

## 2019 Elections - What should I be thinking about?

5<sup>th</sup> May 2019 Hill and Arcadia am

27<sup>th</sup> April was a **public holiday**. It was on this day in 1994 that all South African citizens regardless of race, gender or education level were free to participate in a democratic national election.

25 years have passed since that milestone was reached in our country. And on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May we all once again have the opportunity to **exercise our vote** to determine who will govern SA.

It is important to say up front that we Baptists have been pioneers in promoting **the separation of church and state** (along with freedom of religion) .We have recognized the dangers of the church controlling the state and also the huge risks of the state controlling the church.

That **Baptist Principle** immediately places us in a situation where we as a local church do not and will not align with a political party.

It is **not my intention** this morning therefore to promote any of the political parties participating in this election. Neither will we (I hope ever) give the pulpit or platform to a political party leader to promote their particular agenda or election manifesto.

**The pulpit** is reserved for the preaching of God's word. It is my job; the job of any other preacher to speak on behalf of God. Our mandate is to...

*2 Timothy 4 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

It is therefore my intention to be sure that all that I say (today) is **stamped with** a phrase Jesus often used... *"It is written..."*

We are going to **direct out thoughts** to consider as a result of this message: leaders and parties and government and voting and policy and manifestos... and more.

But at all times urging and questioning and discerning and deciding with **the word of God** guiding and leading and testing and confirming and challenging...

Where do we begin?

### 1 Confirm the age old mystery

One of the many theological realities we have come to recognize is that of **paradox**.

In our world of rulers, kings, authorities and governments we face **this kind of mystery**; where we struggle to bring together what appear to be 2 opposing truths.

Who of us today **can reconcile the fact** that God is sovereign; that is, that He is in complete and utter control, and the fact that we people are responsible; that is that on Wednesday you will make a choice and cast a vote?

**God appoints** authorities... *Romans 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*

And yet at the same time people **make choices** and are personally responsible for those decisions.

King Saul provides a good example of **human responsibility**. His disobedience to God cost him a kingdom that would have been everlasting... *1 Samuel 13:13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.*

**RC Sproul** is right when he says that "we are quickly confounded when we plumb the depths of God". So much about God is a mystery. There is so much about God we don't know.

There is so much we don't understand simply because we finite beings don't know enough about the **infinite incomprehensible** nature and workings of God.

I would therefore urge you to today **to embrace** this paradox by going forward in this election confirming with all its implications the age old mystery...

- You and I have to **be responsible** as to where you place your cross, and then...
- Whichever party ends up in control of government is there by **God's appointment**

## 2 Consider your approach in making your choice

Your and my life consists of thousands and thousands of choices that we are constantly making. Whether consciously or unconsciously there are **influences** that weigh in on all these matters.

**Influences include:** history, family, friends, church, media, personal conviction and preferences, personalities... all of which will contribute to the approach to take.

What or who has been **informing your mind** and influencing your decisions in the political arena? There is...

### 2.1 The foolish approach

After Solomon had reigned in Jerusalem over Israel for forty years he died and his son **Rehoboam reigned** in his place (*1 Kings 11:43*).

There is a **huge lesson** that follows in the way he allowed himself to be influenced.

Jeroboam brings **an appeal** from the all Israel to the king to lighten the load on the people. *1 Kings 12:4 "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you."*

The king then agreed **to think about** their request and told them to return in 3 days for his answer. I suppose as all kings he looks for advice.

**He first consults** with old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was still living (v6). These are wise godly seasoned experienced men.

*1 Kings 12:7 And they said to him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever."*

He then took counsel with **the young men** who had grown up with him and stood before him (v9). These are naïve cocky inexperienced rabble rousers. They give very different advice to him.

*1 Kings 12:10 And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,' thus shall you say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. 11 And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"*

The king allowed himself **to be influenced** by the young men's foolish advice.

Needless to say that chaos erupted and the kingdom split into 2. The young men won the day but devastated the nation.

You and I need to **be discerning** regarding the voices we allow to influence us.

We all need to sift through what we hear; ask the difficult questions... Is this matter been exaggerated, is the truth being distorted, is what he or she says lopsided half-truths, is this all a fabrication, is this all hot air and empty promises...?

One of the most powerful tools politicians use is that of **stirring the emotions** of the people for their own benefit; by doing so creating unrealistic expectations that will end in disappointment and disillusionment and eventually anarchy.

## 2.2 The wise approach

The Psalmist **distinguishes between** wise and foolish counsel and their respective outcomes. Applied to Rehoboam it is not surprising to see that the foolish counsel he accepted plunged him and an entire nation into hardship. Why?

*Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 1:2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted*

*by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

People (have, do and will) come up with **ideas**. We have subjects like Philosophy, Sociology and Political Science.

People study ideas and culture and society and **acquire knowledge** that deals with the state and systems of government; they analyse political activity and behaviour.

Different people from different ages, generations, cultures and countries reach **different conclusions** and have preferences.

It is why in the world at different times and different places **different ideologies** like feudalism, socialism, communism, capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, fascism and democracy... will rise and fall.

**With so much on offer** that sounds plausible and reasonable and desirable to different people and different times and in different places what do you and I do?

**Beware** lest in any ideology or system you end up out of step with the “*law of the Lord*”. The repeated lesson of history is that we (believers) can so easily find ourselves **walking in step** with the counsel of the wicked.

And then **it won't be long** before you can find yourself standing in the way of sinners and end up along with the wicked opposing the ways of God.

What do you consider as the most important influence **in your approach** to this election?

**Is it mainstream** political rhetoric and social media platforms or are you consciously and deliberately being influenced by the often upstream wisdom of God and His word...?

*Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Is your mind being fed by God and His word or hHave you **handed you mind over** the foolish wisdom of the world?

### **3 Specific issues to consider**

Most of us have our **convictions and thoughts** about what the important issues are in an election.

The first issue **on my list** is that of being willing to look for...

### 3.1 Personal blind spots

Our South African **past history** demonstrates that the nature of man is such that we, even those who promote submission to and reverence for God, can (do) have terrible blind spots.

Sadly in many instances **the church** justified Apartheid. The church in Germany supported Hitler.

To avoid this tragic state of affairs happening again we all need to **be willing and active** in what the Psalmist commends in *Psalms 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

Part of our problem we suffer with is that most of us **get fired up** about issues that affect us personally and less concerned about (even ignoring) issues that affect other people.

Essayist **William Hazlitt** has penned a phrase that cuts into the core of my being... *The least pain in our little finger gives us more concern and uneasiness than the destruction of millions of our fellow-beings.*

Hazlitt is spot on...

I am **more likely** to be concerned about affirmative action (my children are affected) than I would be about the people that I don't know who have been displaced from their homes due to the recent floods in KZN.

**In the old SA** much was said and one in the areas of sexual morality, censorship of pornography, maintenance of law and order... and rightly so.

But why did so many South Africans show no or little concern for **racial injustice**?

**Today** many South Africans fly the social injustice flag, are happy ride the wave of being previously disadvantaged and enthusiastically lobby for access to equal education... and rightly so.

But why do so many South African's show no concern and justice for **the killing of unborn babies**? In 2015 90 000 legal abortions were carried out; that gross injustice took place on your and my watch.

Isn't killing clearly **forbidden by God** and therefore a present justice issue?

What are **my blind spots** as someone living in a comfortable home in the east of Pretoria? Do I have any concern for the homeless, hungry, jobless, destitute, abused...?

Have you considered **your blind spots** as you head to the polling booth? Is your vote just about you or does it serve others and does it please God?

Am I more **vocal** about ensuring BEE remains in place because through it I am able to fill my pockets; and I am **passive** about the high levels of corruption because that doesn't really affect me?

Having blind spots must lead us to think about a **second** important issue...

### 3.2 Being patient with other citizens

If you and I are **willing to recognize** our fallible finite sinful nature which will always struggle with blind spots; we will then surely realize that other people suffer with a similar atrocious handicap.

Luther suffered with a terrible blind spot in his dealings with **the Anabaptists**; he identified them as fanatics which resulted in terrible persecution and martyrdom of many Anabaptists.

I have heard it said that **Jonathan Edwards** could not have been a true believer because he was a slave owner.

There are people in this church and in this country **who have different** political views, convictions and practices. What are we to do?

One answer is what **Baptists learned** as those who were severely persecuted and treated as heretics in the wake of the reformation – freedom of conscience.

**Baptists refused** to coerce by force those who were different to them. They instead pursued the practice of standing on the truth seeking to convince others of the truth but leaving them to be wrong if they were not convinced.

Time does not permit today but **freedom of conscience** and **freedom of religion** are tied together and are fundamental Baptist principles.

And so when we go to the polls and as we live as citizens in a society that consists of a conglomeration of views, cultures, religions, convictions... **we do not resort to** physical coercion threatening people's lives and intimidating them and creating anarchy by burning infra structure.

**Every person** must be guided by their conscience and ultimately will be accountable to God. I have found Jesus words in Matthew very helpful...

*Matthew 7:12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

We ought to have the **same attitude** as Paul in... *Acts 24:16 So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.*

### 3.3 Key government responsibilities

These were **published** on the Shepherd's Seminary website giving a good overall summary of governments primary responsibilities:

- **Government should protect human life**

At the very institution of human government, God gave human beings **the mandate** to protect humans, because they are made in the image of God.

*Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image"*

Governments are to protect the most precious thing on earth: **human life** – old, young, mentally and physical challenged and the unborn.

- **Government should show integrity in their dealings**

God requires that those who rule over men are not to be controlled **by covetousness** (greed). If they do the inevitable result will be widespread bribery, perverting of justice and partiality.

*2 Samuel 23: 3 The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, 4 he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.*

*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 as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.*

Rulers, **regardless of** their personal religious beliefs, are to exercise integrity and impartiality for the sake of their office

*Proverbs 16:12 It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness.*

*Proverbs 28:15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.*

*Proverbs 28:16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.*

*Proverbs 29:2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*

- **Government should restrain evildoers and uphold the law**

**Augustine** said that *government is a necessary evil, that it is necessary because of evil.*

Government is required **to restrain evildoers** through the administration of justice, and the upholding of the law (*Rom 13:1-4*).

**The mandate** for a God-pleasing government is to legislate what will restrain those who would harm their neighbours, and make laws that create enough civil order for human beings to live... *1 Timothy 2:2 ...a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

A government that upholds the law through **the appointment and support** of a good and effective police force, judiciary, and penal system shows a commitment to law and order.

A nation where **evil is punished** and **justice upheld** will be set free to prosper on almost every other level. This is a key mandate from God to human government

*Proverbs 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*

*Proverbs 17:15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.*

- **Government must protect private property**

The right to **private property** is one of the fundamental rights of human beings, and a basis of true civil freedom.

Stable families, businesses and communities depend on the economic and social stability which private property ownership brings.

God Himself **protects this right** in *Exodus 20*, and consequently expects government to protect it as well.

*Exodus 20:15 "You shall not steal. 17 "You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's."*

## Conclusion

Having only **scratched the surface** on these many matters I close by repeating 2 things. I urge us:

- To **search the Scriptures** to test your views and find your answers.
- To ask God to **search your heart** like the Psalmist... *Psalms 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*