



Considering politics with biblical glasses

Considering politics with biblical lenses

Imagine a pair of glasses through which to view the world. The frames are biblical truths which hold the varifocal lenses which are the biblical values. They naturally support and complement one another. Especially at election time, these glasses enable us to consider priorities and how political visions measure up to God's standards. The best biblical glasses would be shaped by the entire Bible. However, to provide a memorable foundation, here is a choice of truths and values to bear in mind.

The glass frames - 3 Biblical Truths

- Who God is,
- Who human beings are and why we exist,
- What went wrong with the Fall and what God will restore at the end of time.

The lenses - 3 Biblical Values

- Love,
- Justice,
- Freedom.

The glass frames

Take a moment to think of all you know about the character of God from Scripture and your own relationship with Him.

In just 2 verses - Isaiah 9:6-7, we are reminded that God is supremely powerful and yet Father, mighty and wonderful Counsellor, Prince with the purpose of peace. All of history and earthly rulers are under His authority.

The truth about who God is gives us all the security we need as we look at the messy reality of this world and of politics. We trust in Him alone, not politicians. But we also ask Him to help us discern His will for what should be done on earth. Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit which helps us do this.

The beginning of Genesis tells us that human beings, male and female together, were created as God's image bearers, with infinite value and dignity. The unborn or dying, prisoner or celebrity, citizen of Switzerland or Swaziland, we are all equally precious to God. We were made to relate intimately with Him and with one another, enjoying His world together. God gave us responsibility to work and care for creation. He gave us freedom to obey Him or not.

All of this means that we should reject any political vision which devalues, exploits or harms anyone, whether near or far, or which damages relationships (especially within families). Nor can we support policies which get in the way of the responsibility to contribute to society and to care for creation, or which takes away freedom. Freedom of religion or belief is especially important.

Human rebellion led to separation from God, death, suffering, natural disaster and every kind of sin. Every human now has the capacity for great evil. This is why God instituted government in order to

mitigate the chaos that would ensue without it¹. However, government is, of course, made up of sinful politicians and officials. Power is especially alluring and is too easily abused. That is why we need to protect the checks and balances which ensure accountability and limits for the authorities².

Thank God that we have eternal hope! The book of Revelation reveals a glorious vision of what awaits those who repent and trust in Jesus! When He returns, all evil will be judged and destroyed and everything will be restored according to God's perfect ways.

But also, somehow eternity will be marked by the good and lovely creative things we human beings do. Remarkably, the glory and honour of the nations will be represented³! It reminds us that God really did design humans as good and purposed us to create.

So, let's get behind politicians who take into account both the preciousness of human beings and also their sinfulness.

Let's choose leaders who have compassion for those who suffer and who want to help people in their responsibility to care for creation and contribute to society with dignity.

Let's support the strengthening of relationships, especially the biblical understanding of loving, heterosexual marriage and family.

Let's cheer the celebration of creativity and national culture (ours and others') when those cultural expressions are honourable in God's eyes.

Let's get behind leaders who want to strengthen freedom but who also accept necessary constraints upon their own power.

And let's commit to praying for all those standing for election and for whoever wins, as 1 Timothy 2:1-2 commands us.

The glass frames of who God is, who humans are, the damage of the Fall and the hope of eternity provide essential underpinnings for us. Let's now focus in on the lenses of the glasses; the biblical truths of love, justice and freedom.

The lenses – 3 Biblical Truths

LOVE

Biblical love is based on God Himself being love and His love for every human being. Love is what enables us to live in harmony, care for, serve and enjoy one another. Love brings joy.

¹ Romans 13:1-5.

² In the Old Testament, prophets held kings accountable. See for example 2 Samuel 12:1-14 & 1 Kings 21:1-19. Today, the main checks are from an independent judiciary and media.

³ Revelation 21:22-27

Of course, politicians cannot legislate love because love must be freely given. They cannot stop meanness, cruelty or hatred. But they can promote policies which may lead to the strengthening of love within families and the wider community.

Let's encourage politicians who want to support marriage and families and make it possible for them to thrive, despite the stresses of life. Let's ask politicians to ensure there is help for when relationships go wrong so that couples can have counselling or victims of domestic abuse can have a safe environment to thrive.

