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What Biblical Principles Should Guide How We Vote?

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Question about what biblical principles should guide how we vote.

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Transcript

Welcome one and all to Stand to Reason's hashtag S-C-R-S podcast. I'm Amy Hall and I'm here with Greg Koukl and today, Greg, we have a question that's relevant for our times right now. The season we're in.

Yes. The crazy season. Yes.

And this question comes from Natalie. What biblical principles should guide how we vote? This is a great question and obviously very practical. The kind of question that every committed Christian, every Christian committed to biblical understanding of reality ought to be asking in the silly season that we're in right now, which ends at the election.

And because my concern is a lot of people don't ask that question. They're living their Christian life in somewhat of a vacuum from the other decisions in their world and they are not trying to integrate the Christian worldview with these kinds of things. And it's especially critical because the Bible has a lot to say about the nature of leadership, especially Proverbs actually, a lot about the effect that appropriate leadership read here.

Now policy decisions because the leaders make decisions about policy that affect the people. And good policy creates good government and it is good for the people and bad policy does just the opposite. And I was just reading last evening in Proverbs, I read, try to read about a half a chapter in the evening before I go to bed.

And there were more verses that had to do with this issue, the prosperity of the country based on the right decisions of the leaders of the country. Okay. Now, when I began to reflect on this issue, Amy, I thought, well, there's basically one concern here.

And this is what a voice before. But as I reflected, I realized that there are this one concern that I talk about. There's actually more than that.

But this one has multiple ramifications or multiple applications. All right. So the basic passage and you probably have a written down somewhere or it may be in Romans, I don't know.

But Romans 13, Romans 13, and Paul talks there about the purpose of government is for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right, the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right. So if you think in the broadest sense, the government is supposed to be responsible for justice in the area that it's responsible for. And that would be the people that the government represents.

All right. And this is why Jesus says in Matthew, what six or seven, turn the other cheek. His point there is in pacifism.

It's a unique circumstance that he's describing. I won't go into details there. But the point seems clearly to be when you look at the details that we are not to take our own revenge against other people who insult us or fault us in some way.

If we are, if we are insulted by somebody, we don't retaliate. And Paul makes the same, a similar kind of point, maybe in the Romans passage, not actually a number of places in the New Testament, that we are not to take our own revenge, but leave room for the justice of God. Go ahead.

That actually comes directly. It's at the end of chapter 12 directly before the passage on the government. Okay, well, that's, yeah, all right.

So, and notice, by the way, he uses the word the sword, the government doesn't bear the sword for nothing. No, the strong implication is that part of the latitude government has is to execute people who deserve being executed. This goes all the way back to Genesis chapter nine, verse six, if any man sheds man's blood, then by man, his blood shall be shed for in the image of God God created man.

So, I mean, the sword is in for spanking. It is a, it is a, a metaphor or a description that Paul uses to talk about the power of the government. But the sword is a lethal weapon.

And so it seems the power of government then also entails using lethal force when appropriate. That could be in capital punishment. That might be in suppressing certain acts, public acts that require lethal force, maybe police, and also, I think, not just locally or nationally, because the government is at different layers.

There are different layers of government governing us, but also internationally to protect us from evil without. Okay, so the first thing is if the government is for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right, the first thing that our our voting needs

to reflect is an understanding of what's good and what's bad. And voting for candidates whose policies are going to promote the good, and not the bad, for one, and also punish the bad and reward the good.

Now these have all kinds of ramifications. All right, so Proverbs talks about the importance of being diligent and hardworking. Okay, that's a good and being lazy is a bad.

So, if the government has a responsibility of promoting the good, rewarding the good, and part of the good is hard work, and not rewarding the bad and bad is laziness, then one has to look at policies and see, are these policies promoted by candidates because we vote for candidates and not for policies, characteristically, unless you have an initiative process in the local state, which California does, and many states do have that, but it's an exercise of pure democracy. And anybody who's observing the process here realizes why pure democracy is not a good idea, because it's easy for the populace to be misled by rhetoric to vote for something that sounds good that turns out not to be good. Anyway, this is why we have a according to biblical principles for candidates that represent policies that are going to promote the good and not promote the bad.

And we, I just mentioned some elements of good bad, and what is industry is good and laziness is bad. Okay, so I'm not going to get too granular here, but notice how what I'm trying to do is have a biblical assessment of what good and bad is, and then make an application of those principles to policy and to politicians who are running for election who make policy type promises. Here's what I'm going to do.

