

# Voting—Should Christians Vote?

By Dianne D. McDonnell

Many thousands of Christians believe that voting in a national election would violate their standing as members of God's Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> They have been taught that they are like representatives of a foreign country—God's own Kingdom—and like diplomats, they should have no part in the voting or politics of the country where they live.<sup>2</sup> But is this teaching backed by the Bible and the teachings of Jesus and the example of the early leaders of the church? Or is it just faulty reasoning based on misapplied scriptures?

A doctrine must agree with the entire Bible or it is simply the opinion of men. Must we forgo our national rights when we become a part of God's Kingdom? What biblical examples apply? This article will reveal the truth from biblical examples of how the New Testament Christians viewed their own citizenship and their rights as citizens in their era.

## Christians still Retain their Nationalities

When the apostle Paul wrote about newly converted Christians, he often mentioned **their nationalities**. **Christians retained their national identities** even after they became members of God's Kingdom.

Acts 17:12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

They were still "Jews" as a nationality or "prominent Greek women" and "Greek men". Obviously, each person DID NOT have to give up their nationality or the rights that went with his/her nationality!

## Christians Keep their City Citizenship

In this verse we find that Paul still considered himself a **citizen** of Tarsus and even boasts about his city!

Acts 21:39 Paul answered, "**I am** a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, **a citizen** of no ordinary city....."

We see positive proof that Christians still retain the citizenship connected with their city.

## Jesus Identifies Himself by an Earthly City

When the resurrected Jesus spoke to Saul in a vision, he identified himself by the city where he lived before starting his ministry.

Acts 22:8

"I am Jesus **of Nazareth**, whom you are persecuting,' he replied."

It is not wrong to be identified with an earthly city or nation!

### **Paul Demands his Rights!**

Paul had rights because he was a citizen of the Roman Empire. When those rights were violated, Paul protested loudly!

Acts 16:37-39

37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though **we are Roman citizens**, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that **Paul and Silas were Roman citizens**, they were alarmed.

39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

### **Citizenship in Heaven**

Paul wrote to the Philippians that Christians have citizenship kept for them in heaven:

Philippians 3:20 For our **citizenship** is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet having citizenship recorded in heaven did not stop Paul from using all his rights of citizenship in this present world!

### **We don't Give Up one Citizenship for the other!**

In still another city we find Paul again in trouble and about to be beaten with a whip. He AGAIN demands his rights, and he is protected because he is a Roman citizen!

Acts 22:23-28

As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "**Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen** who hasn't even been found guilty?" When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "**This man is a Roman citizen.**" The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."  
"But **I was born a citizen,**" Paul replied.

### **Dual Citizenship Rights**

Paul knew that his citizenship in God's Kingdom did not stop him from exercising his rights as a citizen of Rome! He had **dual citizenship**, and he had **certain rights** in both the present physical kingdom of the Roman Empire, and the future, far superior Kingdom of God! He represented God's coming Kingdom, much as an ambassador does, yet **he did not have to give up his Roman citizenship** or any of his rights as a citizen.

In the United States, those who are native born Americans have ALL of the rights of citizenship. **Our rights include the right to vote** in all city and national elections! We do not have to give up these rights to become a member of God's Kingdom!

### **He is a Roman Citizen!**

The commander of the Romans troops took special note of Paul's citizenship because it meant that Paul had certain RIGHTS that were guaranteed. The commander wrote to the Governor,

Acts 23:27 This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and **rescued him**, for I had learned that **he is a Roman citizen.**

### **"I appeal to Caesar!"**

Later Paul was about to be turned over to Jews who planned to kill him! His reply was:

Acts 25:11 "...if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. **I appeal to Caesar!**"

Paul did not hesitate to USE ALL of his rights as a Roman citizen, even appealing to Caesar himself. In the first century the republic of Rome had become a monarchy. Yet there was still local voting on some non-appointed offices, but only Roman citizens could vote. Do you think Paul would hesitate for one minute to VOTE for the candidate he felt would be best for Christians? Certainly not!

### **Affiliations, Rights and Obligations**

Paul had many affiliations—he was a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, a Pharisee, a Roman citizen and a Christian looking forward to God’s Kingdom on this earth. His zealous Christianity did not negate or do away with his rights as a Jew, Pharisee, citizen of Tarsus or his rights as a citizen of Rome! We also have many affiliations with obligations and rights associated with each one.

### **Voting on Church Issues and Trash Hauling**

Here is an example of the entire church selecting men for a certain job, and it looks like they voted.

Acts 15:22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, **with the whole church**, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch....

