

November 1st, 2020

The American Magistrate and His Master

2 Chronicles 19:5-7; Daniel 2:20-21b

Why do politics in the Church?

This Tuesday is the general election, and as such, I asked permission from the elders to preach a sermon on the duty of magistrates, or civil rulers. Though I personally have not preached on this before, it is certainly not a novelty. There are scores of political sermons in the Reformed tradition.¹ But I can imagine some Christians being perplexed at the idea of a sermon dealing with politics. “Why can’t we just preach the Word, why are we delving into politics?” So let’s deal with that objection before we proceed.² Here are three reasons.

1. The Bible speaks about politics

First we are delving into politics—what Aristotle called as “the art and science of government”—*because the Bible speaks about it*. It is a gnostic understanding of the Bible to say it only speaks “spiritual things,” but it is silent on “earthly things.” The Scripture gives us a robust theology of earthly governments. Just read **Deuteronomy 17**, **Romans 13**, **1 Peter 2**, **Psalm 82**, or look at the multitude of verses in **Proverbs**³, or read the book of **Daniel** to see that God has spoken voluminously on this topic.

¹ cf. *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805 Vol. 1-2*, Ed. Ellis Sandoz, 2nd Edition, (Carmel, IA.: Liberty Fund, 1998).

² Aristotle used the word “politics” to mean the “affairs of the state,” by politics he meant the “science and art of government.” Source: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=politics> Accessed October 31, 2020

³ Proverbs 8:15-21; 14:34; 16:12-13; 17:15; 20:26, 28; 25:4-5; 29:4, 14; 31:1-9; also cf. Psalm 132:11-12 ; 33:12-19

2. God the Father cares about humanity

Secondly, we are delving into politics *because our Father in Heaven is especially concerned with the care of humanity*. Pastor Samuel Sherwood said in his 1774 sermon *Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers* “The providence of God which rules the world especially concerns itself in more important things which respect...[the] communities of men.”⁴ Loved ones, **John 3:16** says “For God so loved the world...” Don’t you realize that much of the misery and happiness on the earth comes directly from civil magistrates? Therefore since God cares for humanity, He is *especially* concerned with how they are ruled. Jonathan Edwards said that Magistrates are “...the chief instruments of [a people’s] preservation, safety, and rest.”⁵ **Psalm 82:6** calls civil magistrates “gods” lower case g—because they stand in the stead of the Lord God to distribute justice and rescue the needy in the city of man. **Psalm 11:3** calls magistrates “the foundations of the earth.”⁶ Our Father in Heaven cares about government because He cares about us.

3. Christ is Lord over everything including politics

Thirdly, we are delving into politics this morning *because Christ is Lord over everything including politics*. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 2:2** “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Did Paul mean that we should restrict our preaching to the Person of Christ *alone*? Certainly not since Paul spoke about many other things. What Paul meant that we must connect all of reality to Christ “For” **Colossians 1:16** says “...by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, *whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*—all things were created through him and for him.” Christ is sun in our solar system and every planet—meaning every

⁴ Samuel Sherwood in his sermon “Scripture Instructions to Civil Rulers” in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805 Vol. 1*, Ed. Ellis Sandoz, 2nd Edition, (Carmel, IA.: Liberty Fund, 1998), pg. 394

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth, Reprinted 2009), pg. 38

⁶ *ibid*, pg. 37

doctrine, every command, every ethic, EVERYTHING—revolves around Him. That includes politics. **Psalm 2:10-12** “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. *Kiss the Son*, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way.”

That is why we are preaching on this topic this morning. 1) Because the Bible speaks about it. 2) Because God cares for humanity, and is *especially* concerned with how we are ruled. 3) Because Christ is *not* just Lord over our private little religious experience. He’s Lord of *all* lords and King of *all* kings.

The Big Idea...

