

Preacher's Pen points

Exercising Civil Responsibility



As Christians in America we have the awesome privilege of selecting those who govern us. Peter wrote, *“Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves of God. (1 Pet. 2:16)*. This November, as at all other times, Christians may “use their freedom as bond-slaves of God” to fashion a civil government in keeping with God’s original purposes.

What is the function of civil government?

Paul explained that it was necessary for Christians to honor governmental officials, obey the laws of the land, and pay taxes because civil government is God’s institution (Rom. 13:1-7). His purpose in ordaining it is clearly stated: *“For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil” (v. 3-4)*.

God intended that civil government recognize His authority and the concepts of good and evil—to encourage those who do right and punish those who do wrong. It was His intention that legislation and law-enforcement be rooted in the eternal moral principles of His character and word. An ideal theocratic state seems hardly possible in a country of such diversity. However it is not unreasonable to hope that the leavening influence of God’s word would effect the majority of our citizens so as to secure a country founded upon the rule of moral law and that provides the greatest freedom for spiritual life and work. Understand-

ing God’s purpose for civil government will enable us to make better informed choices about those who make our laws and those whose job it is to execute them.

Participating in the process

It is interesting to notice how politicians and participants in public debate almost always appeal ultimately to what is “right” and “wrong” to determine what policies should be adopted. Thus, I offer these suggestions for all of us as we listen to the political debate over the next two months.

- Try to avoid a “band wagon” mentality and think independently, looking beyond the persuasive rhetoric of political spin and resistance to blind adherence to a political party.
- Listen carefully to each candidate for office and what he/she has to say about the issues that may face our society.
- Try to develop a sense of the core beliefs and practices of the person; for these will ultimately affect his policy decisions.
- Evaluate each candidate on the basis of a broad spectrum of issues of moral significance, determining which would best help create the divinely-purposed functions of government.

Sometimes Christians, in my opinion, place too much emphasis upon political power as a means of securing a better society. Instead I still believe the greatest thing we can do is proclaim God’s word to everyone who will listen. But even so, we should not neglect to use what power we have as citizens to create government that acknowledges the authority of the one who ordained it!

—Johnny Felker (www.truthchasers.com)