square tend to be based on that set of beliefs. And the people who dominate our societal institutions tend to be people whose character is shaped by naturalistic principles. As Christians, we should be deeper than that. If we are truly guided by our faith, it is biblical principles which will guide our thoughts and actions, and which will shape our character.

Biblical Vs. Naturalistic Values

America was founded upon principles which emerged out of biblical beliefs. We are going to take a few moments here to look at some of those principles and compare them with the naturalistic beliefs which are now challenging our faith –

indeed, the very shape of our society. Following is an explanation of several of these biblical principles, along with a sampling of Bible verses which support them. These will be compared with the naturalistic point of view, along with a brief explanation as to why naturalistic theology arrives at its conclusion.

A Binding Foundational Legal Document Vs. A Non-Binding Foundational Legal Document
Biblical View - Binding Foundation

There is a law which exists above human law – the law of God. This is not merely a set of suggested moral values, it is a revelation of the actual structure of reality. This revelation is based on the very character of God himself. God has not merely given us a list of rules to follow, he has revealed to us what his character is like, and commanded us to imitate him. His character defines objectively real morality.

In revealing this knowledge to us, God gave it in the form of moral expectations. As such, it can be written as a set of rules and laws. It must be kept in mind, however, that merely keeping the laws is not what pleases God. What he desires is that we become like him. Legalistically keeping the law is not sufficient, because it is quite possible to keep the law outwardly yet have inner desires and motivations which contradict what is being outwardly expressed. So, what we have is a foundational revelation that is unchanging, based on the unchanging character of God. Human beings are called on by God to take that foundation and express it individually as they live daily life.

In American society, this concept has been taken as an organizing principle for our legal system. Our founders created a Constitution which was designed

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to be an unchanging foundation upon which all other laws would be based. Of course, being a human document, this Constitution is not unchangeable in the same way as God's character. It can be changed, but based only on rules stated within the Constitution itself. It also cannot be interpreted differently than what was originally intended.

Psalm 1:1, 112:1-3; Proverbs 28:1-28; Ezekiel 36:27; Matthew 5:17-19; John 15:10; Romans 3:31; Galatians 3:21; 1 John 2:4

Naturalistic View - Non-Binding Foundation

A naturalistic worldview does not acknowledge any sort of transcendent reality. As such, there is no one in existence who could possibly reveal a set of laws or rules which could be considered absolute and unchangeable.

As such, in creating a legal foundation, those who hold to this worldview position do not see any compelling reason to look at the Constitution as an unchanging document. Rather, they see it as a "living and breathing" document which can be reinterpreted at any point by those who are in a position to do so (such as justices in the judicial system).

Civil Disobedience Vs. Strict Obedience to the Law

Biblical View - Civil Disobedience

The concept of civil disobedience is based squarely upon the presumption that there is a higher law than the temporal law of human society. The Bible clearly teaches that human beings ought to obey human law, and that promoting order in society is an essential part of God's will for mankind. That said, when civil law literally conflicts with God's revealed law in ways which prevent people from being obedient to God, his revelation indicates that the human law is

illegitimate, and that obedience to God is the proper response. This very well may mean that an individual will receive punishment from the human authorities as a result of this disobedience. But allegiance to God is the Bible's ultimate standard for every human being. Any law that forces people to disobey God is illegitimate and is not to be obeyed. (Exodus 1:15-22; Daniel 3:1-30; Acts 4:18-20, 5:28-29; Romans 13:1-10)

Naturalistic View - Focus on the Collective

In Naturalism, there is no higher law than that which is established by the governing authorities. As such, civil disobedience is recognized as illegitimate and cannot be not tolerated.

High Value of Individual Human Life Vs. Low Value of Individual Human Life

Biblical View - High Value of Human Life

Based on a biblical worldview, human beings are persons specially created in the image of God. We have a spiritual existence and spiritual qualities which are of a different order than other created creatures. Human beings have a capacity to engage an objectively real personal relationship with God which is not available to other material creatures.

Because of this special status, biblical Christians have a high view of human life. The Bible teaches that no one is allowed to take innocent human life, and to do so is a particular affront to God. As such, all laws and rules that humans create should have a built-in bias toward not killing innocent human life by any means. (Genesis 1:27; Deuteronomy 27:25; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 12:42-46)

Naturalistic View - Low Value of Human Life

Based on a naturalistic worldview, human beings are merely one form of natural animal which is no more spe-

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cial than any other natural animal in existence. Human beings are recognized to have unique characteristics based on a larger and more complex brain, but this uniqueness does not, in any way, provide special status to the human animal. In fact, other animals are seen to be actually superior in other ways (ex. faster, stronger, more stealthy, etc.). All animals are understood to be equally valuable in an objective sense.

