

The Christian Voter's Guide

By Jeff Short

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn (Proverbs 29:2).

As Christian citizens, we sometimes wonder what the extent of our involvement with the civil government of our country should be. Usually, election time sparks a renewed interest in this issue. In this article I would like to consider especially one aspect of civil involvement - voting. Voting is one means by which we may be involved and help to elect leaders that will cause **the people** 'to **rejoice.** "

Our text makes it obvious that we have a certain interest in the government of our land. The people can be made to **rejoice** or **mourn** by those in authority. Our government can affect us positively or negatively. In fact, our leaders have a profound power to impact our lives morally, socially, and economically. They can affect us as citizens, as churches, and as families. The government can encroach on our freedoms through expansive government, complex regulations, and burdensome taxes, or we may enjoy more liberty with a small, limited government that stays within its proper jurisdiction.

In America, we have a representative republic. The magistrates are elected to office by the citizenry of this country. This means that every adult citizen has the privilege of voting in elections. In light of our text, it would be foolish not to vote because of apathy or irresponsibility.

Perhaps, some do not make use of this privilege because voting can seem to be such an overwhelming endeavor. There are so many candidates and offices and it is hard to find reliable information. We can simplify things somewhat when we consider that each voter elects roughly about sixteen key candidates to public office on the national, state, and local levels combined. The overall number may vary given a person's exact location, e.g. if a person lives outside of an incorporated city, he will not vote for a mayor, city councilman, etc.

We can elect five candidates on the national level - a president, a vice president, two senators, and a congressman. We can elect about five candidates on the state level - a governor, a lieutenant governor, an attorney general, a senator, and one or more representatives. Depending on the place of residence, we may elect about six candidates on the local level - a mayor, a city councilman, a city attorney, the school board, a county supervisor, and a sheriff.

These are the key public office holders that we may vote for. We elect them and pay their salaries with our taxes. They are supposed to be servants of the public

and representative of their constituency. They should especially represent us morally.

When we consider the number of offices that we are responsible for, it is not such a large task to be informed of this small number of people. This brings us to the question of how we are to determine a candidate's suitability for office. Is there some reliable guide by which we can make determinations of how fit a candidate is for the office he seeks? Yes, there is such a guide; the Bible is the best Christian voter's guide.

Let us now look into our guide and see if we can find help for the voting dilemma.

Let us consider two main questions and as we proceed, I will also try to address some common questions and difficulties we meet with as Christians trying to vote with a clear conscience.

I. In the first place, how may we determine a candidate's suitability for office?

Certainly, we seek more than just opinion in this matter. What does the Bible have to say about qualifications for government leaders? Or perhaps we might ask, *'Should a Christian even vote at all or even be concerned with politics?'* We probably all share a degree of disgust with politics on all levels. Does that mean we should just stay away from the whole issue? What does the Bible have to say on this matter?

Moses prepared the people of Israel for the time when they would occupy the land of Canaan. He instructed them, **Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment** (Deuteronomy 16:18). Moses taught the people that they would be responsible for choosing their civil officers. Their form of government made the people responsible to make their own judges and officers.

This was not always the case in Israel's varied history, nor is it the case in all the world today. In some countries, the citizens cannot elect their officials in free elections.

So, I suppose that Christians in those countries do not have to face this issue of voting.

However, in the United States, we still can vote and we should. Considering our text, it would be foolish, at best, not to vote. If all Christians would quit voting, our country would move from a moral decline to a free-fall.

When Israel was self-governed, they were responsible to choose their leaders. Along with this charge, they were also given guidelines as to the type of men they should choose. There are two primary texts that bear on this subject, from

which, we will note *seven marks of qualified candidates*. There are actually many verses that seem to speak to us on this subject, but we will stick with the two primary passages in Exodus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 1:13.

After Israel was delivered from Egypt, they had grown to a very large multitude.

Moses was the chief magistrate of the civil government of the nation. He was the only judge, and the people would come to him for judgment from morning until night. Moses' father-in-law was concerned that Moses was going to wear himself out and the people too. He wisely advised that lesser judges should be chosen to help in governing the people.

