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### The Election of 2016 from a Biblical Point of View Psalm 118:8-9

Just prior to the presidential election in 2012, I came across a statement by Marvin Olasky:

***“Sinful humans with all our quirks will decide who controls the White House and Congress.  
But under a sovereign God, the election is no crapshoot.”***

You may not find comfort in the truth of that statement, but I certainly do. Yes, I am offended and fed up with the hostility and corruption in the current campaign. The lies, spin, distortions, and underhanded things that people will do to get elected make me sick. Yes, in my weaker moments I get somewhat anxious, and occasionally terrified, about what “sinful humans” with all their “quirks” might decide two days from now. And my guess is that most of you feel the same way, regardless of which political party you support.

But Marvin Olasky is right: “under a sovereign God, the election is no crapshoot.” Who ultimately ends up in Congress and the White House is not, in the final analysis, subject to the whims and moods of the American people. From a purely human point of view, it may appear to be a “crapshoot”, but I assure you that God is in complete control.

So what I propose to do this morning is set before you eight biblical principles that I hope and pray will both **inform** you about how you and I ought to think of government and politics as well as **inspire** you with unshakable confidence in the supremacy and sovereignty of God over all things.

And rest assured, I have no intention of endorsing a particular candidate or political party. I do intend to articulate some truths from God’s Word that may give direction to how you should vote. But in the final analysis, when you step into that booth on Tuesday, you are bound by your conscience, not mine. I’ve got enough “quirks” of my own to worry about!

#### **Eight Theses on God and Government**

**(1) Human government is not inherently evil. The structures of authority in any particular political system are not per se wicked. All human governmental authority comes ultimately from the hand of God. Government is used for evil because *people* are sinful, not because the *authority* of the ruling party is wicked or should be abolished.**

I don’t know how to say it with greater clarity than Paul did in Romans 13:1 – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” ***God never sanctions anarchy.***

Some appeal to Luke 4:6 to prove that all government is demonic. There Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said: “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.” But there is no reason to trust what Satan says. As Jesus says in John 8:44, “there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

There are numerous passages that affirm government to be a gift of God and controlled by God. So, are we going to believe Satan or are we going to believe Paul in Romans 13? If that were not enough, consider this. Satan claimed that he had authority to “give” power in earthly kingdoms to whomever **he** wills. Yet in Daniel 4:17 we read that “the Most High [God] rules the kingdom of men” and that **he**, God, “gives it to whom **he** will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” Whom are you going to believe? I choose to believe Daniel and the Spirit of God speaking through him.

What is also clear from these texts is that the legitimacy of earthly governmental power is not dependent upon **how** someone comes to power. Whether a government exists because a monarch has appointed his son to rule, or a tribal

chieftain has slaughtered his rivals, or a candidate has garnered the required number of votes in an electoral college, all governmental authority is there because God put it there.

That doesn't mean it doesn't matter ethically or morally or legally how someone came to power. Of course it does. The Bible is not endorsing the stealing of votes or the manipulation of an election. It is simply reminding us that *even the sinful shenanigans of human beings are never outside God's control and that his purpose will be accomplished, even if it means he has to use the wicked ways of men to bring it about.*

Man did not create government. God did. Man does not sustain it. God does. Civil authority is God's idea in this age.

**(2) God is absolutely sovereign and authoritative over *who* rules, *where* they exercise their power (its boundaries and extent), over *whom* they have authority, and for *how long*.**

God spoke to one of the most wicked and powerful rulers in human history, the **Pharaoh** of Egypt, and said: "But for this purpose *I have raised you up*, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:16; see Romans 9:17).

Daniel spoke to the corrupt and barbaric **Nebuchadnezzar**, king over Babylon, and declared: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; *he removes kings and sets up kings*" (Daniel 2:20-21a; cf. vv. 36-38).

Later Daniel said much the same to **Belshazzar**, declaring: "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty" (Daniel 5:18; cf. vv. 24-37 and Jer. 27:5-7).

Note well: Daniel makes these affirmations of God's sovereignty in the context of *the domination of the Jews by Gentiles!* In other words, God not only controls the history of his own people (whether Israel or the Church), but also of the "secular" world as well. And the oppression of his own people is no indication that he has lost control or that he is any less sovereign than when his people are safe and blessed.

Consider the divisions at Barnes & Noble or any other bookstore between the "Religion" section and all others such as "European History" or "U. S. History", or "Current Events", etc., as if God is active and relevant only in overtly "religious" matters! According to Daniel, his sovereignty is limitless and all-inclusive!

Or think about what Jesus said to **Pontius Pilate**, who from a human perspective appeared to hold the fate of Jesus in his hands: When Pilate said to Jesus, "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless *it had been given you from above*" (John 19:10-11a).

**Jeroboam** was one of the more wicked kings of Israel, and yet 1 Kings 12:15 describes the political intrigue that put him in place and says: "It was a turn of affairs *brought about by the Lord.*"

And if God is responsible for the *establishment* of every governmental authority, he must of necessity also be responsible for the *disestablishment* of all! This is precisely what we read in Daniel 2:21 – "he *removes* kings and sets up kings." Again, in Isaiah 40:23-24 we read that

"[God] brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they [princes and rulers] planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble" (Isaiah 40:23-24).

