

How Should Christians Vote?

by: Ronald L. Dart

I have to read a lot in preparation for the 'Born to Win' radio program, but most of what I'm finding to read these days is about politics. I have a feeling that we're all, you and me, getting a politics overload. I would like to walk away from it, but I don't think I should.

Qualifications For President

There are some important things we need to think about regarding these people who are asking for our votes. We could very easily fall victim to the law of unintended consequences. We could wind up with something we really don't want to have.

Now I will not be endorsing any of the candidates. I can't. I regard them all with equal suspicion, but there was something that Governor Huckabee said in one of the debates that got me to thinking. He said that "People would rather vote for someone who reminds them of their next-door neighbor than the man who laid them off at work." I think that was a shot at Mitt Romney, but it was a great line for a debate, but it was utterly irrelevant.

Now I live in a great neighborhood. I love my neighbors but I wouldn't vote for any of them for president. Now if I need a dog sitter, that's another matter entirely. I would trust those people with my dog and you have no idea how big a deal that is.

But anyone remotely qualified for the office of president of the United States has to be an exceptional man or an exceptional woman, even to get to the place to where they can be nominated. They are nothing like your next-door neighbor and nothing at all like you.

Power Can Corrupt

No offense, but we don't want someone like you or me running the country. So let's make a note of this for starters. None of the people we are watching in the political arena are normal folks like you and me. They are people who are obsessed with power and by virtue of the fact that they are running for the highest office in the land, they are seeking more power. It was Lord Acton who said it, and it's become true again and again and again. "Power corrupts," and everybody knows that the greater the power, the greater the potential, almost the greater the certainty of corruption.

Vote for the Lesser of Two Evils

Now that doesn't mean that you and I can afford to walk away and ignore the whole process, wash our hands and say, "It is too corrupt, I don't want to have anything to do with it," because sometimes we are required to vote for the lesser of two evils. I'm even prepared to say, that's what we have to do all the time. I know that doesn't seem quite right. Christian folk would like to vote for the good and we're tempted to think, "Well, if I can't decide for the good, I just won't decide at all." But you have to decide. You can't just walk away from it, and more often than not, refusing to decide is the worst decision of all.

Balance of Powers

Now I'll venture to say that every politician in a democratic society is corrupt to some degree, to whatever extent they have power, they have been corrupted by it. I think the founders knew that this was, not only possible, it was certain. So they tried their best to balance out the power of one side of government with the power of another side of government. They call it, the balance of powers. Our three branches of government are supposed to be separate and equal from one another.

Now the system isn't perfect. Perfection in human government is simply not possible and so consequently we are always going to be choosing between the lesser of alternatives, neither of which makes us happy. We are just trying to do the best we can.

The Press Is Powerful

It is our job to hold the politicians feet to the fire and to hold them accountable. We can't count on them doing it themselves. The old-school journalists used to understand this, but the press has become, in many ways, more powerful than the government. This has not always been the case, but it's been the case longer than I think most of us realize.

I ran across a quotation from a publication called "Heroes and Hero Worship" by Thomas Carlyle written back in 1841. Listen to what the man said, "Turning now to the government of men, old Parliament was a great thing. The affairs of the nation were there deliberated and decided; what we were to do as a nation. But does not, through the name Parliament subsists, the parliamentary debate goes on now, everywhere and at all times in a more comprehensive way, out of Parliament altogether?" Now here is what he is talking about, in his day, this was in 1841, although there were always great debates going on in Parliament, there were tremendous debates going on in the public all the time. When you think about it, this is still true. The debate on the issues of the day is going on everywhere, all the time. It goes on around the dinner table. It goes on in bars and coffee houses, it goes on on the job, and even at church. Now we're all aware of this.

Now you tune into talking head TV and they will say to you, "We are going to have so-and-so on here in the next few minutes and we will debate this subject. Malarkey! They are not debating, they are haranguing one another, but that's another subject for another time.