Jethro also told him what types of men were fit to be civil officers. **Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens**” (Exodus 18:21). The first qualification mentioned is that they should be **able men**. **”Able** refers to strength and especially strength of character. This speaks of men of ability, integrity, virtue, and courage. These must be men who will act from principle, even in the face of opposition.

He next says that these men should **fear God**. They must have a reverence for God and His Word. They would not be atheist or agnostic. They would not advocate the removal of God's Word from all public life, nor would they advocate the transcendence of man's law to God's law. They must **fear God** for **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction** (Proverbs 1:7).

Next, they should be **men of truth**. They should love truth and hate falsehood.

They should not be perpetual prevaricators or supporters of those who are. They must love truth and seek it even when it is not convenient.

These should also be men **hating covetousness**. They should not be greedy for unjust gain. They should not seek to use their office for enriching themselves or their friends. They would also not allow others to use the government for getting unjust gain through frivolous lawsuits and massive redistribution of wealth programs. These four qualifications are given in this passage.

We find three additional qualifications in Deuteronomy 1:13: **Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you**. In this passage, Moses referred to the time in Exodus 18 when, forty years prior, Jethro counseled him to have other judges to help him.

Notice that Moses told Israel they were to **take**, or choose, the men fit for these offices, and he would **make them rulers over you.** ”

The fifth mark of those fit for office is they should be **wise men.** This means they should be skillful and intelligent. This speaks of a natural ability and a wisdom that is gained through experience. No fools need apply.

Next, they should be **understanding** men. This does not refer to some sappy sentimentalism, rather they should be able to deal wisely and discern. They must be able to make proper moral and ethical decisions. By the nature of their position they must make tough decisions, decide on legislation, etc. A fit candidate should be able to give a definite answer concerning issues such as abortion, sodomite marriages, etc.

The seventh qualification given is that they should be **known among your tribes.** ”

This indicates that these men had proven themselves among the people. They have a track record in their homes, church, community, and business. These would not be novices, but men who have earned respect in other spheres of life and labor. This probably eliminates the carpetbagger from consideration for office.

Though these verses deal with the nation of Israel, *the passages are relevant for us today.* The authority for all civil government comes from God, whether in Israel, Rome, or the United States. God defines the purpose and responsibility of the government.

Regardless of whether they acknowledge Him or not, they will be held accountable by God for how they fulfilled their responsibility.

Consider the passage in **Romans 13:1-6.** There we have the purpose of the civil government defined and the Apostle was talking about the Roman government at that time. If we compare this and other New Testament passages with Old Testament passages related to Israel, we find that the purpose of the government is the same. We can safely conclude that if the civil government authority is the same, the purpose is the same, and the jurisdiction is the same, then the qualifications for officers in the government are also the same. Therefore, we must use these guidelines to determine the suitability of candidates today and tomorrow in the US as well as any other country.

II. Secondly, we must consider another important question on this subject: Should Christians vote for a woman for public office?

A woman holding public office is an accepted fact in our day. We do not even hear this subject being debated in the public arena. For most, it is not even a consideration. In fact, probably few Christians even think about it or seriously consider whether this is acceptable by Scripture.

In America, this has been a reality since the 19th century. Susanna Medora Salter was the first woman in the history of this country to be elected to a public office. She was elected mayor of Argonia, KS in 1887. Different women had run for office before this time, but she was the first to win an election and hold a public office. Since that time, we have been used to women as mayors, governors, senators, representatives, judges, and eventually even president.

For conscientious Christians, *voting for a woman can be a dilemma when it appears that a woman is the most fit candidate for the office*. We cannot deny that this is the case at different times. A woman may be running unopposed or she may just simply be the most conservative and moral candidate by far. However, this question must be brought first of all to the Scripture. Before we even consider a woman's qualifications, i.e. her ability, wisdom, integrity, moral and spiritual condition, we must find out if a woman can hold public office according to God's Word. If she is not permitted by the Word, her suitability for office is irrelevant. If she is permitted, then we must determine her suitability by Scripture just as we would for a man.

The answer to this question in brief is that *the Bible does not permit women to bear rule over men in any sphere*. They are not permitted to rule over the man in the home, in the church, or in the public arena. It is not a question of her abilities, nor is it a question of history where a woman has held a public office and done well, or even where women have done good things for the country by their office. When the question is put to the Scriptures alone, the position of authority over men is not given to women by God.