Naturalistic belief asserts that every life form arrived at its current state based on naturalistic evolution. Thus, all living things are merely part of an evolutionary continuum. That being the case, human life has no more intrinsic value than any other life form. With that kind of reasoning, such things as abortion, capital punishment, or any other form of taking life, is not viewed as a bad thing in and of itself. It can only be good or bad based on the particular circumstances surrounding it. If it is considered good for the survival of the collective, there is no moral wrong to be considered. Thus, when societal laws and rules are created, the life of any particular individual is secondary to what is considered to be the needs of the collective.

Equality of Opportunity Vs. Equality of Outcomes

Biblical View - Equality of Opportunity

The concept of equality can be expressed in various ways. Based on biblical worldview beliefs, equality is based on the value of the individual. God has created individuals with special value and with unique abilities. In order to achieve excellence and accomplish God's purpose for their lives, the Bible teaches that each person is to be a good steward of those gifts by using them as effectively as they can in life. Not everyone is the same. Different people were created with the ability to excel in different areas of life. As a result, the outcomes of people's efforts will

be different based on their personal decisions and strengths.

The biblical revelation expresses the idea that individuals should be provided with the freedom to pursue their lives based on their gifting from God. This promotes the idea that everything everyone does in response to God's leading is of value. As such, everyone ought to be provided with an equal opportunity in life to pursue this leading from God. (Proverbs 22:2; Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 10:12; James 2:1-4)

Naturalistic View - Focus on the Collective

A naturalistic worldview is based on a different set of underlying values. Rather than valuing the special gifting of individuals, the focus is on promoting the survival and advancement of the collective. As such, individuals are encouraged to pursue their own opportunities only to the degree that it promotes the higher value of the collective. In cases where it is deemed by those who control society that certain needs must be accounted for, the opportunity of individuals to pursue their own desires can be legitimately curtailed.

Individual Liberty Vs. Priority of the Collective

Biblical View - Individual Liberty

At this point, we come to a principle which informs all of the rest of the matters we will be considering – the priority of the individual as opposed to the priority of the collective.

Based on a biblical worldview, the individual has priority. As such, all laws and societal rules should be crafted in such a way as to promote the growth and development of individuals. This does not mean that the collective should not be taken into account, only that the individual is primary. It is society's duty to create an environment which facilitates and encourages an individual's willing-

ness and ability to move into that relationship, but the relationship itself must be established at an individual level.

The reason for a priority on the individual is that God created individual human beings for the specific purpose of relationship with himself. To pursue this, each person must have the freedom to make decisions which move them in that direction. God created mankind with that ability, and revealed that all should live life based on it. (Deuteronomy 24:16; Proverbs 9:12; Isaiah 61:1-11; Jeremiah 31:30, 34:8, 15-17; Ezekiel 18:20; John 8:36; Romans 13:1-10; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 5:10; Galatians 5:1, 13; James 1:25)

Naturalistic View - Focus on the Collective

A Naturalistic worldview, on the other hand, is based on a belief that the highest value is the survival of the species. Since it does not acknowledge the existence of God, and it views human beings as nothing more than one part of an evolved natural order, individuals are only valuable as they contribute to the survival of the collective. Thus, if it is judged, by those in a position to make the rules, that society would be better off by allowing either the harming or promotion of certain individuals or classes of individuals, that could be deemed okay.

Impartial Judges Vs. Judges Who Take into Consideration the "Greater Good"

Biblical View - Impartial Judges

The idea of impartiality, as it relates to the legal system, seems only fair to most people. However, the very concept of fairness, itself, must be based on some overarching principle. Based on biblical teachings, that would be the revelation of God himself. As such, fairness, as expressed in the Bible, becomes an absolute which cannot be violated. The Bible teaches that God, himself, is impartial in his judgment of mankind, and has revealed that this is a point of view which should characterize human judgment of other humans. (Leviticus 19:1, 15, 35-37; Deuteronomy 1:16-17; Proverbs 11:1, 16:10-13)

Naturalistic View - The Greater Good

Naturalism has no such absolute base. It believes that the natural universe is all that exists. As such, the most important principle for society is to promote its survival and the greater good. This may include impartiality in making judgments, but that is not an absolute. A naturalistic approach could just as easily allow for partiality, if the judges believe that would be better for the greater good of the collective. There is nothing in Naturalism which demands fairness.

Due Process Vs. Consideration of the Greater Good

Biblical View - Due Process

Due process is another expression of a biblical worldview based on God's revelation. This principle refers to the necessity of having the opportunity for an individual to tell his or her side of the story during any judicial proceeding. The idea is that one cannot be deprived of life, liberty, or individual stewardship responsibility, unless this qualification has been met. Once again, this is seen as an absolute principle. The Bible conveys the idea that due process is an expression of the kind of fairness God exhibits, and expects society to follow. (Deuteronomy 25:1-3, 19:15; Numbers 35:30)

Naturalistic View - The Greater Good

Based on a naturalistic worldview, proper due process is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is also not absolute. For something to be absolute, there must be some absolute basis for its existence; and since Naturalism has no foundation for absolute values, it is understood that there might be times when due process may not be in the best interest of the collective. The more appropriate standard in Naturalism would be the interest of the greater good – which is determined by those who hold power in the society.