Magistrates must serve in the fear of the LORD *because* they rule for Him *and* the misery or happiness of society depends on it

- ☆ The Magistrates of Our Society
- ☆ The Members of Our Society
- ☆ The Master Over Every Society

I. The Magistrates of Our Society

Jehoshaphat’s epitaph

2 Chronicles 19 deals with the political and religious reforms that King Jehoshaphat made in Judah. Taking his whole life into view, King Jehoshaphat was a *good* king. 1 **Kings 22:43-44** says “He walked in all the way of Asa his father. He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. *Yet* the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. Jehoshaphat *also* made peace with the king of

Israel.” This is kind of like King David’s epitaph over his life. **1 Kings 15:5** says “David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, *except* in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” King Jehoshaphat likewise walked with the Lord *except* in the matter of his political relationships, specifically King Ahab of Israel. **1 Kings 16:30** says that “Ahab...did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.” He married Jezebel of the Sidonians. He worshipped Baal and built poles for Asherah. And he persecuted the true prophets of the Lord. King Jehoshaphat made a political arrangement with him by having his son marry Ahab’s daughter. As a result King Jehoshaphat would join King Ahab in battle. That’s the context of chapter 19. King Jehoshaphat narrowly escapes death in battle. **18:31** says that “...Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him.” But Ahab did not survive. As was prophesied against him by the prophet Micaiah, he died in battle. That’s how chapter 18 ends.

Jehu’s rebuke

Please look with me at **19:1** “Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. But Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, *wrath has gone out against you from the Lord.*” What was this wrath? I believe it was what happened after Jehoshaphat died. In 2 Chronicles 21 we read that his son Jehoram became king, and when he did, he killed all his brothers with the sword. You see Jehoram’s mother-in-law was the wicked Jezebel. He walked in her ways *not* in the ways of his father. And according to Jezebel, this how you deal with threats to your throne—you kill them. Jehoshaphat’s own sons were murdered partly due to his political alliance with the house of Ahab. Just like his forefather David, the sword entered into Jehoshaphat’s house through his own sin.

Jehoshaphat's reforms

Now God spared Jehoshaphat that knowledge it seems, but he didn't spare him the rebuke. The prophet says to him in v.2 "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" Now this rebuke had a tremendous effect on Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat resolved himself to bring reform to Judah. v.4 tells us that though he lived in Jerusalem—the capital—he went on a campaign from Beersheba (the southern most part of Judah) to Mount Ephraim (the northern most part) in order to bring them back to the LORD. They *had* to be brought back to the LORD. Why? Matthew Henry says "[Jehoshaphat's] late affinity with the idolatrous house of Ahab had had a bad influence in his own kingdom. Many were emboldened to revolt to idolatry when they saw even their...[own] king so intimate with idolaters."⁷ So what does he do? v.5 He starts by appointing judges, "city by city." Notice immediately the connection between reforming a culture and appointing righteous civil rulers. He understood that you can't have one without the other. Now Jehoshaphat gives *three commands* to these magistrates. Three commands, and we'll take them one at a time.

The 1st command: Consider what you do *for* you are the Lord's servant

Their first command is in v.6 "*Consider what you do*, [meaning: 'take heed, give all your attention to this one thing, carefully ponder' Why?] *for* you judge not for man *but for the Lord*. He is with you in giving judgment." Rulers beware, you do not ultimately for man, but for the Lord. And He is with you in every single ruling. This is a **universal truth**: all magistrates—Jewish or Gentile, religious or pagan—are servants of the Lord and they rule on His behalf. Jehoshaphat is not giving us a merely OT Jewish doctrine here. He's saying the same thing Paul does in **Romans 13:4** "...he [the civil ruler] is God's servant... he is the servant of God..." Servant is the Greek word δῆκονος diakonos. We've seen this in our studies in Corinthians. A *diakonos* is a table waiter or a bus boy who serves on behalf of his employer. Paul called himself and the other

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume: Genesis to Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), pg. 465

