

Deuteronomy 17:14-20

Psalm 46

Romans 13:1-7,11-12

John 19:7-16

“In God We Trust—Or Do We?”

Nine days to go! Are you tired of it yet? Has it caused you to lose your salvation? Nine days before we find out if we end up with an insider, slick, liberal, but seasoned politician or an outsider, flamboyant, conservative, but keen businessman. Maybe neither is right. Or perhaps the perfect candidate needs the qualities of both. In either case, this election season is driving people crazy—TV, radio, internet pop-up ads, newspapers, political mailers, roadside banners. Enough, already!

The American Psychological Association (APA) released a finding from its annual “Stress in America” survey which documents that well over half of all adults in the United States (actually, 80%) feel very or somewhat stressed by the election—with Republicans and Democrats feeling similar stress rates. And this stress phenomenon has an official diagnosis: “Election Stress Disorder.”

There are ‘primitive’ parts of our brain (e.g., amygdala, hypothalamus, dorsal motor vagal complex) whose primary job is to focus on our safety and security, and they react instinctively, automatically, to perceived threats. They’re also the ‘combative’ parts of our brain which spring into action during debates, political advertising, conversations with friends, etc. Over the past several months, we have become a nation at war driven by these primitive parts of our brains. Neighbors who once shared a lot in common suddenly turn into the Hatfield's and McCoy's as their front yards bristle with election posters. Our shops and offices are charged with static electricity as everybody tries to feel out their co-workers' voting intentions. Screaming matches between best friends are happening more and more frequently as they each desperately try to prove the absolute validity of their own political ideologies and the total idiocy of their friend’s political ideologies—and after the election, those friendships will never be the same again. And even fist fights are taking place in Wal-Mart parking lots based on the hat someone is

wearing or the bumper sticker on the back of someone's car. We have lost our national sanity and civility!

And money? Do you even realize how much money is involved in these political campaigns?

During a 'normal' presidential primary year:

President	7-8 billion
DC Senate	4-7 million each
DC House	2-6 million each
Governor	.5-2 million each
Senate	.2-1 million each
House	5K-.5 million each
Local	5k each

Lump all the races together and you end up with about 12 billion dollars. And when the election is done, the money is GONE—no tangible value. What a shame! Imagine if you could split that money out and give each state their share, 240 million each, to be used for desperate needs! And that's during a 'normal' campaign year—the staggering political contributions given this year have absolutely BLITZED previous records!

Praise God, our presidential elections only happen once every four years because our electoral process has become totally divisive as the issues and the personalities get more and more virulent. And when it's all said and done, rising out of the aftermath will be a nation fractured by a tremendous rift as one half celebrates over their nominee's victory and the other half shrieks and howls (and maybe even sets cities on fire) at their nominee's loss.

What should a person of faith do when it's so hard to find any semblance of godliness in our most cherished constitutional systems?

1. Understand how it was supposed to be.

We can't begin to understand what we've got until we have a clear picture of what it should've been. God's desire was for a theocracy where the Tabernacle/Temple would stand as the center of all civic life because, back in the time of Moses, there was no division between the secular and the sacred; the Law of Moses didn't just

describe which holidays required what sacrifices, but it described—from soup to nuts—how God’s children were to live in relationship to Him, in relationship within the community, and in relationship with surrounding nations. But God, knowing our hearts and knowing how much we would want to control our own destinies, gave Moses provisions in the Law for that day when, centuries later, the Jews would ask for their own king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). And the most important provision of that Law required that any future king needed to make his own copy of the Law of Moses and then subject his decisions to the Word of God.

I haven’t seen this in a commentary, but I really think God was setting the groundwork for His perfect King of Kings, Jesus, Who was not only the incarnational, living Word of God, but Who modeled this requirement of the Law perfectly when He said, “My food is to do the will of Him Who sent me and to finish His work;” “I seek not to please Myself but Him Who sent Me;” “I stand with the Father, Who sent me;” “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught Me,...I always do what pleases Him;” and “These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father Who sent Me” (John 4:38; 5:30; 8:16; 8:28-29; 14:24).

Imagine what the Oval Office would be like when the first order of business for a newly inaugurated president is to hand-write a personal copy of the Bible (or at least the Gospels)! Anyone can lay their hand on a Bible while swearing in, but to let each copied word flow from your eyes, through your head, (hopefully) through your heart, and then through your fingertips; keep that copy on your desk; and then filter every decision through that copy;...what a nation this would be!