Based on this and other examples of the entire church voting, the United Church of God allows limited voting within the church.

United also **allows voting on local issues** like **sewage disposal and trash hauling**.<sup>3</sup>

### **Limited Local Voting, but No National Voting?**

If Christians can vote to remove sewage and trash—why can’t we vote to remove a corrupt local politician? Or why can’t we vote to remove from office a national Politician caught illegally skimming public funds into his own pocket? Yet United’s policy paper tells us we should not vote for any candidate—as if they won’t affect our lives. To explain their odd reasoning the doctrinal statement gets a little convoluted with scriptures taken out of context. The following section is a prime example.

### **Not Being a Part of This World**

The United Church of God uses the following scripture as a key verse:

“But God tells His people, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities’ (Revelation 18:4-5). **Therefore, as God’s people we should avoid involvement in the political systems of this world, ...**”<sup>4</sup>

### **What is Wrong with this Interpretation of Rev. 18:4-5?**

Look at the context of this quote in your own Bible, **chapter 18** of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Verse 2 of the same chapter

identifies what God is saying to come out of. It is "Babylon the Great". In Rev 18:10 just past the quoted verse we find, "Woe! Woe, O great **city**, O Babylon, **city of power!** In **one hour** your doom has come!" Clearly God is **not** referring to the political systems of this world as the United writer would have us believe, but God refers to a rich, powerful, great city that sells "cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls;..." Rev. 18:12.

Revelation is a prophetic book revealing future events, and in the future this city will be consumed by fire in a single day, even a single hour, Rev.18:8. "In **one hour** such **great wealth has been brought to ruin!**"

An argument can be made for Babylon being part of a church or religious organization for we read in Rev 18:20, "...Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you". And in verse 24, "In her was found **the blood of prophets** and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth." This Babylon is a city where true Christians have been martyred.

To equate casting a vote for the candidate of your choice in a national election with **being a part of** this evil city called **Babylon**—that is just **not logical!** It is not a correct understanding of these verses.

### **Jesus and Politics**

Sometimes **the struggle to do what is right** and refute what is wrong **becomes "political"**! Even Jesus found his teachings and actions being interpreted in a "political" light. When he rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey, Matt 21:1-11, he was demonstrating the first fulfillment of Zech. 9:9, "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Fulfilling prophecy and pointing toward a future time when he would come as a King with great power—that was Jesus' true motive. Yet some of the people of Jerusalem read a different motive into his actions. The people of Jerusalem were used to seeing Roman generals ride victoriously on fine horses with chained captives walking behind them with the people cheering wildly. So to some it looked like Jesus was ridiculing their military leaders or even the emperor himself when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with crowds cheering him.

But wasn't this a prophetic **message** being fulfilled? It was God's own message which revealed that human ways are NOT the ways of God.

Was Jesus getting involved in politics? No, Jesus was illustrating publicly what is God's Way.

### **Politics and Right and Wrong**

When we stand up for what is right in God's eyes sometimes those who do not understand our motives might call our actions "political". If we speak out publicly against partial birth abortion, a process in which a full term baby is killed just as he/she is being born, that could be seen as a "political" stand. But it isn't a bit "political" for the innocent infants being killed! So do we say nothing and DO NOTHING on these issues of right and wrong because someone might call us "political"? No, we must stand up for what God reveals as right!

Jesus is a king who has qualified for world rulership. Yet when a sign was put over Jesus' head saying "King of the Jews", Mark 15:26, it was a political charge. If he was a King, then they felt he threatened the emperor. Jesus admitted to Pilate that he was a king, Mark 15:2, and had often alluded to a future world-ruling kingdom, Matt 8:10-12, Matt 25:34, Luke 1:30-33, Luke 13:29, John 18:36. **Was Jesus being political** or just telling Pilate the truth? It was God's truth.

Do you see how deciding lines between right and wrong, truth and lies, sometimes emerge into a national forum, and that national dialogue gets labeled "political"? Issues of true right and wrong, and good and evil impact true Christians far more than issues of trash removal! **No one** should be able to **stop us** from **standing up for God's truth and being counted!**

### **The Good Stored within Us**

Jesus said we must **bring forth good** from the good stored within us.

Matt 12:35 The good man **brings good things** out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

We cannot bring forth good in our nation if we do not participate.

### **Doing Nothing in the Face of Evil**

Are we guilty of doing nothing even though we clearly see which policies are good and right and what policies are wrong and evil?

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who **knows to do good and does not do it**, to him it is sin.