The Fourth Estate

Continuing to quote Carlisle, Burke said, "There were Three Estates in Parliament." Now this is a reference to the old French Ancien Régime. The Three Estates were the church, the nobility and the people. Continuing, Burke said, "There were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder," he said, pointing, "There sat a Fourth Estate more important by far than they all." Now you have likely heard the press referred to as the Fourth Estate. This is the origin of the term, Visualize Parliament in session, sparing back and forth, men representing the people, arguing their case and looking over them all, the Reporter's Gallery, and Burke said, "There sat the Fourth Estate more important far than they all," the men on the floor of Parliament. He said, "It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact,-- very momentous to us in these times. Literature is our Parliament too. Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to democracy; invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable. Writing brings Printing; brings universal every day extempore Printing as we see at present. Whoever can speak," he continues, "speaking now to the whole nation becomes a power, a branch of government with inalienable weight in lawmaking in all acts of authority."

Good grief, it's true! And when you think about it, you know it's true. Your Congressman has got a certain amount of authority, he has a reasonable amount of power, but your Congressman goes in amongst 400 other people and he sits there listening to the debate and makes his argument, and you may never hear a speech he makes on the floor of the House, but I'll tell you what, you get some talking head on television or you get some influential columnist, when they write, they are heard by far more people than your Congressman is. People who vote can vote your Congressman right out of office.

Continuing to quote, "It matters not what rank he has, what revenues or garnitures, the requisite thing is, that he have a tongue of which others will listen to; this and nothing more is requisite. The nation is governed by all that has tongue in the nation: Democracy is virtually there. Add only, that whatsoever power exists will have itself, by-and-by, organized; working secretly under bandages, obscurations, obstructions, it will never rest, till it gets to work free, unencumbered, visible to all. Democracy virtually extent will insist on becoming palpably extent." That's the end of the quotation from Carlisle.

No nation, no people, no time in history has seen this more evidently than our own. The fourth estate has profoundly influenced our politics and governments for generations. That means of necessity, just follows, that the press is as corrupt as the government.

Freedom of the press is necessary for a democracy, but who will limit their power, if not you and me. Now how do we do that? Well, we are making a stab at it nowadays, but in the end, we the people will have to punish anyone in the press who corrupts his responsibility.

CBS has paid a price for Dan Rather's attempt to influence the election against George Bush. Their news division now is almost a joke. Now we have 24 seven news service, plus the Internet for the meanest of us all, we've got a voice and the obligations of power rest on all of us. We can't walk away from it

A Prophet Who Tried To Run Away

There's a great story in the Bible about the prophet who tried to run away. His name was Jonah, and everybody knows his story.

The word of Lord came to him and said, "Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh and tell them what I bid you to tell them." Well, Jonah listened and he went straight down to the ocean, got on a ship and went the other way as hard as he could go. But, we all know he didn't get away. The Lord sent a storm after him and it nearly sank the ship, but finally he told the guys on the ship what was going on and he told them, "Throw me overboard." I don't know why he didn't jump, but I guess he didn't have the nerve.

So finally the guys did all they could to save the ship, him and them, but finally gave up and threw him overboard.

A great fish was prepared and swallowed Jonah. I won't tell you the whole story, but in summary, he ended up filling the responsibility God gave him even though he smelled a lot like fish by the time he finally got to Nineveh.

(The person we vote for president must be the person that we feel will face and solve our national problems of the economy, jobs, debt, national security, keeping our military strong, and continuing the fight against terrorism and not run away from our problems and play golf.)

A Real Prophet Must Speak God's Word Faithfully

Now I'm not a prophet, and neither are you. Although there's probably someone reading this article who thinks he is. To all of us, a real prophet has this word from God. It's found in Jeremiah chapter 23. This is the chapter where God absolutely takes the hide off of prophets who are not doing things the way He wants it done.

It's in Jeremiah 23 and verse 26, "How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yes, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart. {27} They think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbors as their fathers had forgotten my name for Baal. {28} The prophet that has a

dream, let him tell his dream, and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff (the dreams) to the wheat (that's my word)?" says God.

