

Don't Waste Your Vote

Christian Responsibility and the National Elections

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1 Peter 2:13-17 (ESV)

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Who is Lord of Your Votes?

Eight more days and millions of Filipinos will flock to polling stations to select who will be the next President, lawmakers, and local government leaders of our country. Today I will devote my time to encourage you to vote on that day but not just to vote like the rest of the country. I want to say, "Don't waste your vote."¹ It implies that votes can be wasted, not by those who will try to cheat, but by voters who will vote unwisely. When the elections don't turn out in a way most of us expect, don't start blaming and finger-pointing. Remember that we are all responsible. Ask yourself after voting, "Have I not wasted my vote?" There is a way to waste your vote. There is also a way not to waste it.

We are taking a break from our Galatians series, but this is not totally out of line with what we are studying so far. The message of Galatians is the freedom that we now have in Christ. Paul is challenging his readers to live according to that freedom. Peter is also doing the same thing in our text, applying the freedom we have in Christ to the believers' responsibility to the government (even to wicked, harsh and abusive human governments). "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God" (2:16). That freedom is a freedom to live as "servants of God" (literally "slaves" from the Greek *doulos*). He is not just talking here about being slaves of God in spiritual areas of life, but in all other areas of life like our duty to the government and to our country. Our attitude toward our government and this elections must be what God wants us to have. He is Lord of all of your life. He is Lord even of your votes.

¹ The title of this sermon is borrowed from Robin Boisvert's sermon, "Don't Waste Your Vote," preached on July 20, 2008 at Covenant Life Church. Available for download at http://www.covlife.org/resources/131455-Dont_Waste_Your_Vote.

The Importance of the Issue

Aside from the immediate relevance of this issue because the elections are very near, there are several other reasons we need to consider about the importance of not wasting our votes. Why is it important not to waste our votes on May 10? First, *the results of the elections will help shape the future of this nation*. It is one of the major factors because who will lead our country will be determined by the results of the elections. If, according to Peter, government leaders are “sent by [God] to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (2:14), then it is their responsibility to see to it that evil is suppressed and good is promoted in the land. If we have the right leaders, then justice will prevail, we will see the good fruits of true democracy, the poor will be empowered to lift themselves out of poverty, the environment will be taken care of, children will get good education, Filipino families will be together, righteousness will govern the nation. If we don’t have the right leaders, poverty will rule the land, injustices will prevail, we will see the continuous disintegration of the Filipino family, the poor will continue to depend on patrons, and we will not see God-honoring development in the Philippines.

Of course, they are not just the ones responsible for the future of our nation. All of us are. So the second reason why this is important is this: *We are given the privilege and the responsibility to select our leaders and, therefore, help shape the future of this nation*. God through the apostle Peter commanded the believers, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme or to governors...” (1 Pet. 2:13-14). The people in Peter’s time do not have the right to select their leaders. We do. That’s why democracy is good. Let us not waste that privilege. We live in a free society. Thank the Lord for that. But also bear in mind your responsibility to select the right leaders. If for no other reason, do this “for the Lord’s sake.” He wants you to vote. He doesn’t want you to waste that vote.

Third, *the glory of God is at stake*. Wasting our votes will not glorify God; to vote according to the will of God will glorify God. Democracy means “rule of the people.” It does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want. We are ruled by God. As “servants of God” we must vote according to the will of God. That’s the way we can be sure that we are not wasting our privilege to vote. From now on, consider your vote not just as a political obligation, consider it sacred. You will exalt the name of the Lord by your vote. “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (other Filipinos) honorable so that...they may see your good deeds (your attitude in voting) and (in that way, they will) *glorify God...*” (2:12).

Biblical Principles to Remember

The Bible does not directly teach us about voting since governments at that time are very different. Nevertheless, we can gain some general principles of God’s design for governments and how Christians are to respond to that design. Then we can use them as guide on how we can make sure that our votes are not wasted. Remember that the Word of

God is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God (that’s you, fellow Christian) may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Voting responsibly is good work.

The media can guide us in voting responsibly, although not usually. The newspapers can enlighten us about the issues. The Commission on Elections can teach us about important matters on the elections. However, only the Bible, the Word of God, can infallibly give us light on this matter. We can also have the psalmist’s confidence, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). We will walk from our homes to the voting precincts with the Word of God giving light to our paths.

So what are some of the biblical principles we need to remember so that our votes are not wasted on May 10?

First, *vote as a dual citizen*. You are primarily a citizen of the kingdom of God but you are also (secondarily) a citizen of the Republic of the Philippines. That our primary citizenship and, therefore, our primary allegiance is to the King of kings is clear from these verses: “But *our citizenship is in heaven*, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even *to subject all things to himself*” (Phil. 3:20-21); “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies* of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

It is true that we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). But Jesus also said that we must be responsible citizens of the country he has given us. “Render to Caesar (the Roman emperor’s title) the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Luke 20:25; cf. Matt 22:21; Mark 12:17). Paul agrees with Peter, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities...Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” (Rom. 13:1, 7). So when you vote, bear in mind that as a Christian God does not want you to be totally separated from the world and be uninvolved in its affairs, but be active in doing something that will contribute to the transformation of our nation.