When it is in your power to stand up against evil policies with your vote—**and you fail to do so**, then you become partly responsible for the evil that results!

### **Living as Free Men**

Peter instructed Christians to live as “free men”

1 Peter 2:16 **Live as free men**, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

Do we really live as FREE men and women when we can't vote? Voting in a free society is one of the most cherished of all rights. We are not “free” to sin, but neither are we “free” to ignore evil and allow it to grow because of our inaction! Inaction can indeed be a “cover-up” for evil, allowing it to thrive because we do not truly live as “free” men.

### **Doesn't God Decide Who Leads Us?**

This next point is raised by non-voting churches and used to oppose the democratic process of voting in local and national elections:

Daniel 2:21 And He changes the times and the seasons; *He removes kings and raises up kings*; He gives wisdom to the wise **and knowledge to those who have understanding.**<sup>5</sup>

Their reasoning is that since God controls everything-- why should we participate in any election? God can indeed influence minds and hearts and bring about events that change the course of any election. But whose mind and heart does God find **easiest to influence**? Since true Christians who love God, and are deeply converted, are given God's own Holy Spirit-- then **our minds and hearts** are the **most easily influenced!**

The second part of this verse is “He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” If God gives His people His Holy Spirit, wisdom, knowledge and understanding—then WHY should they refuse to participate in selecting national leader of their country? Does it make any sense to have all these benefits from God and yet refrain from using your RIGHT to vote? It makes no sense!

### **Division as a Reason for Non-participation**

In their Concluding Statement, another issue that is raised as an “underlying reason for **not voting or running for a public office**, is **promoting peace** within the Church, **not division over vote-related issues.**”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, **if you can't vote**, then **you can't argue** about voting matters at church! This "don't vote policy" is **not the answer** to the problem of division over political matters! If church members are arguing over what minister they like best, is it solved by firing all ministers? You know that wouldn't happen. If the women are arguing about how long skirts should be, would the church decree that no woman can wear a skirt? No, of course not, members would be told that they should leave arguing outside the church doors. In the same way a voting church is reminded to leave its campaign buttons outside the church if arguments start sprouting.

### **Non-Participation and Withdrawal**

Many of the same religious writers that urge Christians not to vote also teach a general non-participation in all things "worldly". However, the definition of "worldly" differs from church to church. It is SIN in this world that we must withdraw from and avoid getting entangled with! We do not have to withdraw from ALL things—just that part that is the spiritual "leavening".<sup>7</sup> We must work in this world, buy food and goods in stores of this world, and eat in this world's restaurants. We live in this world. We must not withdraw from necessary things that keep our democratic nation running!

Jesus tells us to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's regarding taxes, Matt 22: 17-21. Taxes are **necessary** to keep our nation functioning. The authors of the United paper state that because voting is voluntary it is not the same as paying taxes. Yet isn't voting **necessary** to keep our nation functioning? If everyone follows what these leaders advocate, then **how does our democracy continue to function?**

Voting is how our present earthly leadership is determined. Jesus came to impact this world, even though some thought his actions were "political"! We are not to participate in the SIN of this world, but voting in an election is not a sin! Even the United Church of God admits this:

"...we do not consider it a sin to cast a vote,"<sup>8</sup>  
"The Church does not declare voting, itself, to be a sin."<sup>9</sup>

Since it is not a sin, then why isn't it left up to individual decision?

### **Are you Accountable for your City's Decisions?**

Did Jesus teach that the citizens of a city are held responsible for the decisions of that city? **Do you have "accountability"** for what happens in your city? Believe it or not, Jesus taught that there was accountability city by city for the actions of the citizens of that city!



Luke 10: 11-15

11' Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 "I say to you, it will be more tolerable **in that day** for Sodom than for that city. [*Here Jesus refers to the Day of Judgment when he returns to this earth.*]

13 " Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. 15 And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades!"

Jesus is saying that each citizen of the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum will be RESPONSIBLE when they stand before him in judgment. These cities saw miracles and yet rejected the message God sent to them! This passage shows that **we each share responsibility for our city and the decisions of our city!** If our city become more and more evil and against God, and yet we have not even cast a single vote to try and counteract that evil and stand up against it—we will find ourselves answering to God and Jesus Christ for our lack of action!