And then you just have to ask yourself the question, does the policy this individual or this party represent? Does it reflect a biblical good or a biblical harm? Because the government is supposed to do the good and not promote the bad. Okay, I'm not going to get into a lot of detail. Like I said, granular what those amount to, but I also want to I also suggested that this government responsibility to guard and protect its people.

And that's what promote the good and punish the bad amounts to to protect the people happens at different levels. It has at a local level. And so you have local police and things that relate policy relating to local policing are governed by the same principle.

Okay. And what about the state? And actually the federal government. So you have these different layers, local state and federal that all have the same responsibility.

And the federal responsibility to protect citizens is two is threefold. One, the principle that I just mentioned. Two, that the federal government doesn't isn't itself an author of evil among the people.

I'll come back to that in just a minute. And third, and the use of its power. I mean, and the third thing is it this it's to protect not just from internal danger, but from external

danger as well.

Okay, so you have an international concern. That's why I have armies and military and stuff like that to protect mixture. These are to me all encapsulated in this concept of punishment of evil doors and praise of those who do right.

That's the protective element of government to do for us, which we are told not to do for ourselves, seek personal vengeance, because there is a there is a vehicle for that that God has established. And when it says leave room for the vengeance of God, it's not just talking there about in the final analysis at the last Trump kind of deal. It's talking about those agencies that God has ordained to be the appropriate human agents of that vengeance that legitimate justice here on earth while we're in this age, not in the age to come.

So, and that would be government. All right, so there is the propriety there. Now, I want to back off just a minute because I want to focus in this.

I'm talking about local governments. I'm talking about national government protecting us and also protecting us internationally as well. So, there's a role for international relations and what this what the policies represent protecting the people that the government is supposed to protect.

Lots of applications there too. Same principle. But what about the government's own policies? This principle applies also to the government because if the government has policies that promote evil, then we are obliged to oppose those policies and those politicians who are in favor of those.

All right, the classic example. Let me just back up. There's two classic examples historically.

Here's the first one, slavery. Okay, we had slavery in this country and it was finally abolished formally in the 13th Amendment and subsequent laws that are meant to promote the good and punish the evil, right? So, if there were candidates, let me back up. If there are policies in place, people promoting policies regarding slavery, would a Christian feel justified in voting for that policy, supporting that policy because they think there's some other good that trumps the policy of slavery? Well, we can put up with slavery because the government is going to do other things that are better, a greater good than that.

I don't think anybody would count on it such a thing. Okay. So what about abortion? Abortion takes the life of an innocent human being without proper justification.

So I have made a scientific statement and I have made a moral statement, an innocent human being. Human beings unborn are human, they're human beings. And without proper justification, that is a moral statement.

In other words, and this seems to me obvious, we would not take the life of other citizens for the reasons people give to have an abortion. And if anybody's not completely convinced Christians, then just go to Luke chapter one and see the conversation between Mary and Elizabeth. And in that conversation between Mary and Elizabeth, it's really clear that John the Baptist, who is in the second trimester in Elizabeth's womb is himself.

He is the prophet that is filled with the spirit in the second trimester, leaping with joy because he's in the presence of the Lord. How is it that the mother of my Lord is coming to me? For the moment that I heard the cry, the sound of your voice, the baby leapt in my womb. Just analyze that passage, it's not hard.

And you see that that Jesus and John are themselves when John's in the second trimester and Jesus is a zygote. All right, so that that ought to inform us biblically, if we're not persuaded by some other kind of scientific ethical argument, maybe that I just offered. So that's an evil that the government is perpetrating in certain states now that cannot be countenanced by a biblical Christian, because there is no greater good imaginable.

I've heard all the arguments, no greater good imaginable that can trump the the value of the human life in the womb, which is taken every single time that there's an abortion. So I've just laid out one principle I've spent a lot of time talking about. There's more we can talk about maybe here or another broadcast, but I just want to lay that first one out.

It's for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do good. And this has broad ramifications for local government, for state government, and for national government. And the Christian needs to be informed on what is good and what is evil.

And then seek to use their power in voting to do the best job of promoting the most good. And what's the right word in denying or resisting the greatest evils. And that's, I think, their moral obligation as Christians with regards to government.

Well, Greg, I think I have a lot of the same ideas as you. I've packaged it a little bit differently. I think the problem is, as Christians, as we're developing our political philosophy, what people will use is the idea that we are to love our neighbor.

And that's it. And the problem is that people can use that phrase to support all sorts of different things that aren't actually loving. And so it's important to remember that it's God's law that teaches us what love is and how to love.

That's what Paul says. For this reason, you are not to kill. You're not to commit adultery.