Apostles *diakonos* (1 Cor. 3:5) because they were nothing but instruments, it is God who gives the growth. Jesus is called a *diakonos* (Romans 15:8) because He didn't seek to do His own will *but* the will of Him who sent Him (John 6:38). Likewise all civil rulers in Jehoshaphat's time and ours are *diakonos*—they are servants of God—not ruling on behalf of the people but on the behalf of God. Dear congregation, do you see that? The problem is that we have been trained by either our culture or by well meaning *but mistaken* Evangelicals (be it our pastors or parents) to divide up the world into two neat categories: the sacred and the secular. The Lord rules over the sacred but not the secular. Or if the Lord does rule over the secular, it's in a very laissez-fair manner. He's a god who let's things take their own course in the secular realm, he doesn't interfere. That is *not* the God of the Bible. As King Nebuchadnezzar was happy to confess after the Lord corrected Him. “The LORD does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Daniel 4:35). If you think that God rules over governments *less* than He rules over the Church, you have a defective view of God. Just as pastors are His servants, so are civil rulers. Which immediately implies this: when rulers rule unrighteously they make God look bad. When King David acted wickedly in the case of Uriah, what did God say to him? “...by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to *blaspheme*”⁸ (2 Samuel 12:14). When rulers rule wickedly, the enemies of the Lord blaspheme and despise His name. God's reputation suffers in the hands of wicked rulers.⁹ Do you think God takes that lightly?

The 2nd command: Let the fear of the Lord be upon you

That leads to the second command that Jehoshaphat gives. Look at v.7 “Now then [or therefore in light of *this*], let *the fear of the Lord* be upon you.” Let's stop there. Jehoshaphat is commanding Judah's rulers to let the fear—the dread or terror of the Lord—control them in their office. Meaning there are

⁸ NASB—it is in the footnote of the ESV

⁹ cf. my sermon from 2 Peter 1:8-11 *God's Reputation Is In Your Hands*

two types of fear that control magistrates in their office: they will either be controlled by the fear of man or the fear of God. Those are the only two options. King Saul was a wicked ruler because he was controlled by the fear of man (1 **Samuel 15:24**). The idea is similar to what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:28** “And *do not fear* those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather *fear him* who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” In other words, ‘...rulers do not fear those you rule, do not fear whether you will please them, or whether you will retain your power. Rather fear Him who will see all things and who holds you accountable for the way you discharge your office. This is universal command for every single magistrate of whatever nation. The only safe and right rule for magistrates is to rule in the fear of the Lord.

Objection: “Magistrates should be religiously neutral”

Here is where objections are raised. “Shouldn’t our magistrates be religiously neutral? Isn’t this just a command for OT Israel, not for magistrates today?” This is a massively important objection. So I’m going to answer in three distinct ways. 1) From Scripture. 2) From reason. 3) From history.

1. From Scripture

Please turn to **Psalms 2:10-12**. Here the Psalmist is addressing the kings of the earth—meaning all civil rulers. And he makes it clear from **v.1-2** that he is not limiting this to the Jewish leaders, but the nations, that is the Gentile nations. Starting in **v.10** “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. [What does he require of all civil rulers?] *Serve the Lord with fear*, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way...” He’s not speaking about them as merely individuals. He says *serve the Lord* in other words ‘...as you are **serving** in the office as the Lord’s *diakonos* **serve** Him with fear, pay homage to Him.’ John Calvin says here “[God] does not order [kings] to lay aside their authority and return to private life, but to make the power with which they are invested subject to Christ *that* he may rule

over all.”¹⁰ So no the Scripture doesn’t support the idea that Magistrates should be religious neutrality, but rather that they should rule in the fear of the Lord.

2. From reason¹¹

If a magistrate ought to be religiously neutral, then it follows that they have no responsibility to God while acting as a magistrate. But if a ruler has no responsibility to the Lord, then there is no such thing as acting unjustly.¹² This is what the Nazi’s argued in the Nuremberg trials when they were prosecuted for war crimes. They claimed that their national laws made it right for them to do the monstrous things they did, and other nations didn’t have the jurisdiction to tell them otherwise. It was only when the the prosecutors on the Allies’s side appealed to the Law above the Law, God’s law, that they were able to defeat their argument. The Nazi’s were guilty, not because they broke German law, but because they broke God’s law.¹³ In other words, the Nazi magistrates were guilty because they did not rule in the fear of the Lord. If every individual has a

¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Trans. Henry Beveridge, (Peabody, MA.,: Hendrickson Publishers, 2nd Printing 2009), pg. 972 (IV.XX.IV)

¹¹ Every magistrate is already religious, the only question is what religion are they? See the third FAQ at <https://www.niagaradeclaration.ca/faq>. Also cf. my message *The Impossibility of a Non “Religious” State* from my *Christ, Caesar and the Church* series. If Libertarians says: “No the fear of the Lord shouldn’t be the standard by which a magistrate rules, but rather the Book of Nature.” I wouldn’t entirely disagree. I would simply ask “What does the book of nature demand but that we honor the Lord and give thanks to Him as the Creator of all things?(cf. Romans 1:21). Cf. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen Vol. 13*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 509

¹² Sherwood, pg. 389

¹³ Source: <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1456&context=honors> accessed October 31, 2020

responsibility to love the Lord their God in every part of their life, then so does the magistrate acting as a magistrate.¹⁴

3. From history¹⁵

If magistrates ought to be religiously neutral then how ought we to interpret all the nations that God has destroyed because they would not follow Him? Egypt was devoured by the sword of the Lord because they trusted in their idols (**Jeremiah 46:25**). The nation of Moab was broken and put to shame because he magnified himself against the Lord (**Jeremiah 47:27**). The nation of Assyria was punished because they boasted not in the Lord but in the strength of their own hand (**Isaiah 10:12**). Babylon was wiped off the earth because they built their empire on cruelty, violence, immorality and they worshipped idols (**Habakkuk 2**). God poured out His wrath on the city of Nineveh because they polluting their land by tearing away boundaries that were fixed by God (**Nahum 1-3**). Now if God judges nations for wickedness before Him, how *ought* the magistrate rule? Shouldn't he rule in the fear of the Lord? It is a dreadful

¹⁴ James Bannerman's *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 137.

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Is it only in this dispensation that the magistrate is not required to protect the worship of God? Owen, pg. 512

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See Appendix for one final objection regarding the 1st Amendment

¹⁵ Cf. my message *Christ: Lord Over the Church and Caesar* from my *Christ, Caesar and the Church* series.

mistake to suppose that the magistrate can rule without the fear of God. History demonstrates that those nations who ignore Him taste His wrath.¹⁶

The 3rd command: Be careful what you do *for* there is no injustice with God

That brings us to the third command that Jehoshaphat gives magistrates. Halfway through v.7 “Be careful what you do, [meaning: take heed, be most diligent, take great pains in how you rule. Why?] *for* there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality or taking bribes.” The idea is this: these three vices listed: injustice, partiality, and taking bribes accompany rulers who don’t rule in the fear of the Lord. In other words, **every magistrate who does not fear the Lord hurts people in one way or another.** King Jeroboam turned his heart away from the Lord and built idols in Samaria consequently throwing the whole nation into every sinful abomination which led to their overthrow and captivity (1 Kings 12:25-33). King Ahab killed the righteous (1 Kings 18:4) and spared the wicked (1 Kings 20:42). 2 Chronicles 33:9 says that King “Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.” Pontius Pilate the Roman

¹⁶ I would have liked to add a fourth answer coming from Reformers and the Confessions, but space forbids. The WCF denies the religious neutrality of magistrates by stating this in 23.3 “Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief.” Likewise Calvin said this in IV.XX.IX of the Institutes: “...The duty of magistrates... extends to both tables of the law, did Scripture not teach [this], we might learn from profane writers; for no man has discoursed of the duty of magistrates...without beginning with religion and divine worship. Thus all have confessed that no polity can be successfully established unless piety be its first care, and that those laws are absurd which disregard the rights of God, and consult only for men...Hence in Scripture holy kings are especially praised for restoring the worship of God when corrupted or overthrown, or for taking care that religion flourished under them in purity and safety. On the other hand, the sacred history sets down anarchy among the vices, when it states that there was no king in Israel, and, therefore, every one did as he pleased (Judges 21:25). This rebukes the folly of those who would neglect the care of divine things, and devote themselves merely to the administration of justice among men; as if God had appointed rulers in his own name to decide earthly controversies, and omitted what was of far greater moment, his own pure worship as prescribed by his law.”