Second, *vote bearing in mind God’s kingdom purposes in using human governments to lead a nation*. When we think of the kingdom of God, we often limit it to the church. True, the church is God’s primary agent for the transformation of the world. As Bill Hybels often says, “The local church is the hope of the world.” But the kingdom of God is larger than the church. Even non-Christian government leaders are, according to Peter, “sent by [God] (for what purpose?) to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet. 2:14). God has a purpose for even allowing President Arroyo to lead our country for 10 years. He has a purpose for using even non-believers to lead a nation. God is building his kingdom. He will make sure that no one gets in his way (see Psalm 115:3).

So when you vote, pray like what Jesus taught us, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done [in the Philippines] as it is in heaven.” Many Filipinos may have many different reasons for taking time to vote. But we Christians must be able to say, “I will vote because I want to contribute to the building of the kingdom of God in the Philippines through our government.”

Third, *vote for leaders who has the character and the competence to lead our country toward God-honoring development.* Jethro’s counsel to his son-in-law Moses is full of wisdom, “Look for *able men* from all the people, *men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe* (that’s character), and place such men over the people as *chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens* (that’s different levels of competence)” (Exod. 18:21). Vote not for “who is likely to be so,” but for “who ought to be so.”² Don’t be misled by surveys. I hear many people say that they will vote for a certain candidate because he has a good chance of winning. But what kind of reasoning is that? I hear other people say that they *want to* vote for a certain candidate because they think he is the right choice, but *they will not* because he does not have a chance of winning. What kind of reasoning is that?

Vote for leaders who have both character and competence. If a candidate is a Christian, that’s a plus. But it does not necessarily mean that we will vote for him. We are looking for people who have the vision for the country and have the competence to move us toward the fulfillment of that vision. So we look for track records. What have they already done? Does their background prove that they can lead a country or just a small town? Why will we vote for someone to be the top leader of our country when they don’t even obey the law? Ask yourself this question, “Who among the candidates have the proven potential of leading our country for the good of the people and the development of our nation?” It is not about what you feel, or about popularity, or about personality. It is about leadership.

Fourth, *vote with the confidence that whatever the results, God will still accomplish his kingdom purposes.* You may vote for the right leaders according to the wisdom God gave you. But it is highly possible that the results may not turn out in a way that you expect it to be. Take heart, as long as God is King over all his creation, we must not fear any wicked President or be anxious about an incompetent President. God is guiding history, including our country’s history, toward his appointed end. Even a pagan king acknowledged God’s sovereignty over the affairs of all men, including powerful men.

I, Nebuchadnezzar... blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, 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?” (Dan 4:34-35).

² Conrado de Quiros, “Surveyed,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 29, 2010, page A14.

Practical Reminders

With these biblical principles in mind, I want to leave you with some practical steps to take before you vote on May 10.

First, *depend on God and pray for wisdom*. Remember that you will not vote for whoever you like but for whoever you think will honor God by their leadership and will work hard for the good of the people. God promises wisdom to those who ask for him (Jas. 1:5-6). Let the Holy Spirit guide you. This is not just a *secular* matter, this is truly a *spiritual* issue. Don't vote until you have prayed hard about it.

Second, *dig as hard as you can to know the candidates*. Don't just look at their ads. Most of them may be misleading. Look at their profiles. Read newspapers. Watch debates and presidential forums. Watch GMA's *Kandidato* (available online at www.gmanews.tv). It will take some time but necessary. For this week, choose to watch less TV or less Facebook and spend those time to know the candidates. Your choice on May 10 must be an informed choice not a leap in the dark. We must do away with our *bahala na* (come what may) attitude.

Third, *discuss with others*. We may get wisdom from others when we discuss. After our service, take time to gather in small groups with your friends and ask them who they will vote and why. Listen to their reasons. Don't be arrogant. Do it with gentleness and humility. You can talk about it in your family during meal times. Respect each others' opinion. Have an open mind.

Fourth, *decide before May 10 and not on May 10*. Chances are, if you will decide only on May 10, your decision will just be a haphazard decision. Don't just try to complete your ballot. Go to the polling stations with your choices ready. Make a list.

Your vote is not insignificant. Your single vote has an important place in a sea of millions of votes that will be casted on that day. A single pebble dropped into the still waters can make a ripple. Think of your vote as not just a seed that you can just throw away. That seed when planted can become a huge forest. Your vote is a "forest in a seed."³ Let God use that seed to build a forest of his kingdom here in the Philippines. I hope and pray that your votes will not be wasted on that day. And that after voting you will be able to say, "Christ is the Lord of my votes." Don't waste your vote, brothers and sisters.

³ Scott D. Allen and Darrow L. Miller, *The Forest in the Seed: A Biblical Perspective on Resources and Development* (Phoenix, AZ: Disciple Nations Alliance, 2006). Available for free pdf download at <http://www.disciplenations.org>.