**(3) God is not only sovereign in that he decides who shall rule and for how long, but he also can exert omnipotent and irresistible influence over the hearts and minds of kings and rulers and presidents to do what he wants done.**

If this one strikes you as somewhat extreme, consider just a handful of biblical examples that prove my point:

“But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your **God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate**, [so] that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day” (Deuteronomy 2:30).

“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; **he turns it wherever he will**” (Proverbs 21:1). And if it's true of the “king” then it is no less true of presidents, senators, congressmen, governors, and mayors!

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, [in order] that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, **the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia**, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing” (Ezra 1:1).

“And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had **turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them**, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:22).

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, **who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king**, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 7:27).

“[God] says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’ Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: ‘I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me’” (Isaiah 44:28-45:5).

Because all authority to rule and to govern comes from God, those in authority are called God's "ministers" (Romans 13:4) and God's "servants" (Romans 13:6; Jer. 25:9) and even his “shepherd” (Isaiah 44:28) and his “anointed” (Isaiah 45:1). These words are descriptive of their **function**, and say nothing about any supposed religious or spiritual or personal relationship to God. They are God's servants and ministers because they accomplish his will in history, not because they believe in him or love him.

“[F]or truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place**” (Acts 4:27-28; see also Revelation 17:17).

It was God who stirred up Nebuchadnezzar to launch an assault on Israel (Jeremiah 25:8-9) and it was God who determined the outcome of the battle:

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And **the Lord gave** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god” (Daniel 1:1-2).

Observe that **“the Lord gave”** . . . Ultimately it was neither the sin and weakness of Jehoiakim nor the brilliance and strength of Nebuchadnezzar, not even the impotence or inactivity of God, but the sovereign good pleasure of Yahweh that determined the historical outcome (cf. Dan. 2:20-23). The Israelites “are not mere pawns on a political and geographical chessboard. To be in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar is not to be out of the control of God” (John Goldingay, 22).

This is one reason Paul urges “that supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We are to pray that the Most High God would stir their spirits, move upon their hearts, change

their thinking, shape their character, and incite them to enact legislation all to accomplish what would be most beneficial to the church, the people of God.

**(4) Although we are ultimately citizens of a heavenly kingdom and only secondarily citizens of an earthly state, we are not for that reason exempt from submitting to the laws of the land where we live (1 Peter 2:13-17).**

Our responsibility to honor and submit to the government of our country is not dependent on whether or not we voted for its leaders or like them. Perhaps I should repeat that!

Let me explain. *Peter knew what it was like to live under tyranny and barbarism.* He was born under the rule of the *Emperor Augustus*. But the more direct authority over his life in those early days in Galilee would have been *King Herod the Great* who ordered the slaughter of the male infants in and around Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the new born Jesus.

Peter would also have experienced the rule of *Herod Antipas* who executed John the Baptist and not only presided over the mock trial of Jesus but joined with the soldiers under his authority to torment and ridicule our Lord. Peter would have known *Pontius Pilate*, the governor of Judea, who washed his hands of Jesus' murder, had him beaten, and delivered him over to be crucified. Peter was especially acquainted with *Herod Agrippa*, who executed James, the brother of John, and arrested Peter with the intent of doing the same to him. Then, of course, Peter lived under the tyrannical rule of *Nero*.

My point is simply to argue that *Peter wasn't naïve about the potential for corruption and evil in those who held governmental and political power.* He didn't live in a "Christian nation". He knew all too well about the depravity of these men who wielded authority in Rome and Palestine. And yet he tells us, without hesitation, to "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether emperors or kings, and to "honor" them.

It's important to hear what Peter says in this text because his description of Christians as "exiles" and "aliens" and "sojourners" on the earth (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11) might lead some to think that they are exempt from earthly rules and laws and obligations to human authorities. *After all, if I am a citizen of a heavenly kingdom, why should I bother obeying the dictates of an earthly system?* If this world is not my ultimate home, being as I am an alien and exile in this world, I shouldn't have to care about following the standards and rules that govern those who know nothing of God or his heavenly kingdom. Right? Wrong!

It is, of course, true that Christians are not first citizens of any earthly nation but citizens of the kingdom of God. Paul writes in Philippians 3:20, "*Our citizenship is in heaven*, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Christians are aliens, exiles, and mere sojourners in America. But that does not mean we are free to live in anarchy or in defiance of the government that God has placed over us.

Peter may also have been anticipating the possibility that some might call for our complete *withdrawal* from the world and from society. On numerous occasions in history Christian communities have created their own *spiritual ghettos*, enclaves, and communes in which they swear allegiance only to themselves and refuse to acknowledge the authority of the state in any respect. I think Peter is saying, No, you can't do that.

There is yet another reason Peter says what he does in this passage. Look at v. 15. Just as our conduct in general can be used of God to bring people to saving faith in Christ, so also *our law-abiding obedience to the governing authorities* can silence the unwarranted accusations of those who oppose us.