Let us now consider some reasons for this conclusion from the Word. If we go back to the qualification passages referenced earlier, we can see that these verses have men in view. The word **men** in these verses is gender specific, meaning the male gender as opposed to the female gender. The context will also bear this out that men were to be selected for positions of civil leadership.

Women holding public office would also violate the doctrine of headship taught throughout the Bible - from beginning to end. The order of authority given by God is God-Christ-man-woman (**I Corinthians 11:3**). We have no authority to change the chain of

command established in ante-antiquity by the eternal God. This order is seen in the first three chapters of Genesis, the second chapter of I Timothy, Ephesians chapter five, and other passages. This order is never overturned by any precept in the Bible.

Paul taught Timothy that women should **learn in silence with all subjection** and they should not **teach**, neither should they **usurp authority over the man** (**I Timothy 2:11-12**). He went on to support this saying, **For**

Adam was first formed, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:13). He goes right back to the beginning and sets forth the order not to be violated: **For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man** (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

We have been so conditioned by our society of humanist/feminist rebellion against God that to say these things is shocking. However, the question is not one to be determined by our feelings, opinions, preferences, etc. The question is rather: What does God require? The Bible tells us plainly that God requires men to take leadership in all spheres. He requires men to be men, not the whining, whimpering, in touch with his inner child or feminine side, feminized pretty boy of our day. Biblical manliness has been lost today in a quagmire of touchy-feely, spineless manhood that is subject to political sensitivity and correctness. The question that should perplex us is where are the men, the real men?

We do not deny that women have been in positions of authority over men at different times in history, and even in Bible times. This fact should not surprise us, for men, women, and children have been violating God's Word since Adam and Eve did so in the Garden of Eden. In the Bible when women were ruling over men, rather than condoning or commending it, the words are plain that it was an error and even a curse. We have this lament in **Isaiah 3:12, As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.** This was a sad situation, even an error. It was also a judgment against the men of that day who abdicated their God-given responsibility.

Notice also that *ambition for public office was unknown to the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31*. In this chapter, we have the inspired description of a godly and virtuous woman. It is a beautiful description of biblical womanhood.

An examination of this chapter reveals, **Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land** (Proverbs 31:23). In ancient times, **the gates** was the place where the elders and judges would sit and conduct official public business.

It would be similar to speak of the courthouse, capitol building, town hall, or some other municipal building where the affairs of civil government are handled. It was this woman's **husband** who was known and sat **among the elders of the land**. She had no thought or desire of taking his place.

The virtuous woman is the central focus of this passage, and we see that her interests and work were centered in her home (v. 27). She was industrious (vv. 13, 16-19). She worked to feed her household (vv. 14-15). She labored to clothe her household (vv. 21-22). She performed important community service (v. 20). She

excelled in her God-given opportunity so much that her works praised **her in the gates** (Proverbs 31:31), but she never sat there in a public office.

She was a manifold blessing to others, using well her opportunity as a wife and mother (v. 26). Her husband dealt with matters of civil government and was blessed to have her as his most trusted counselor (vv. 11-12). This woman is styled as one who **fears the LORD** (Proverbs 31:30). She was not misguided by seeking the deceitful favor or vain beauty of a powerful public woman. ” Additionally, the virtuous woman is not unfulfilled or unproductive and unhappy because she is not contributing to society in a meaningful way by living her life as a man. On the contrary, she is strong and honorable (v. 25), wise and kind (v. 26), happy and fulfilled (v. 25), well respected and honored (vv.28-31). This woman was not trying to find herself; rather she found God and great joy in serving Him and others through her home.

I am sure that by this time, someone is ready to protest, *‘But, what about Deborah?’* ”

The conventional wisdom is that she was a judge in Israel and certainly, this must be an argument for women holding public office. Let us now consider Deborah and see if her case is such that would commend the practice of women running for and holding offices in the civil government.

What we know of Deborah, we read in **Judges Chapters 4 and 5**. At this period of

time, Israel was in a state of civil confusion. They were passing in and out of enemy occupation. The judges that Israel had at this time were more military leaders than they were judicial bench sitters. These men were warriors who led the people into battle and delivered them from the strong hands of their enemies. This forms the context for when Deborah came on the scene.