That God's law is fulfilled in love because it's teaching love. You can't just come to it with the culture's idea of love and then impose that on law, because that's not how it works. We have to start with an understanding of what's just and all those sorts of things.

So as you're developing your political philosophy, I have four principles. And Greg, you covered, I think probably all of these in one way or another. But here are four things to keep in mind.

You should support a system, a political philosophy, that has laws that get human nature right. That's the first thing. You have to start there.

We're created by God. We're created in His image. We're intrinsically valuable.

We're created male and female. We don't create ourselves. We don't come up with our own gender or value.

We don't have to do certain things in order to gain value or be certain types of people in order to have value. We are morally responsible. And here's a big one.

We are sinful intrinsically. It's not that there's something outside of us making us sinful. It's actually that we are fallen and we're sinful and we are corrupted by power.

So all of these things are aspects of human nature that you have to make sure that your political philosophy depends on and takes into account. So that's the first one. The second one, we need laws that are just laws that are based on God's justice, not the culture's understanding of justice.

And so in order to understand what that means, you have to know God's law. You have to understand, this is why I love Deuteronomy, because I love justice. And there are so many beautiful things in there that explain what it means to be just.

And by just, I mean giving to people what is due them. That's just the simplest way of putting it. And I distinguish that from charity.

I don't think justice is charity. I think charity is something different. So you need to have laws that are just that give to people what they're due, whether good or bad.

Can I make this distinction? Justice is morally obligatory. Charity is above and beyond in a certain sense. It's what philosophers call a super-arrogatory act.

It's something that we praise people for doing. Okay, we don't praise people in a certain sense for doing what's right, because they're obliged to do what's right, justice. But if they go beyond that and give out of love, charity is used to be a synonym for the word love, then we are going above and beyond.

We have an obligation to love others, but that's different from our obligation to be just. That's the distinction I'm making. I think what people think is that because as Christians, God does ask us to be charitable and to give and all those sorts of things, they think that that makes it a matter of justice.

But it doesn't. These are two different concepts. All right, so that's the second one.

The third one is you should support laws that reflect the proper role of the government. This is what you talked about, Greg, that idea that the government is there to keep order, to reward the good, and to punish the evil. These days, people have expanded the role of the government into so many different things, which causes the government to get bigger and causes a lot of the problems with the corruption of power.

This is all related. If we stick with the role of the government in that that God gave to the government, that's a good way to go. And the fourth thing, and see, Greg, you have touched on all of these things already.

That's so interesting. But the fourth thing I have here is you should support laws that do good. Now, this is the one where you have to know about more than just Christian worldview.

So yes, you have to understand human nature. Yes, you have to understand the role of government. But you also have to understand how economics works.

You have to understand the effects of your laws, not just your intention. So you can agree with somebody on all the things I already mentioned, on what it means, what human nature is, what justice is, all those sorts of things. But you could disagree on which laws are doing good because you have different views on economics.

Maybe you don't understand it. Maybe someone has convinced you that something else actually does good when it doesn't actually do good. And sometimes we can be, we can think just offhand that something sounds right.

But until you get into the specifics, you don't know what it's going to do in the culture. This is the liability of the democracy, the democratic system of the I made reference to before the initiative process. Because what it does is you have a law that's titled in such a way to focus on what the benefits that are intended for the law.

And people look at the title and the intention and they say, I agree with that intention. I want that cheaper housing. I like cheaper housing.

That's great. Now, whether or not the law will encourage cheaper housing in the long run, that's a different matter. And that's what that's why people who are good at this policy, Walks, are looking at the long term effects.

This is what who's the economist, the black economist from Stan Thomas, Thomas all says, stage one thinking, what I'm describing, as opposed to looking further what's going on down the line in time and what's actually happening laterally in other areas as a result of this legislation. And what you're saying is you have to understand enough to know what ends up being good for the people beyond just the good sounding platitudes

of the initiative title and what politicians say this will accomplish. Now, I think the biggest level of disagreement in the country used to be at this level.

So it used to be that we had the same understanding of human nature and the same goals. And we just had different understandings of how to get there. What the good is.

Yeah. But sadly, I don't think that's the case today. I think now we have many more disagreements on laws that get human nature right, laws that are just and laws reflect the role of the government.

So it's a much deeper divide at the worldview level that's happening in our country right now. So, but amongst those of us who do share all of these Christian worldview ideas, we do have to understand how things work. And we also have to show grace to others because I think sometimes people think if you support a different policy, you must have bad intentions.