Governor of Judea was an absolute brutal leader. **Luke 13:1** says that he killed some Galileans mixing their blood with their sacrifices. **Acts 12:2-3** tells us that King Herod was a violent persecutor of the Church, he killed "...James the brother of John with the sword" and put Peter in prison.

The magistrate has more power to do good or evil

The principle in all of these account is simply this: Because the civil magistrate is endowed with the power of the sword (**Romans 13:4**), he has more power to do good or evil *than any other man*. Listen to how Pastor Sherwood said in in 1774:

"[Just] as rulers are capable...of doing more towards promoting justice and righteousness among their fellow-men: so [they are capable of doing] the highest injustice and wrong, and the greatest mischief and evil of any men in the world; and are the biggest plagues, and heaviest judgments upon a society that can be sent upon them."¹⁷

On the one hand Scripture calls righteous magistrates the "saviors" of the land. (**Nehemiah 9:27**). On the other hand, wicked rulers are the plagues of the earth and the people rejoice when they perish (**2 Chronicles 23:12**).¹⁸

Experimental politics

At this point my prayer is that this message would be heard by civil magistrates, whether that be local or state or federal or beyond. Whether it be policeman or politician, judge or prosecutor, military personnel or sheriff. God designed you so that you would be a blessing to the people you serve. And He

¹⁷ Sherwood, pg. 386

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 "Almost all the prosperity of a public society and civil community does, under God, depends on their rulers. They are like the main springs or wheels in a machine, that keep every part in its due motion, and are in the body politic, as the vitals in the body natural, and as the pillars and foundation in a building." Edwards, pg. 37

¹⁸ Also cf. 2 Chronicles 21:20 and Proverbs 11:10

commands you to walk in the fear of the Lord as you serve, and pay close attention to yourself and your charge, lest you “...may incur...guilt before the Lord and wrath...come upon you.”¹⁹ There is a judgment coming, when the books will be open, and you will have to give an account for all the ways you served as a public official. Those who serve in public office will be judged with a greater strictness.²⁰ The Righteous Judge of the universe, whom you serve is watching over you as you care for those whom He made. Therefore it is most vital, since you have been charged with ruling over men, that you should rule in the fear of the Lord. For on the last Day there will be a reckoning, and then you shall receive a righteous sentence either of absolution or condemnation.

II. The Members of Our Society

The rule for appointing rulers

Please look at **v.5** “He [King Jehoshaphat] appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city...” Under a monarchy it is the King who appointed his officials. King Jehoshaphat knew that he couldn’t appoint wicked and foolish men to be a judge. At the founding of the nation of Israel, Jethro—Moses’ father-in-law—gave a wonderful description of what to look for in a leader. He told Moses in **Exodus 18:21** “Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people...” Did you hear it? Jethro gave essentially the same advice in *looking for a magistrate* as Jehoshaphat gave in *his charge* to his magistrates. Jethro said “look for these type of men” and Jehoshaphat told his judges “be this type of men.” No doubt, Jehoshaphat did his best to find such judges even as the nation of Judah was in moral decay.

¹⁹ 2 Chronicles 19:10

²⁰ Parallel truth to James 3:1 “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

The American people appoint their rulers

That's our charge today as we face the election. You see we don't have a monarchy, but a republic, so it is we who appoint our leaders through the act of voting. It's incumbent to find the *best type* of rulers given the moral decay in our country. In other words, who *in the main* rules in the fear of the Lord? Or we could say it like this: Which candidate's policies *best reflect* the fear of the Lord? Or we could use language of **Romans 13:4**, which candidate's policies carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer? Or the language of **1 Peter 2:14**, which candidates policies punish those who do evil and praise those who do good?