We are introduced to Deborah in the fourth chapter of Judges. **And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment** ” (Judges 4:4-5). We learn that she was **a prophetess** and that **she judged Israel**. The Hebrew word *shaphat* is here rendered **judged**. *Shaphat* is a verb that means primarily to judge or decide. The word itself in its primary meaning and usage does not necessarily indicate judging in an official sense. The word refers to a third party who sits over two parties at odds with one another, hears their side of the story or complaints, and then gives a judgment or a decision. The word does not require that this is an authoritative or official judgment.

We may think of it this way. A man has two neighbors who have a squabble over something and they both respect and trust this man. So, they both come and spread the matter before him and he gives them his opinion (judgment) in the matter. His opinion is not legally binding because he is not acting in any official capacity, but he has judged his neighbors. Just so, the language of the verses in **Judges 4** does not require that she was an official judge in Israel.

The context of these two chapters in Judges is actually against the idea that she was a judge in the official sense as Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, etc. During Deborah's time, there was a man named Barak who was the leader of Israel. Consider the heroes mentioned in **Hebrews 11**. Not all judges are mentioned, but the writer does say, **And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets** (Hebrews 11:32). He mentions four judges from the book of Judges in a group - Gedeon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthae. It is not Deborah that is foisted to the spotlight here but Barak, who led Israel to victory at the time when Deborah was a prophetess.

We come to the fifth chapter and read, **Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day** (Judges 5:1). Deborah and Barak sang a song of victory after Israel was delivered from victory. This was a song of praise to God for His mercy and deliverance in battle. This song also contains some words that do not support the idea that Deborah was an official judge.

By her own declaration, Deborah **arose a mother in Israel** (Judges 5:7). It is significant that she called herself a mother and not a father. The father is the head of the home and the Hebrews knew that very well. She considered herself a mother who has a very important role in the home but it is supportive and subordinate to the father. This is consistent with her being a **prophetess**. ”

She spoke of, but did not number herself among, **the governors of Israel** ” (Judges 5:9). These governors were lawgivers and the term refers to the elders and rulers of the tribes. This reinforces the idea that the judges of this period were more military leaders than civil magistrates. Deborah was outside of this group.

The roles of Deborah and Barak at this time were spoken of clearly in **Judges 5:12: Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.** Deborah was called on to **awake** and **utter a song**. Barak was called on to **arise . . . and lead**. Barak was the official judge and Deborah's role was supportive.

A casual reading of verse 13 may suggest to us that Deborah was bearing rule in some way. **Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the**

mighty (Judges 5:13). Does the last phrase of this verse teach that Deborah had dominion, or was a public office holder?

First of all, we must remember that this song was sang by both Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:1). So, it is not clear that Deborah speaks this personally of herself. Secondly, in light of the context, this passage refers to their victory in battle.

I am not saying that Deborah had no role; she certainly did have a role. She was a prophetess. She encouraged Barak to go up to battle saying, **the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand** (Judges 4:14). We also find that another woman had a hand in

Israel's deliverance. Her name was Jael. It was by her hand that the mighty Sisera was slain (Judges 4:21-22).

What we understand about Deborah is that she was a prophetess. She was more like Miriam who was a leader of women in her day (Exodus 15:20-21). Miriam's role was supportive and when she tried to lead men (Aaron), she was punished (Numbers 12:10, 14-15). We have no such stain on Deborah's record though. She was a godly woman and the people of Israel sought her wisdom. This is a commendation of her and a condemnation of the low state of the men of Israel at this time. She was not appointed a civil judge over Israel and her case is certainly not an argument for going against plain Scripture and having women rulers.

Conclusion Let us now take up a few final considerations. The guidelines we have considered from the Bible admittedly set a very high standard. *Does this high standard for civil magistrates make it impossible for us to vote at all?* I think we have to realize that no man will ever meet these standards perfectly. This does not mean that we should just forget these guidelines and vote for anyone we want. There were obviously men in Israel made judges by the people and Moses. So, they must have reasonably conformed to the standard. We should not lower the bar to accommodate men of low degree, but we should demand a high standard for those that we will elect and pay their salary. We should seek men for office who have a reasonable conformance to this standard.