Whereas you actually have the same intentions, but you don't think the way they're going about it and I highly recommend Jay Wesley Richards book Money, Greed and God where he talks about economics and it's such a readable book and it's so fascinating because economics is all about human decisions. It's about who we are as human beings. So it's so interesting.

It has a lot to do with individual liberty too, whether we have the liberty to make agreements with private agreements with people for an exchange of goods and services for for money. I mean, that's really at the foundation of it. I wanted to make some.

Did you got to all four? Yeah. Let me just let me just finish up this. Don't lose your train of thought there.

But I just want to say again, as you're figuring this out, you might disagree with people you respect and that's okay. Have grace and as you're making your decisions, don't go against your conscience, but at the same time, don't stay uninformed. So you need to make sure you inform your conscience as well as you can as to the actual way these laws work and play out.

And another organization I recommend is Acton, the Acton Institute. I'm trying to think of what their religious liberty and I can't remember. ACTON.

Yes, ACTON and they have so many lectures and articles and things that help you figure out how the Christian worldview plays into politics and liberty and freedom and Christian worldview and economics and all these sorts of things. It's just it's a great resource. Just a point of clarification.

I know we're going a little long for the show, but this is so so critical. First of all, we're not telling anybody who to vote for. What we're doing is saying what kind of values, biblically

speaking, ought to guide their voting with regards to people and people represent policy.

That's the key. Policy is what governs. People who are elected make policy decisions that are voted on that become incumbent upon us to obey.

And so there's a connection there obviously, but what we're talking about are the principles that ought to guide. And as Amy has intimated, careful thinking or what's the right word here. Honest Christians can disagree on exactly where these things lead.

Now, I do think there's some limits to that. And I'm not going to get into those limits right now, but just because you're sincere doesn't mean that your your point or your view is a good one or a correct one. And I think the culture has the ability nowadays to mislead about these.

And you open with the concept about love. What's loving? Well, biblically, Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 13 that love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth. So there are two items there.

What is true and good and what is righteous? These are all tied together in our expression of love. So our expressions of love need to be not just biblically informed, but morally informed. It is not just good will towards people that is satisfied.

And plus, that's the second great commandment. So many people quote the second great commandment as if it's the first great commandment. The first great commandment is to love God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

You cannot love your neighbor in a way that goes against proper loving of God. That isn't loving him, that you're violating the first command. And God gives the law, Paul talked about the whole law being being kind of captured in the concept of love, but that concept of love cannot be informed by the culture's definition.

It's got to be informed by God's definition. If you are going to cite biblical text in support of your views, loving kind of thing, I want to make another observation and I wasn't sure if this is under laws that are just or or that was your second point or the third point reflecting the proper role of government. God's law says that you that the Jews were not to favor the poor in judgment.

That is a almost a word for word command from the Mosaic law. Do not favor the poor in judgment. That is in just that's an active injustice.

I mean, that's what it says they were in the text. This is not justice. You don't favor the rich in judgment.

You don't favor the poor in judgment. You do what's right based on the circumstances.

Okay.

So when you have government policies that favor the poor in judgment, that is a violation of God's moral code. All right. Now, what about the poor? Well, it's interesting that they're in the law.

There is provision for gleaning. Now, gleaning is when you harvest your field, but you don't harvest every single stick. You leave the little edges so that people who are poor, who don't have fields can go out and glean.

They can harvest by hand some stuff for themselves. But notice how there's provision made for the poor to help themselves. It isn't just give all of this portion too directly to the poor, but rather make provision for the poor to be able to help themselves.

So there is an industry element that's involved even in the gleaning law. Okay. So I just wanted to make that particular point that there is a place for that and also charity, of course, is important.

And this is also in scripture, but charity is something that's done individually. Governments can't show charity. Charity is an individual virtue where we give out of the goodness of our heart to help another individual.

If I take money from you to give to somebody else, that's not a charitable act on my part. That's arguably an illicit act. But I'm not, again, trying to get too granular on these things.

I'm trying to help people to see that there are biblical principles that apply here, but we have to be careful how we apply them. Well, thank you, Greg. And thank you, Natalie, for such an interesting and important question.

And we appreciate hearing from you. If you'd like to send us your question, you can go to [x](#) and just use the hashtag STRask in your question somewhere there in your tweet there. Or you can go to our website, it's at str.org and just look for our podcast page and go to hashtag STRask.

And then you'll find a link there where you can just click on that link and send us your question, keep it to one or two sentences. And we always love to hear from you and we love getting interesting questions. So if you have one in the back of your mind, go ahead and send it.

You might hear it on the show. Thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.