Sadly, I don’t know if any king of Israel ever followed that law. In fact, generations later, kings would be shocked and amazed when a priest would come bursting into the throne room and say, “We’ve discovered a scroll of the Law!” They would read it and say, “No wonder God is angry at us.” Or in one case, the king took a knife and as the scroll was unrolled and read, he would keep cutting those sections off and tossing them into a fire (Jeremiah 36:23)!

2. Realize that leadership is placed there by God.

Even if we don’t like it, we need to humbly accept the fact that every person placed in a position of authority, especially political authority, is in that office

because that's exactly who God wants there. This is precisely what our New Testament reading (Romans 13:1-7) and Gospel reading (John 19:10-11) are trying to tell us. After the last round of elections, we had a friend of our comment on our new district representative to Augusta—"She might be your representative but I didn't vote for her; she's not MY representative!" It's sad because this is exactly what the nation saw in our last presidential elections. For months we saw street mobs and protests all swirling around a "Not My President" movement.

If God is instrumental in placing people in office, then what these verses boil down to is the Christian realization that "Not My President" is NOT a valid, godly response for a follower of Jesus Christ! When God fills the office, that's exactly who He intended us to have.

3. Recognize our role as temporal citizens of earth.

My family back home is politically passionate, and it's a HUGE family. I remember when some of them said they were praying biblical prayers for President Obama—that they were praying Acts 1:20 for him: "May his place be deserted;...May another take his place of leadership" (based on Psalm 69:25 and 109:8). And I've seen that as bumper stickers on cars. A lot of conservative Christians have taken that as their call for God to displace liberal or unbiblical politicians. But did you realize that this reference made by Peter about the suicide of Judas and the need to appoint Matthias to take his place comes from a passage in Psalm 69 that cries to God to remove His salvation from this person? And to blot his name out of the Book of Life? Read Psalm 69:25 and then keep reading down to verse 27 and 28. We can't pray those prayers, even in humor, because those are prayers of cursing, death, and eternal judgment!

So what are we supposed to do as pilgrims passing through earth on our way to heaven? We're supposed to be blessing those in authority over us and praying for their peace, because their peace and blessing becomes OUR peace and blessing. This is exactly what Jeremiah told the Babylonian captives in Jeremiah 29:4-7. And Paul duplicates this Christian duty as he instructs Timothy. In fact, in 1 Timothy 2:1-8, Paul says that our prayers of peace and blessing for our leaders is "good, and pleases God our Savior" (vs. 3).

If our frustration with the candidate who wins the election causes us to speak bitter words about them, then WE are no longer pleasing to God. It doesn't matter whether we like them or approve of their political platform—if God has placed them in office, we are required by God to pray for them and bless them. Anything else puts us at odds with the throne of heaven!

Conclusion.

So what does all of this mean for us? It's rather simple: No political election in the history of the world has ever compromised the purpose of God. No candidate has ever gained a public office that God Himself did not allow.

Think of it this way: sometimes the Lord installs a leader who will strengthen the nation as a sign of His blessing. At other times God gives us leaders that our national sins and stubbornness deserve. The outcome, however, remains the same—that either through our thankfulness for a good administration or through our repentance and prayer for a challenging administration, our hearts should always be focused on heaven. As believers, we must place our trust in the Lord through the voting process...and to honor our leaders whether we personally cast ballots for them or not. They are all servants of God who, knowingly or unknowingly, are preparing the Church for the return of Jesus Christ, and we must be in continual prayer for them.

Elections are a good time to practice our faith and trust in God and to exercise our right to choose those candidates who at least condone rather than erode biblical principles. We should use whatever opportunity He affords us to choose what is true, moral, just, and right—and not to make those decisions based on earthly definitions and political correctness but on what Scripture says most reflects the kingdom of heaven on earth. Granted, sometimes we have candidates who don't offer us much, but in a race there is always at least one whose platform comes closer to God's throne than the others, and the choice we make is a reflection of our faith and what we earnestly believe to be biblically true. And then, regardless of the outcome, we should place our confidence in God's control. Ultimately, our national seasons of turmoil or celebration, of unrest or tranquility, are given to us as opportunities to surrender our hearts—in praise or petition—to the ultimate rule of Jesus Christ, eternity's King of Kings and Lord of Lords.