Let's seek politicians who understand the importance of neighbourliness. Neighbourly love can be strengthened through, for example, town planning or cultural events which gives space for connection and celebration. Or the school curriculum can promote values like respect, forgiveness and kindness.

Let's look for politicians who favour health systems which protect the unborn, those with disabilities or the dying.

Let's choose political parties who are committed to giving aid to those in desperate need in the poorest regions of the world.

Let's support politicians who will strengthen laws to require businesses to respect workers, suppliers, the environment and customers.

And let's examine politicians for their attitudes and funding decisions which could make it harder or easier for faith groups and charities to bless society.

Political parties may differ on how much they believe national government or the EU, civil society or the individual should act. They may argue about what can be spent and how money is to be raised. However, let's look to see if political parties are motivated by the many-faceted aspects of love for all human beings.

Finally, love is what balances justice.

JUSTICE

Biblical justice is about making things right, sorting out the consequences of the Fall on human beings and all of creation. Only Jesus' return will ultimately deal with sin. However, systems of government are meant to establish and maintain justice⁴, while also protecting freedoms.

However, are we to worry about social or criminal or environmental justice or all three? Is justice about my particular issues being favoured, to the detriment of others? Should right and wrong be defined by people like me or the majority or by who? How much can we impose our understanding of right and wrong on others? What should be encouraged but not compelled through law?

To understand justice, we need to go back to our biblical framework of how God intended life to be but also the immensity of sin's impact. All humans are meant to have the opportunity to flourish, live well

⁴ Proverbs 31:8-9, 1 Peter 2:13-14

in community, care for the environment and to fulfil their creative potential. They are also meant to have freedom.

Let's support justice policies that will protect from violence, theft, oppression or exploitation.

Let's choose politicians who want to ensure well-funded, effective, impartial and merciful police, judiciary and prisons.

Let's get behind a political vision which is ambitious in creating systems that enable human and environmental flourishing.

And let's remember that justice cannot survive if truth is not prized and protected.

As we discern which politicians to vote for, let's ask ourselves who has the ethical framework to work for biblical justice for all. And will they themselves submit to systems of justice to make sure that their use of power is fair?

FREEDOM

We have seen how God gave freedom to human beings to obey and worship Him or not. Without freedom, we would not have the dignity the Lord has bestowed on us. Without freedom, genuine love is not possible. Freedom is a gift from God simply because human beings are made in His image. Governments do not grant freedom. Their task is to protect and maintain it.

However, biblical freedom is balanced by love and justice. Freedom has limits. Biblical freedom does not mean the right to harm other people or the environment or to neglect our responsibilities.

Biblical freedom is centred around Shalom - human flourishing for all. We are meant to be free from oppression and crushing poverty so that we are free to worship, grow, learn, relate, create and live.

However, others are also meant to be free to flourish, including the other drivers on the road or the factory worker producing the things we buy or the people expressing attitudes we hate. We cannot disregard the rights of others.

Biblical freedom should be exercised within an ethical framework of restraint because we all live in community with others and are responsible for our neighbours, both near and far. Also, real freedom is only possible within the boundaries God provides in His Ten Commandments.

As we observe politicians' words and actions, let's ask ourselves who understands the biblical gift and also responsibility of freedom?

Who will uphold laws which provide necessary constraints on freedom but not go further than necessary? Who is seeking to get the balance right?

And who will strengthen respect for the rule of law?

Our biblical glasses

Looking at the world with a biblical worldview is not easy. We must withstand the voices which would pressurise us to go along with prevailing attitudes. We still have the task of discerning how love, justice and freedom are best worked out in the 21st century. We also need to look at the big picture, not just one or two issues.

When we look at politicians, their words, deeds and promises, it can get harder. We will not find a perfect party or individual to vote for. We will have hard choices to make and fellow Christians may disagree with us. However, we can encourage one another to do our best to make sure that our praying and voting are solidly rooted in biblical understanding and to pray for those in authority⁵, whether we like them or not. We can work together to try to change societal attitudes which mean that our fellow citizens will be less likely to vote for politicians with manifestos that clash with biblical standards. Finally, if we do not like the choice of candidates seeking our vote, let's pray and work to make sure there are some better people standing in time for the next election.

Let's keep our biblical glasses on.

Graphic Note

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⁵ 1 Timothy 2:1-4