Now you have to understand this, even though we don't wear the prophets mantle, we have the Bible and we need to speak it faithfully. You probably have got one right there in your house, maybe on your desk, it might be on your coffee table, it might be on a bookshelf or somewhere, but you have got one.

The Bible is our word from God. We don't really have to have a dream. God has said enough down through the ages, He shouldn't have to do this twice. He should be able to tell us once and that should be sufficient.

So, we have got the Word. Our job is to be faithful with it, but you should know this, about anybody who picks up the Word, anybody who is a prophet, they are not better, they are not more righteous than anyone else. If they pretend to be or look like they are, to whatever extent that's done, it's a deception.

Isaiah Was a Real Prophet

Take a man that we all recognize to be a prophet. I would call him the greatest of the writing prophets, the finest poet in the Old Testament. His name was Isaiah. He was a priest. He tells this story in Isaiah chapter 6, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up and his train filled the temple. {2} Above it stood the seraphim, one had six wings and with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. {3} And one cried to another, and said "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." {4} And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried and the house was filled with smoke." By this time, Isaiah's knees had probably given out.

{5} "Then Isaiah said, "Woe is me. I'm undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." You know, we should be able to identify with this, not division so much, as with the condition of the man, that we also are a people of unclean lips, and if anyone lived in the midst of a land of people of unclean lips, we are the ones.

So he said, {6} "One of the Seraphim flew to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he took with tongs off the altar {7} And he laid it upon my mouth and said, "Lo, this has touched your lips, your iniquity is taken away, your sin is purged." So, getting ourselves clear of some of these things may prove to be painful. I don't relish the idea of a coal of fire being put on my lips.

But then {8} "Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Who shall I send? Who will go for us? And then said Isaiah, "Here I am, send me." So, sometimes for anyone who's going to speak the Word of God to a society, whether he's had a vision or had a dream or anything

else, God is going to have to work him over before he gets out there. And in the end, he will decide he wants to be faithful.

(We have seen that God wants His prophets to be Faithful to Him. Most of the people in the United States probably know and believe that our Constitution was divinely inspired and is one of our country's greatest blessings. The man that we vote for president must be the person that we feel will Faithfully support and govern using the Constitution as his guide. And hopefully he will also use the Bible as his guide.)

Likability is a Fringe Benefit

Now here's something else we ought to think about in an election year as we're contemplating the men who are running for public office. Watch out for voting on the basis of whether you like the man or the woman or not. Likability is a nice fringe benefit, but the person who becomes our president is going to have to do some things that nice people don't usually do. They are going to have to do things that you and I, if we were in that position, would not want to do.

President Jimmy Carter

President Jimmy Carter comes to mind. He was an idealist. He wanted to pursue human rights. He was a Christian man but the problem is, I don't get the feeling that Jimmy Carter ever quite made the distinction between his duty as an individual Christian and his duty as a head of state. They are not the same. President Bush like Jimmy Carter was an idealist. He had an ideal of the Middle East that very likely will never exist in this world.

King David

Now a contrasting example of these two comes to mind. His name was King David. King David was a remarkable man in every way and reading his works, we all have come to the place to which we admire, respect and like King David, but candidly, if you had been on the ground at the same time David was, I don't know that you would have liked him so much. You know he was the first world leader to disarm Iraq and to pull serious teeth at the same time in the same fell swoop. King David is called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), but he was a fighting man of the first water and he had to do a lot of things that nice people don't do. He actually got himself in trouble with God on more than one occasion. Because power can corrupt and it got to King David.

Oh sure, he really knew better than to call Bathsheba over from her house to his house while her husband was away in battle. He knew better than that. He knew it was wrong. He just thought he was the King and because he was the King and because he could do it, he did it.

There are many things about King David we might not like, but he was the man of the hour. The problem was, David was such a violent man, that he was not allowed to build the

Temple of God. He was allowed to gather the materials for it, but it was left for his son, Solomon, to build the Temple.

Be Suspicious When Voting

Now when you consider voting for president, be suspicious of the image of a nice person and never believe an idealist. Whoever is the next president of the United States is going to have to do some things that none of us would like to do. We may not admire him very much when he does it, but there comes a time and place where it has to be done.