Although there is much in this passage, what I want you to see is *that all of life, even our political lives, in relation to the governing authorities, must be grounded in God and for God and reflect our relationship to God.* Why do I say that?

Let's start with v. 13 where Peter justifies his exhortation: it is "*for the Lord's sake.*" Our obedience to the governing authorities is at best only secondary. Our primary allegiance is to God. We obey them because we obey him. Peter also intends to say by this that our ultimate aim in obedience to the law of the land is the glory of God. It is for his "sake," i.e., to bring honor to him and to make known his greatness and his majesty that we give our lives in obedience to the emperor or king or president or whoever is in power.

***We do not simply obey in order to preserve our reputation but to enhance and promote his!***

This God-centered approach to our civic duties is again made clear in v. 15. We live in obedience to the law because it is ***“the will of God”*** that in doing so we silence those who persist in accusing us and slandering us (recall 1 Peter 2:12). Again, according to v. 16 we are to live in this world not primarily as the subjects of an earthly president but as ***“servants of God.”***

**(5) Although we are submissive to the authority of government, Christians have a responsibility as citizens of both heaven and earth to influence for good the government under which they live.**

Let me mention only a couple of examples where believers publicly criticized government and its leaders and sought to exert a positive influence on governmental officials and held them accountable to biblical values of morality.

“Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: ***break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed***, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity” (Daniel 4:27).

“So with many other exhortations he [John the Baptist] preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been ***reproved*** by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, ***and for all the evil things that Herod had done***, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison” (Luke 3:18-20).

“After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. ***And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment***, Felix was alarmed and said, ‘Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you’” (Acts 24:24-25).

When Paul says that God ordains human government and invests it with authority, he does *not* mean to suggest that government is therefore free to do as it pleases. It is subject to God and his will. Government is not morally autonomous. ***The church is the conscience of the state.*** Let's not forget that in 1 Peter 5:13 Peter calls Rome “Babylon”!

On what issues should we seek to exert our influence? Certainly it would include such matters as sexual morality, dignity of life (i.e., abortion), education, the environment, poverty and homelessness, war and national defense, the principles of right and wrong that govern the economy, and marriage and family, just to mention a few.

We read in Romans 13 that the primary purpose of the state is to preserve and protect public morality, justice, and to insure the punishment of the offender. It is not the purpose of the state to promote the gospel, but to provide a legal and moral atmosphere in which the *church* can do *its* work (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Thus when you vote you should ask the question: Which candidates or which political party is most effective in promoting moral righteousness and praising good when it appears and who is most committed to punishing and prohibiting evil? Which candidates or which political party is most sincerely committed to the advancement of biblical values.

If someone says that in doing this we are ***legislating our morality***, we should respond by saying, “Well, yes, of course we are!” But ***if we don't legislate our morality you can rest assured they will legislate theirs. All laws are moral statements.*** Every law that forbids some action or requires another is declaring that something is either wrong or right, that it is either beneficial or destructive to society.

**(6) Although Christians are responsible to exert a positive influence on government, nowhere in the NT do we see that Elders in the local church, by virtue of their being Elders, have authority in or responsibility over local, state, or national government decision-making. Elders can certainly hold public office, but they do so as private citizens and not because of their office in the local church. Likewise, nowhere in the NT do we see governmental officials exerting authority over the local church or selecting its officers or dictating what it must believe or how its people must behave.**

**(7) No government or earthly authority or political party platform ever sent anyone to hell. Politics has no such power. On the other hand, unrepentant pride and immorality and rebellion and unbelief do send people to hell. They have precisely that power. Similarly, no government or earthly authority or political platform can save a single human soul. On the other hand, Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone can.**

I hope that provides you with a measure of perspective as you vote on Tuesday. I hope that puts your fears to rest and fills your heart with joy irrespective of the outcome of Tuesday's election or any election in the years to come.

**(8) The confession that "Jesus is Lord" is not simply a declaration of faith and an acknowledgement that he is the Master of our lives individually and as a church. It is also a *political* statement.**

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18), declares Jesus. And he means it! That includes every government in the world. It includes every president, premier, prime minister, and peasant.

It means that how we live every day in relation to the government and our neighbors and our friends and our enemies is to be shaped and energized by the inescapable reality that Jesus has authority over them and over us.

So, with this I close.

Neither Donald Trump nor Hillary Clinton is the Savior of the world, not that any of you would be silly enough to think that they were! Neither is the Savior of America! Whoever is elected President on Tuesday, he/she is among those small 'k' "kings" over whom Jesus rules as capital 'K' "King"! Regardless of who wins on Tuesday, Jesus is still "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16; 17:14).

No matter how things turn out on Tuesday or on any day thereafter, Jesus is still seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. Regardless of the outcome on Tuesday, Jesus will not have failed. Political events are always and ever in his hands, no matter the results. And regardless of how you vote and regardless of who wins, be certain that your faith and confidence and hope are in Jesus Christ, Lord over all of life in heaven and upon the earth!