Equal Justice Under the Law vs. Consideration of the Greater Good

Biblical View - Equal Justice Under the Law

Another expression of a biblical worldview is equal justice under the law. This is the belief that everyone, no matter their station in life, is of equal value, and that justice should not be portioned out based on an individual's life circumstance. In this view, the law, rather than human status, is the ultimate basis for judgment. The very idea of equal justice under that law is based on the belief that God, himself, judges this way, and has revealed that human beings should judge likewise in their legal system. (Deuteronomy 16:18; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Ephesians 6:9)

Naturalistic View - The Greater Good

Once again, Naturalists don't necessarily dismiss the concept of equal justice under the law out of hand. Many, if not most, would recognize this, generally, as a good basis for judicial practice. That said, there is nothing to establish it as an absolute standard. It is the ones judging who must set the ultimate standard, as Naturalists do not acknowledge any source for a transcendent law. Thus, if those who hold power perceive that equal justice, in particular circumstances, does not further the greater good of the collective, a different standard can be used.

Formal Accusations Vs. Consideration of the Greater Good

Biblical View - Formal Accusations

The purpose for requiring formal accusations is to promote justice based on truth, rather than on the personal desires of those who hold power. It is quite easy for an individual to accuse another of wrongdoing out of a desire for personal gain. A formal accusation establishes a framework where the person being accused has the ability to understand what they are being accused of, as well as the opportunity to respond.

Once again, this principle is an expression of biblical revelation. Based on biblical teachings, human beings have the ability to freely choose to do right or wrong. Choosing against God is the very definition of sin, and is that which separates a person from him. To get that problem corrected, individuals must understand their sin so they can repent. God, in his revelation, has explained to humanity what sin looks like and why it is an offense against him. The revelation, then, becomes a formal accusation to which the individual is able to respond. This principle is held forth as one that expresses a proper element of justice in the legal process. (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19)

Naturalistic View - The Greater Good

As with previous principles, the naturalistic belief about formal accusations is based on a naturalistic worldview. And as before, Naturalists don't necessarily see providing formal accusations as a bad thing – it is just not absolute. At those times when the "powers that be" believe that providing formal accusations may not be in the best interest of the collective, there is no compelling reason to operate on that basis. The most compelling standard, in Naturalism, remains the greater good of the collective – which is determined by those who hold power in society.

Legal Trials Vs. Consideration of the Greater Good

Biblical View - Legal Trials

The purpose of a legal trial is to provide the person being accused of a crime a means to be fairly treated based on true justice, rather than on the capriciousness of those in power. A legal trial is one which is conducted based on a standard set of rules which cannot be violated. No individual, or group, should have the power to accuse or convict a person of a crime based on arbitrary rules, or on their own authority.

As before, this principle is an expression of biblical revelation. When God judges human beings for their

sin, it is not done in an arbitrary manner. The rules of judgment are firmly established based on a fixed, and known, set of spiritual laws which God has revealed to mankind. God impartially judges humanity based on these unchanging principles. He has revealed that human society should also operate using this principle. (Deuteronomy 1:16, 17:9; Exodus 18:21-22)

Naturalistic View - The Greater Good

While many, if not most, Naturalists would agree that having "legal trials" is a good, and even proper, standard, Naturalism does not provide a basis for making that judgment. In Naturalism, there is no absolute standard for any moral claim, as there is no authority which can be considered absolute. All moral expressions must be created and judged by those in society who have the authority to do so. Legal trials can be seen as good in circumstances where it helps maintain order in society. But if there are circumstances where it is considered that the greater good of the collective is served by a different system, there is no reason why that can't be done, as well.

The Foundation of Values Matters

In American society, biblical values are, without question, the basis for understanding right morality and fairness, in the legal system and throughout the rest of society. Even those who are not Christians generally acknowledge the "rightness" of these values.

That said, when the source for the values is denigrated or are set aside, it will not be very long before the values themselves are eroded. Even when the values are considered to be a proper ideal, when the foundation for the values is not understood to be absolute, they may be put aside in circumstances where it is considered to benefit the greater good of the collective (based on the evaluation of those who hold power).

The source of values does matter. There is a way reality is actually structured, and that way is that God exists and has spoken to mankind in his revelation. In that revelation, he has given us guidance as to what is right and wrong, and we do not have a right to alter it.

To the degree we acknowledge God and follow his ways, we will thrive – individually and as a society. To the degree we push him aside, we will collapse into ruin.

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