Using the Bible as the Christian voter's guide does eliminate some candidates from consideration. The amoral humanists, for example, would be eliminated. These are the evolutionists, feminists, sodomites, abortionists, etc. The Christian could not vote for such candidates according to their voting guide—the Bible.

We may also eliminate any woman from our consideration, because they are not permitted by the Bible to hold public offices. This certainly does not equate all women with amoral humanists. In fact, this does not take into account their morals

or abilities at all. We cannot help elect them simply because the Bible forbids women from ruling over men.

At this point, *the pickin s are beginning to look mighty slim*. There are only a few candidates that we could vote for, if this is going to be our policy. I certainly agree that our current selection is whittled down greatly. The lack of suitable candidates is a situation that is not helped by Christians who will not vote for a reasonable candidate when he does run. Usually, we will not vote for him because we think there is no way he can win. He will not be backed by the liberal media or morally bankrupt politicians already in office. He will not gain widespread popularity among the special interest groups that seem to be driving our modern public thought and he will be at a distinct disadvantage financially. We figure this would just be a wasted vote.

This brings us to consider *the common philosophy of the day*. There are two prevailing thoughts about voting in our day that we hear repeatedly. For all practical purposes in our day, we have a two party system in this country. And, it is becoming increasingly difficult to tell them apart. So, we really only see two candidates in the race for an office. Essentially, in these two, we have the bad and the worse. We have the candidate that we do not want and the candidate that we really do not want.

The first common thought is this: To vote for a candidate other than the two mainliners is to vote for the candidate that we really do not want. In other words, say the two mainliners are candidates A and B. We are not thrilled with candidate A, but we are terrified at the thought of having candidate B. The common thought is that to vote for a candidate C, who is not a member of the main two parties, is really a vote for candidate B - our worst nightmare.

I cannot understand this logic. As an individual citizen, I have one vote. If I cast that one vote *for* candidate C, then I voted *for* C and not A or B. When the votes are tabulated, my vote is put in the column for candidate C and not B. I suppose that we are assuming that we are taking a vote away from candidate A and thereby giving candidate B a better chance of winning.

What does God require of us as Christian citizens? Are we responsible to become pollsters, political strategists, or statisticians? Are we to calculate the odds and try to play them? Are we in some way responsible for what everyone else does and therefore we have to try to counteract their vote with ours? This is all a hopeless game that we cannot win. We are responsible to God for our thoughts and actions. We are responsible to take His Word as the final rule of all faith and practice. We are responsible to follow

His Word and to have a clear conscience before Him. When we vote *for* a candidate, we are voting *for* that candidate and not *for* someone else.

The next common thought is also based on the presupposition that only one of the two main party candidates has any hope of winning. We reason that since only one of the two main candidates has any chance at winning, we have to pick the lesser of two evils to keep the worst candidate from being elected. This logic admits that we are not voting for a suitable candidate. In order to mollify our conscience, we reason, "The man is going to get in office that God puts there anyway, so I'll just pick the lesser of two evils and hope everything turns out all right." We justify voting for an unsuitable candidate by appealing to the sovereignty of God. When we boil it all down, we just vote for whomever we want because of the party and our belief in the greatest economic benefit through them. So, we basically choose our candidate based on some personal preference - whatever pet issue we have - and then figure everything is all right because of God's sovereignty.

This whole line of thinking ends with God's sovereignty, when God's sovereignty

should be at the beginning of our thoughts. Let me explain what I mean by that. God is absolutely sovereign and **both according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth** (Daniel 4:35). He reigns in the affairs of men and even in the civil governments of the nations. We are told that God **changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings** (Daniel 2:21). **For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another** (Psalms 75:6-7).

Beginning with a proper view of God's almighty power, we have no need to play games or strategize. Through faith, we may look to Him and follow His Word to vote for qualified men and leave the disposing of the whole matter in His hands (Proverbs 16:33). We may take our stand with the Apostle Paul who said, **And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men** (Acts 24:16). Let us vote for a suitable candidate with a clear conscience and where we cannot vote with a clear conscience, let us refrain from voting and **mourn** "unto the Lord that He will work for us that we may rejoice **When the righteous are in authority.** "