

Introduction

A little girl asked her daddy a question, "**Do all fairy tales begin with 'Once upon a time'?**" "**No sweetheart,**" he answered, "**Some begin with 'If I'm elected'.**" There is a kernel of truth in that joke. The reality is that politicians often don't do in office what they promise to do in their campaigns. We don't always know what we're getting when we vote. Nonetheless, we need to vote and we need to vote competently. We need to vote as Jesus would if He were us and that's what I'm going to preach about – two days before what is probably the most defining presidential election in my lifetime.

Of the People

Peter's text, 1 Peter 2:13-17 is a companion to Paul's, Romans 13:1-7. Notice a term he uses in verse 13, "**human institution.**" The word "**institution**" there connotes government. The government under which Peter and first century Christians lived consisted of an emperor, a senate, and consuls. It was autocratic or dictatorial though because the senate and consuls answered to the emperor who answered to no one.

Now, Peter articulates the same principle Paul does in Romans 13. God established or ordained this government. It served His purpose of ordering human life and restraining anarchy from ruining it. While we abhor autocratic forms of government like Rome's, it did bring a stability and peace to the ancient world it had never known, the celebrated "**Pax Romana,**" which many conquered peoples received gratefully.

That insight is foundational to Peter's command in verse 13. Christians were to submit to the Roman government including, in verse 14, the provincial governors through whom the emperor ruled over them. Submission, except to its profanities, is the appropriate response to an autocratic form of government. Christians were to abide by Rome's laws - to do what it told them including pay taxes.

That's all well and good but how does it apply to 21st century

American Christians? Ours, in sharp contrast to Rome's, is a republican form of government. It's a government **"of the people"** as Abraham Lincoln described. Public officials elected by the people and answerable to them comprise it. In that form of government, the duty of citizens isn't just to submit to it but also to participate in it. It isn't just to submit to being ruled but to take a necessary share in the ruling as well.

That necessary share involves a host of activities the foundational of which is voting. Read the 15th, 19th, and 24th amendments to the United States Constitution. They assure that people can't be denied the right to vote because they're black or female, or because they haven't paid their taxes. Those amendments assume two things. Voting is both a precious privilege and a pressing duty. Because it is that, good citizens vote, which means we're bad citizens if we don't. So, vote!

But it isn't enough just to vote. In verse 15, Peter observes that God's will is that we **"do right"** as citizens. The reference point of rightness of course is Jesus. Rightness is rooted in the person He is. It's rooted in His character in other words. That implies that it isn't enough just to vote. We must also vote as Jesus would if He were us.

If Jesus were us, an American citizen today, He would vote in three ways, each of which I'm going to explain.

Vote Intelligently

First, Jesus would vote intelligently, and so should we. Voting intelligently requires two things.

One is knowledge. We need to be voters in the know.

If what we're voting on is an issue, we learn what it explicitly does. We discover the intended and immediate consequence of it passing. We also learn what it implicitly does. We discover the consequences that necessarily follow from the intended consequence.

One of our local issues, for instance, is the Poland School levy. We learn what it explicitly does. It imposes a 5.9 mill levy on property owners, which is \$180 a year for a \$100,000 home. We also learn what it

implicitly does. According to campaign literature, it will prevent a state takeover of the school system and restore last year's cuts among many other things. We need to know what that issue and all issues do.

If what we're voting on is an office, we learn its nature, that is, the purposes it serves and the powers it bestows. We also learn the nature of the candidates running for it, that is, their ideology, competence, and character. Take the presidency as an example of what I mean.

First, we learn the president's purpose, which the oath of office he takes states. It's to **"preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."** That generally, is his purpose. Because it is, we should learn the ideology of the candidates in that regard. Some people, called "textualists," view the Constitution as an enduring document. They think it should be interpreted as its signers intended. Others view it as a living document. They think it should be interpreted as our own reason and judgment direct. In his autobiography, Barak Obama tells us what his view is. It's a living document. Mitt Romney's view, as best as I can tell, is that it's an enduring document.

Second, we learn the president's powers, like the power to direct the Justice Department or to issue Executive Orders. That second power, to issue Executive Orders, is so affecting that it's called **"executive fiat."** It's like a magic wand. The President speaks and it is so.

The President's ideology directs what orders he issues. The "Mexico City Policy" is a classic example of what I mean. It prohibits federal funding of overseas organizations that perform or promote abortion. On his fourth day in office, Barak Obama issued an executive order rescinding that policy. Mitt Romney claims that one of his first acts, if he's elected president, will be to issue an executive order reinstating it.

All of that demonstrates the first thing that voting intelligently requires. It's knowledge. We should be voters in the know.

There's a second thing it requires – good logic. We apply the logical relations of implication and contradiction to what we know and draw valid conclusions from it. With regard to an issue, the conclusion is about

whether it's moral or immoral on the one hand and wise (more helpful than harmful) or foolish (more harmful than helpful) on the other. With regard to an office, the conclusion is about which candidate has the ideology, competence, and character best to fulfill its purposes and to exercise its powers.

