

Introduction:

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Florida, the 27th state, was admitted into the Union governed by this document on March 3, 1845.

On November 5, 1968, the electorate of Florida ratified the following: "We, the people of the State of Florida, being grateful to Almighty God for our constitutional liberty, in order to secure its benefits, perfect our government, insure domestic tranquility, maintain public order, and guarantee equal civil and political rights to all, do ordain and establish this constitution." The very first protected right says, "All political power is inherent in the people."

These documents put us in an interesting position. We are citizens under the rule of government. At the same time, we are the government. Our nation and state claim to have governments "of the people, by the people, for the people." We are the kings. We do not exercise this kingly power directly, but through elected representatives. In a sense, we are kings for one day: election day. This leads us to a fantastic question, which Matt Johnson put me on to asking (you can thank him later; or blame him, whichever the case may be): If the king were a disciple of Jesus, how should he govern? If you have conscience against being involved in the government of geo-political nations and states which are not the covenant people of God, I am not trying to convince you to participate. I sometimes have questions about that myself. Rather, for those who participate, I'd like to take a few minutes to share what I have found to be some important perspectives to help govern your participation in governing.

Discussion:

I. The difficult balance.

A. On the one hand: Jesus's kingdom is not of this world.

1. Jesus explained to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world" (**John 18:36**, ESV). Why weren't Jesus's disciples starting a military coup? Why weren't they trying to make Jesus king of Judea or emperor of Rome? Jesus's kingdom is not of this world. Jesus's kingdom doesn't fight like the world's kingdoms or govern like the world's governments. Paul drives this home in **2 Corinthians 10:3-4**. The kingdom of heaven does not fight with fleshly weapons. We don't use the means of earthly, fleshly government to bring the victory to heaven's kingdom.
2. If Jesus were here, He would not run for President or campaign to be governor. We do not spread the borders of Jesus's kingdom through military or political means. We don't bring people in submission to God's laws through military or political means. We do it the same way Paul did when he went to Corinth, by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified (**1 Corinthians 1:17, 22-24; 2:2**). We recognize and believe the truth of **Proverbs 14:34**: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (ESV). However, the path to righteousness for us and our nation is gospel, not political. We promote righteousness not through vote or political debate, but through spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. On the other hand: God is active among and disciplines nations.

1. **Psalms 94:9-10** says: "He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke?" (ESV). In other words, how foolish prideful sinners are. God made the ear, of course He hears the plots of the proud. God made the eye, of course He sees their sins. God disciplines entire nations, of course he will rebuke these proud fools. The key for us is God disciplines nations. Let us not think our nation will be any different.
2. Job made this even more clear. He gets pretty intense in one of his laments in **Job 12:17-25**. The Lord makes nations great and destroys them. He enlarges them and leads them away. As part of that, He even brings judgment on the counselors, judges, kings, and priests of the nations. If, as we claim, ours is a government of, by, and for the people, we are the ones God will judge. While our job is not to spread the borders of Christ's kingdom through political or military means, as kings for a day, we need to exercise our part of that governance with God's involvement in mind. He will judge our nation and He will judge us as its government. How, then, should we fill our governing roles, even if we are only "kings for a day"?

II. Balancing Principle #1: First of all, pray.

- A. In **1 Timothy 2:1-4**, Paul said the first thing he wanted Timothy to teach the Ephesian congregation was to pray. Pray for kings and all who are in high positions. Why? So we might lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. Not pray so all the national laws will coincide with God's laws. Not pray so all the laws will require folks of the world to act like Christians. Pray so we who want to live as disciples are free to do so. Does this prayer not set the great priority for our choices as kings for a day? Our main concern is not governing in such a way to force others to lead godly lives, but governing in such a way we are free to lead godly lives whether others choose to do so or not.
- B. In **Jeremiah 29**, the prophet sent a letter to those already in exile in Babylon. We must be leery of asserting a "Jeremiah Mandate" to us based on this passage because our situation is not the same as Israel's. However, to the degree we live as exiles behind enemy lines, **Jeremiah 29:5-7** gives insight to our question. Since we don't know when we will be going to our homeland, we should conduct our lives as peacefully and normally as possible, building houses, planting gardens, marrying our kids off. Additionally, we should seek the welfare of the city where we are. Jeremiah tells the people how to seek the welfare of the city. "Pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." That sounds like **1 Timothy 2:1-4**, doesn't it?