Be suspicious and watch out for any promises of compassionate government. Compassion is a human emotion. Government is not human, it is a system. There's a distinction here that keeps getting overlooked.

How Does God Avenge Us?

You can look this up later. There's an explanation offered by the apostle Paul that begins in Romans chapter 12 and verse 17 and continues on through chapter 13. He starts out in Romans 12:17 by simply telling us we're not supposed to avenge ourselves, that we are to say, "God will take care of it." God says, "I will avenge you, I will repay." Paul tells us in verse 20, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him." Now all of these instructions are given to us as Christians in private life. For us to be able to do this, there must be someone to protect the innocent and to avenge the wronged. Vengeance, by the way, is the central value of justice. It is not for you and I to take personal vengeance but nevertheless somebody is going to be God's agent in avenging the people who are wronged.

Paul goes right on in chapter 13 without breaking stride. How exactly does God avenge those who have been wronged? What is His instrument in doing this? Well Paul explains it in chapter 13. It's the authorities, the governing authorities, the powers that be, the state. God has established them. God has authorized the state and when the time comes for God to take vengeance on people, the chances are, He's going to do it through some government authority.

Now Paul doesn't discuss what you do if you are the one in authority, because in his day and time that was not an issue and couldn't be. Now a person doesn't lay aside his Christian conscience when he enters government, but he takes on a whole new layer of responsibility for judgment and for justice. Think about King David, think about any civil leader of God's country. He has got to do some things that a Christian in private life must not do.

Hurricane Katrina

Now when it comes to the question of compassion and government, consider Hurricane Katrina. By all accounts and by general agreement, government failed miserably. Who stepped up and performed magnificently, I ask you? Christian churches! God bless them. I

was so proud after Hurricane Katrina at the way the Christian churches took care of those refugees who showed up on their doorstep.

When I am looking for compassion, I will not look to government, I will go to a Christian every time!

Promises of Politicians Are Like Pie Crust, Made to be Broken

Now here is something else to think about. Watch out for voting for a candidate on the basis of his or her promises. Promises of politicians are like pie crust, made to be broken. Now there is a whole litany of promises being made out there by the candidates, that I really like, but don't worry, none of them will ever happen.

Now, for example, I really like the fair tax idea. The fair tax would be good for the country, but it will never pass Congress! I would respect a candidate who would say "I would love to do away with the IRS and I will if I can," but unless you could do something about Congress, it isn't going to happen! That is the truth! And why isn't it going to happen in Congress? Well because it would involve the relinquishing of a lot of power and that's something Congress is just not very good at.

The only thing that you and I can do is take power away from the congressman or the senator in our district because we can't do much about the whole package.

Now how can I be so sure about all of this? Well, taxation is one of the greatest powers the government has and can you expect an institution so addicted to power to give up any of it? I don't think so!

King or Queen

So while I am talking about Congress, here's another thing you can consider. Watch out for any candidate who talks like he or she is running for King or Queen. Now what do I mean by that? My example, is that some politicians, promises to take money from the big oil companies and distribute it among the more deserving. Now I don't feel I need to defend big oil, but really, to tax the oil companies and use the money for whatever it is that they want to use it for can be a breathtaking statement.

By the way, has anyone ever considered who actually owns big oil? A lot of it is owned by mutual funds, where a lot of working people have their IRAs invested. Taking money from big-oil may in fact be taking it away from your retirement funds. Take a look at your IRA, your mutual funds. Does your mutual fund own any Exxon? Chances are it does, and that's is going to be the money that politicians want to take.

If you want any real change to take place in government, you're going to have to look at your congressman. You're going to have to start locally. You are going to have to do it right there in your hometown to the people you send to Washington.

One more thing we should think about. Watch out for any suggestions that Jesus would endorse one or the other of the candidates. If you want to know how a civil government would function under Jesus you'll have to go back to the Israelite history before the monarchy. It failed because men failed their duty to God and to country.

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