### **Are We Afraid to Stand Up?**

We must not be afraid to stand up for God's Way of life socially or politically, for we must account for every word we speak, and every decision. Joseph of Arimathea was on the Council, a board of elders having religious and **political authority**. On that fateful morning those members voted on an issue fraught with political overtones—the fate of Jesus:

Mark 15:1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, **reached a decision**. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

After the death of Jesus, Joseph came forward to speak to Pilate:

Luke 23:50-52 Now there was a man named **Joseph, a member of the Council**, a good and upright man, 51 **who had not consented to their decision** and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and **he was waiting for the kingdom of God**. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body.

Here was a good man who was “waiting for the kingdom of God” and yet he **held an office** in a **group that had political power!** He had “not consented to their decision”. In other words, he had voted against crucifying Jesus, but he was out voted. If Joseph had **refused to vote** on that day, if he had just hid himself—would he be responsible for failing to try to stop evil? Yes, he would have failed to try and counter evil. Would he be held responsible for a decision to hide himself rather than boldly voting against the murder of Jesus? Yes, hiding himself would also be a decision and a failure to oppose wrong.

**Joseph did vote**, but evil prevailed because it was God’s will for Jesus to die. **Casting his vote was not wrong!** Even after he had been unable to stop the crucifixion, Joseph came forward at great personal risk to claim the body of Jesus to put him in his own tomb. He didn’t say, “**This is a political issue** so I’m not going to get involved!” He spoke up before Pilate and his brave words and actions are forever on record. Perhaps Joseph had heard first-hand these words of Jesus:

Matt 12:36-37” But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For **by your words you will be acquitted**, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Remember, **a decision to NOT PARTICIPATE is still a decision** and we are held accountable for every word and every decision!

### **A Christian Holding Public Office!**

United feels its members should not seek public office.<sup>10</sup> Yet we find in Rom 16:23 a Christian is mentioned by name who held a public office! “...**Erastus, who is the city's director of public works**, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.” In Corinth a pavement has been excavated that bears the name of Erastus and his title as director of public works! It stands as mute testimony that Christians did and can serve in public office!<sup>11</sup> Erastus was one of the first 70 apostles.<sup>12</sup>

### **Evaluating by the Commandments**

As Christians we should evaluate the plans and backgrounds of those running for office from the standpoint of God’s Ten Commandments and God’s way of life. Does one party consistently mock God and those who believe in God? How does each candidate stand on whether or not a mother should be encouraged to take the life of her unborn baby? What about our tax structure? When the nation of Israel in ancient times paid a tithe they each paid the same percentage, ten percent. God is fair to both rich and poor.

We need to carefully evaluate candidates and their future plans from a true Christian viewpoint. Register to vote. Become informed, and then pray about it. Finally, vote! It is your right and obligation as a citizen, and as Paul did, you need to use your rights as part of being free. Your rights are given to you by the sacrifice of our country's soldiers. If you take no stand against evil, then you will have to answer to God for your lack of opposition! Do not be deceived by false teachings that would deny you your rights as a citizen! You have dual citizenship, just as Paul did. As a Christian, you are a citizen of God's coming Kingdom, and a citizen of the country in which God has placed you! Be accountable in all your decisions!

Here is a link to register to vote:

[http://www.rockthevote.com/rtv\\_register.html](http://www.rockthevote.com/rtv_register.html)

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<sup>1</sup> Churches that teach a "do not vote" doctrine include but are not limited to: the United Church of God, *an International Association*, The Living Church of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

<sup>2</sup> From the paper "Voting and Involvement in Politics," A doctrinal statement of the United Church of God, *an International Association* written in 2003. Page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Page 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Page 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, the first part is quoted from the Bible, the last statement is personal opinion. Page 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, Page 20.

<sup>7</sup> Paul referred to sin as "leavening" or "yeast" in I Cor 5:7 "You must remove the old yeast of sin so that you will be entirely pure...." TEV Bible (Leavening is yeast, baking powder and baking soda, and is removed from homes during the Days of Unleavened Bread to symbolize sin being removed from our lives.)

<sup>8</sup>"Voting and Involvement in Politics," Page 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Page 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Concluding Statement, "The United Church of God, *an International Association*, maintains its traditional teaching that a Christian should avoid voting and participating in political elections and running for public office." Page 20.

<sup>11</sup>Erastus in Corinth, 2 Tim 4:19. Link: This pavement in Corinth documents him having the important job of *aedileship* meaning treasurer or head of public works.  
<http://reasonobelieve.blogspot.com/2007/01/corinth-isthmia-and-cenchreae.html>

<sup>12</sup> He was one of the 70 original apostles, Erastus was martyred in 67 A.D in Rome. See link: Foxe's Book of Martyrs, Chapter 2. <http://www3.calvarychapel.com/library/foxe-john/text/bom.htm#02>