III. Balancing Principle #2: Be disciplined, not self-indulgent.

- A. In **Ecclesiastes 10:16-19**, the Preacher provides a contrast between a blessed nation and a cursed nation. A land is cursed when its king is a child feasting in the morning. A land is blessed when the king is noble, feasting at the proper time to have strength rather than out of self-indulgence.
- B. I believe **vss. 18-19** explain the mindset of the childish king who through self-indulgence feasts in the morning for drunkenness. This king is described by sloth and indolence. The roof sinks and the house leaks because of it. But he continues to focus on bread and wine because he is convinced money will fix all problems. (Though in **Ecclesiastes 7:12**, the Preacher said money does provide some protection, he also said in **Ecclesiastes 5:10-11**, money does not answer all problems but actually increases those who consume it. That is, money protects from some problems, but creates others.) If ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, we the people need to be disciplined, not self-indulgent.

IV. Balancing Principle #3: Govern to serve, not take advantage.

- A. In **Matthew 20:25-28**, Jesus contrasts the way pagans govern and exercise authority with the way His kingdom citizens will. When pagans rule, they lord authority over the ones they govern. Not so among us. When we govern, we follow in the footsteps of our own Lord and King, sacrificing ourselves in service to others.
- B. When Jesus said this, He called to mind an earlier governor of the Lord's people. After the Babylonian captivity was over, the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins for years until Nehemiah, cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, was given authority to return to Judea and rebuild the city. The building was not only jeopardized by external forces and enemies, but by internal conflict. **Nehemiah 5** presents the scene. Two factors were impacting the people: ¹in **vs. 3**, a famine had caused some of the Israelites to mortgage their fields and vineyards to get grain and ²in **vss. 4-5**, those who had mortgaged their fields had no means to pay the Persian king's taxes, so they had to sell their children into slavery. Do you see what is happening here? We would say some people had wisely set themselves up to capitalize financially on the political and natural circumstances. Clearly, some had planned better, been wiser, and prepared for disaster and others hadn't. It was allowing the rich to get richer and pushing the poor to get poorer. In **Nehemiah 5:10-12**, Nehemiah demanded the ones who had taken hold of more and more property through shrewd and wise business dealing to return the mortgaged fields and lend without exacting interest. The people agreed.
- C. Then in **Nehemiah 5:14-19**, Nehemiah compared his own governorship to those who had governed before him. Notice the specific statement that the previous governors had laid heavy burdens on the people and "lorded it over the people." Nehemiah, on the other hand, did not do so. Rather, he refused to demand the governor's allowance because it was too heavy for the people. He refused to lord over the people his rule and authority. See the final statement in this section: "Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people." Instead of lording over those he governed, he served for their good. He did not use the law to take advantage of others. He didn't use the law or his authority to line his own pockets. (For further study in this, consider the contrast between the law for the kings in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20** and Samuel's warning to the Israelites when they begged for a king in **1 Samuel 8:10-18**.)

V. Balancing Principle #4: Govern to extend justice, righteousness, and mercy.

- A. **Daniel 4** gives intriguing insight. Daniel was a citizen of God's kingdom, but had been taken into the geopolitical kingdom of Babylon. Though a captive slave in exile, he had distinguished himself and become a

counselor in the government of a purely earthly kingdom. God sent Nebuchadnezzar a dream, warning him about the way he was governing. Daniel interpreted the dream and counselled Nebuchadnezzar. To save time, we'll skip the dream and jump directly to Daniel's counsel in **Daniel 4:27**: "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" (ESV). Please, be careful with one aspect of this statement. When we see "practicing righteousness," we immediately jump to "do only right things according to God's law." However, be aware, when Nebuchadnezzar repentance was accepted by God, he did not make God's law Babylon's law. In fact, he didn't even make YHWH the only God of Babylon.