John Piper and his unhelpful argument

This past week John Piper wrote an article entitled Policies, Persons, and the Paths to Ruin: Pondering the Implications of the 2020 Election.²¹ Now John Piper has been one of the most influential preachers and theologians in my life and I praise God for Him. But his article is an example in how *not* to think about the upcoming election. He only considered one race, the presidential race between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. His conclusion was that he was not going to vote for either candidate. A Christian may have that conviction and that's between them and the Lord. But it's *how* Piper argued that I take issue with. Piper lined up the two candidates and started listing off their particular sins. On the one hand there is the candidate who has unrepentant sexual immorality, unrepentant boastfulness, unrepentant vulgarity, unrepentant factiousness. On the other hand, we have the candidate who endorses baby-killing, sex-switching, freedom limiting and socialism. Piper's unspoken premise is that "all sins are equally damning and *therefore* all sins are equal."²² That is essentially why he isn't willing to vote for either candidate. Now I completely agree with Piper that all sins are equally damning. **James 2:10** says "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."

²¹ Source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/policies-persons-and-paths-to-ruin> Accessed October 31, 2020

²² Much help here from <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/john-piper-me-and-the-cool-shame-election.html> Accessed October 31, 2020

The thought of foolishness is sin (**Proverbs 24:9**), and if that sin is not covered in the blood of Jesus Christ, it will damn you just as much the sins homosexuality, or thievery, or drunkenness (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**). So I agree that all sins are equally damning, but it doesn't follow that all sins are equal. The Scripture tells us again and again God will judge every man according to his works. **Matthew 16:27** "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then *he will repay each person according to what he has done.*" **Revelation 21:12** "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened...and the dead were judged by what was written in the books, *according to what they had done.*" Scripture makes it clear that some sins, *because of the nature of them* carry a greater penalty than others. Because some sins are greater. Jesus said in **John 19:11** "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you *has the greater sin.*" In **Matthew 11:21-22** Jesus said "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you." Applying this to Piper's argument, we can grant that both candidates sins, if not covered in the blood of Jesus Christ, are both equally damning. But that doesn't mean they carry an equal penalty. And it doesn't mean that they are equally destructive to society. It is perfectly consistent to believe that King Jehoshaphat did "...what was right in the sight of the Lord" (**1 Kings 22:43**) without believing it was right for him to make political alliance with the wicked King Ahab (**2 Chronicles 18:1**). Though King Jehoshaphat at times helped the wicked and loved those who hated the Lord (**2 Chronicles 19:2**) he was a far better king than Manasseh (**2 Chronicles 19:3**). But Piper's logic puts King Jehoshaphat reign on the same level as King Manasseh.²³

²³ Though experiment for the future: Imagine if we practiced Church discipline according to Piper's logic of voting.

Imagine a yesteryear election

I hope that you see *why* this is so vital to think through. There are some sins that are more destructive to society than others. It is absurd to say that unrepentant sexual sin is on the same level as the murder of babies. It is absurd to say that arrogance kills people like socialism does. Imagine if your great-great-grandfather had to vote in a presidential election and he had to choose between two candidates: one who was pro-slavery but was a decent fellow, and the other who was anti-slavery but had an opioid addiction. Which sin is more destruction to the American people? Which candidates policies are more in line with the fear of the Lord?

Experimental voting

Dear congregation, we should be asking that as much as we have opportunity with every magistrate that we can vote on: which of these candidates in the main has policies that reflect the fear of the Lord? **1 Timothy 5:22** warns us about laying hands on potential pastors too quickly: “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others...”²⁴ If we can share responsibility for the sins of those we put into an ecclesiastical office, it seems to follow that the same is true for a civil office. The Bible doesn’t tell us *who* to vote for, but *what* to vote for. Therefore it is incumbent on us to get a thorough knowledge of a person’s political principles and weight them against the Scripture. This is no small duty that lies before us as we vote for any office. **Proverbs 28:15** says “Like a roaring lion or a charging bear *is a wicked ruler* over a poor people.” The civil officers we vote for have the potential to do great harm or great good to our society. Not just for our basic civil rights, but our religious rights as well. Pastor Sherwood said this in 1774 and I think it should captivate our minds every time we vote:

“We are awfully threatened with being deprived of the liberty of our consciences, the liberty of professing important truths of the gospel; and

²⁴ NASB

attending those sacred ordinances which God has instituted with a view to advance the glory of the Redeemer and promote the salvation of his people.”²⁵

III. The Master Over Every Society

The catechism of the world vs. Daniel 2

Please turn with me to Daniel 2. What does the catechism of the world say regarding the election? It’s question and answer would look like this. Q. Who decides the election? A. The voter does—the candidate with the most votes wins. But what does the Scripture say? Please look at **v.20** “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.*” Dear congregation, it is not ultimately the voter who decides the next election, though this doesn’t lessen our responsibility to vote, it is the Lord God. He removes one and sets up another. God is sovereign over the kingdom of men.

Pink’s words for this present darkness

A.W. Pink’s words during the Great Depression are just as relevant today as they were then:

“Without a doubt a world-crisis is at hand, and everywhere men are alarmed. But God is not! He is never taken by surprise. It is no un-expected emergency which now confronts Him, for He is the One who “worketh all thing after the counsel of His own will” (**Ephesians 1:11**). Hence, though the world is panic-stricken, the word to the believer is, “Fear not”! “All things” are subject to His immediate control: “all things” are moving in accord with His eternal purpose, and therefore, “all things” are “working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called

²⁵ Sherwood, pg. 403

according to His purpose.” It must be so, for “of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things” (**Romans 11:36**).²⁶

The stone cut by no human hand

Loved the reason why we are ending in Daniel 2 is because you need to know how to respond after the election. Daniel 2 is the picture of all of world history which God is infallibly directing. God gives Nebuchadnezzar a vision of a great image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, stomach and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet mixed with iron and clay. **v.31** says that it’s appearance was mighty and frightening to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel interprets and we find out that this image represents the 4 great nations throughout world history: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Like the image, these nations were frightening and terrible. But something happens. **v.34** tells us that “...as stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image...[and] it broke [it] in pieces.” This stone fills the whole earth. It is, **v.44** says the kingdom that the God of Heaven set up “a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.” Loved ones Daniel saw the kingdom of Christ and His Church. Do you see? Babylon has fallen. So has Persian, and Greece, and Rome. All the kingdoms of this present world will fall, including America.

The invincible Church

But the gates of hell have never prevailed against the Church.²⁷ It’s impossible. Do you know why? Not *merely* because God is sovereign, though that would be enough. The Church can never be destroyed, because we have a Savior who has already paid for all our sins for which we ought to have been judged for. These kingdoms failed because of their wickedness. But loved ones, if you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you cling to Him by faith, if you

²⁶ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984), pg. 15

²⁷ cf. Rev. William M. Paxson and his imagery of the Church as a great ship guided by an infallible Pilot through the ocean of eternity in his message “The Church, the Preacher, the Pastor—the Instruments of God’s Salvation” in *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), pg. 350-351

hope in Him alone, then your wickedness has already been judged on Christ. What can man do to you? What can governments do to you? What can elections do to you? Christ has made satisfaction for your sins in Heaven. His blood has made you white as snow. When He was raised from the dead, you were raised with Him, and you can never perish. You will never be condemned, and you will never be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Watch your joys and sorrows and pray for repentance