It's clear, I think, to us all. Jesus would vote intelligently and we should too. So, be knowledgeable and logical and do just that.

Vote Objectively

But Jesus wouldn't just vote intelligently, He'd vote objectively as well. To be objective means to have a mind that's open to truth, to reality, to the facts, to the way things are, or however we wish to say it.

The minds of many voters aren't. They're closed instead by one or both of two things – cherished ideas and deep-seeded emotions. False ideas and/or destructive emotions prejudice them against the truth. When the truth goes against the grain of what they think or feel, they reject it out of hand without even considering it.

We all know that by experience don't we. My wife has instructed me never to bring up political subjects of any kind with certain members of our family. You know the old adage, "**Never discuss religion or politics.**" Think about that. Religion and politics are the two most significant issues in human life. So, why does conventional wisdom advise us never to discuss them? It's because of the consequences when we do. They're rarely constructive: minds are rarely changed. And they're also almost always destructive: feelings are almost always enflamed. Discussing politics is usually more harmful than helpful.

What's going on here? It's that people are in the grip of ideas and emotions. That grip is so tight that it blinds them to reality. It makes them oblivious to facts, no matter how indisputable. It also compels them to attack anyone who disagrees with them. Most people are too close minded to have a civil conversation with them about politics.

But in politics, as in all the arenas of life, God calls us to be

objective pursuers of truth. So, be open-minded enough to see things as they really are. Follow the evidence we know wherever it leads us, whether we like it or not. Draw valid conclusions from the facts we know, whether we like it or not.

Almost all of you know I'm a registered Republican. But I try to be objective. I talked with a Republican who made this judgment about Barack Obama and the six trillion dollar deficit during his four years in office, "**Any president who gets us trillions of dollars in debt is a bad one.**" I then pointed to George Bush and the five trillion dollar deficit during his eight years in office and said, "**By your standard, Bush was a bad president as well.**" The logic is this, using his own first premise. **Premise #1:** Any president who gets us trillions of dollars in debt is a bad president. **Premise #2:** George Bush got us trillions of dollars in debt. **Conclusion:** George Bush was a bad president. That is the valid conclusion of those premises. If they are true, it is also necessarily true. But my Republican friend refuses to draw it. He insists Bush was a good president instead, contrary to his own standard, which means he isn't objective.

Don't be like that man whether you're a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. Follow the facts wherever they lead, whether you like it or not. Vote objectively! That's what Jesus would do and so should we.

Vote Biblically

There's a third way that Jesus would vote and I've saved the most important for last. He would vote Biblically and so should we.

I'd observe two things about the Bible. First, it's authoritative. Because God wrote it, it's absolutely binding on us. Second, it's relevant. Much of what it teaches speaks directly or by implication to political questions before us. Consider the following texts and the issues they address as examples of what I mean: (1) Psalm 139 - pro-life and anti-life (abortion) legislation; (2) Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 - marriage legislation; (3) 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 - welfare legislation and reform;

(4) Proverbs 6:1-5 – lottery legislation; and (5) Romans 13:4 – capital punishment legislation. Yes, the Bible is authoritative and relevant.

So, vote the Bible! Some people are straight ticket Republicans or Democrats. Be straight ticket Christians who always vote the Bible.

Vote the Bible when it comes to issues. Vote *for* those that are consistent with its teachings, and *against* those that are inconsistent with its teachings. I voted for the first time in 1973. The most hyped issue that year was Issue 1, which would create the Ohio Lottery Commission. I voted against it because gambling, especially the state sponsored kind, is contrary to the Bible.

Also vote the Bible when it comes to offices. In a sermon he preached, Rick Warren said: **“Well, I like that guy’ – that’s a stupid reason to vote for somebody. You need to know their worldview. Read their platforms. And then vote your worldview.”** **“Your worldview”** means **“the Bible’s worldview.”** We should know the worldviews of the candidates as best as we can and stack them up against the Bible’s. Sometimes, it’s a tossup. Both generally do or don’t have Biblical worldviews. But when one clearly does and the other clearly doesn’t, that becomes a defining factor in determining for whom we vote.

In his insightful book *The Christian Mind*, Harry Blamires calls followers of Jesus to have a Biblical mind that **“relates all human problems – social, political, cultural – to the doctrinal foundations of the Christian faith.”** I say **“right on”** to that. Take your Bible with you (figuratively speaking) into the voting booth on Tuesday.

Conclusion

Earlier this year, a controversial televangelist, Bill Keller, set up a website to do this - get Christians to cast a write-in vote for Jesus in the presidential election. I don’t know about you, but I’m not going to do that. I am going to do my best though to vote intelligently, objectively, and Biblically. Why? It’s because Jesus is the Lord of everything, including voting, and that’s how He’d vote if He were me.