- B. We can gain some understanding by comparing God's instruction to the kings of Judah and Israel in **Jeremiah 22:2-3**: "Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place" (ESV). Doing justice and righteousness here is parallel to mercy to the oppressed. As I provided a warning about this issue of "righteousness" in the previous passage, allow me to now ask you to be careful about reading into the term "oppressor" in this passage. In our modern day, we seem to be in a constant Olympics of oppression as nearly everyone expresses our victimization and oppression and tries to convince the rest of the world we are the most oppressed. Oppression in today's world is what we call it when others disagree with us and say they think our behavior is inappropriate or wrong. That is not oppression in the biblical sense.
1. In **Leviticus 6:2-5**, oppression is connected with taking from another what is rightfully his or hers, whether through deception, robbery, lying about finding something that was lost, falsely swearing.
 2. In **Leviticus 19:13**, part of the law of loving your neighbor as yourself, oppression is connected with robbery and also with shorting your hired workers on their wages.
 3. In **Deuteronomy 24:14-15**, oppression is specifically connected to holding on to the wages of a hired worker, especially those who are poor and needy.
- C. With these thoughts in mind, we reconsider and reconnect God's instruction to the rulers of Judah and also to Nebuchadnezzar. We should exercise our governing power to accomplish justice, righteousness, and mercy. Specifically, tied to our previous point, we are to pursue these aspects instead of using our governing power to line our own pockets. In **Jeremiah 22:13-17**, the prophet returns to the instruction on governing. He rebukes the king who uses his authority to take advantage of people and increase his own holdings, wealth, and property instead of judging the cause of the poor and the needy. The poor and the needy God instructs about include specifically the widows, the fatherless, and the resident alien. That last is the sojourner. Other words we might use for this person today would be immigrant or refugee.
- D. Can we for a moment be struck by **Jeremiah 22:3**? "Do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place" (ESV). This verse should help us grasp politics is complex in our day and in our country. Though not strictly true, we practically have two choices in most aspects of our governing choices. One party focuses on the need to avoid shedding innocent blood, but the other party focuses on protecting those who would sojourn and seek refuge among us. Both parties claim to be concerned about helping the poor and needy but disagree about what the best way to do so is. One party says we should have a death penalty because those who shed innocent blood should be lawfully executed. The other party says we shouldn't have a death penalty because, try as we might, we have and will end up executing people who are innocent. And I know that after this lesson, folks on both sides will come to me saying, "But my side really takes all that into account and the other side doesn't." Further, folks from both sides will come to me saying, "But my part in that list is the important part and the part I'm not so focused on doesn't apply the same today as it did to David's house or Nebuchadnezzar's reign."

VI. Balancing Principle #5: Honor God.

- A. Return to Nebuchadnezzar in **Daniel 4**. In **Daniel 4:30**, he was looking from the roof of his royal palace and declared, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (ESV). At that statement, God brought His judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. When Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his right mind, he declared the praise of the Lord, "for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (**Daniel 4:34-35**, ESV).
- B. He went on to say, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (**Daniel 4:37**, ESV). We

must not think our nation is great because we have made it a great nation. Only God can do that. I don't mean this quite as politically charged as it will sound considering present campaign slogans. But we would probably be whole lot better off if we tried to make America humble again instead of trying to make it great again. At the same time, in order to be an equal opportunity slogan basher, we as kingdom citizens don't need to be spending nearly so much time trying to politically find a new way forward for America as trying to spiritually help Americans find the only way to God: Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

"We the people" who are also citizens of Jesus's kingdom, must treat our role as the government of this nation the way we do everything. Just like we let Jesus's Word govern us on the job, in our schools, in our homes, in our relationships, we need to let Jesus's Word govern us in the voting booth. Finally, as we wrap this up, may we remember what we studied a few weeks ago from **Titus 3:1-2**. Whatever we do in the voting booth, as we interact with one another, encouraging one another, persuading one another may we "be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people" (ESV).