So then how does the gospel help you respond to the election? Well **first** of all it ought to control your joy if righteous magistrates are elected. Why do I say it *controls our joy*? Because Jesus wants us to have joy in the right things. When His disciples returned from casting out demons, He told them in **Luke 10:20** "... do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Loved ones do not rejoice merely in the "right" candidate winning. Rejoice that you belong to Jesus Christ. Rejoice that God has shown mercy *and* pray for national repentance. There is no Savior on Capitol Hill. We need revival. Without revival, no politician can save America. Judgment is here and it is coming. We are a wicked nation. Pray to the Lord of Heaven to that He would give sight to the minds of unbelievers whom the god of this world is blinding. Pray for our leaders that they would turn like the King of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah and put on sackcloth and ashes and call for national repentance to the Lord Most High. Pray that a King Josiah would be raised up and bring national reformation and rid our land of wickedness, so that we could walk in the fear of the Lord. **Secondly**, the gospel ought to control your sorrows if unrighteous magistrates are elected. How? Why will you be sorrowful if unrighteous magistrates are elected? Because your peace and prosperity are threatened? Because it means dark times? Of course those things are sorrowful. But loved ones we should be sorrowful because it means that our great God and His Son Jesus Christ will be further blasphemed. We should be sorrowful because it means that more wickedness will be taught to the children of this nation. We should be sorrowful because it means that the

lost will be in greater darkness and that the gospel will be less accessible to them. Whatever happens in the election, we must remember that our hope is only in the Lord, there is no hope in any political party or strategy. Outside of Him there is no salvation. Let me end with these words by Pastor Sherwood as he contemplated the uncertainty of the future:

“Let us be deeply affected with the present critical and alarming situation of our public affairs; *and unite in fervent prayers to that God who is higher than the kings of the earth*, that He would graciously interpose to our relief; that He would avert the impending storms of vengeance, and favor us with peace... and the full enjoyment of all our valuable liberties; [and] that our rulers may feed us according to the integrity of their hearts, and guide us by the skillfulness of their hands.”²⁸

²⁸ Sherwood, pg. 403

Appendix #1: “What about the 1st Amendment?”

Furthermore if someone objects by saying: “the First Amendment says ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof’ and therefore a government official cannot rule in the fear of the Lord for that would be in violation of our most basic right.’ I would respond in several different ways. First, I would say that man’s law is always subservient to God’s law. That our Constitution says something does not make it right or true. Other countries require their citizens to be atheistic. Are their laws the final arbiter of truth? Secondly, I would say that this objection comes from a wrong understanding of the 1st Amendment. The Founding Fathers prohibited a federal Church from being recognized because the fact of the matter was that many of the states already had state-recognized Churches. This Amendment prohibited the federal government from establishing one Church against the wishes of the different states. As R.C. Sproul says “The First Amendment does not express the idea that our nation is independent of God or that it was founded on atheism. It was actually self-consciously theistic in its origin, but refused to grant any particular theistic group favored status under the law.”²⁹ This is seen in just a few evidences: “In 1782 Congress approved a Bible for American’s citizens—one that was more akin to the 1560 Geneva Bible than to the Englishman’s King James Version.”³⁰ “Subsequent to the Declaration of Independence, Vermont (1777), South Carolina (1778), Tennessee (1796) restricted officeholding to those who believed in eternal life; [while] Delaware and Pennsylvania [additionally] required belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures—Old and New Testaments (1776)”³¹ in order to hold political office. Remember it was John Adams who “Our Constitution was

²⁹ R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2019), pg. 506

³⁰ David W. Hall, *Calvin In the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights, and Civil Liberties*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2009), pg. 259

³¹ *ibid*, pg. 261

made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”³²

Appendix #2: “What about tolerance of non-Christians”

It is thought that if our magistrates ruled in the fear of the Lord that this would mean religious persecution of those who didn’t share their beliefs. First this is a shoe-is-on-the-other foot argument. Every state is already necessarily religious, because every state has philosophical/ideological commitments that inform them what is right/wrong. So this problem exists for every state already.³³ Secondly it is absurd to think (generally speaking) that non God-fearing magistrates would have more tolerance and respect for those who believe differently than they than God-fearing magistrates. Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them, and therefore have the fruits of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**); non-Christians do not. History proves this out. For every one God-fearing magistrate who abused their power and hurt others, there are ten non-God fearing magistrates who have done the same. It is not enemies of God but friends of God who are better rulers.

³² Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102> Accessed October 9, 2020

³³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFepAmSVwoI> . This is my message *The Problems of Independence, Tolerance and Conscience from my Christ, Caesar and the Church* series.