



## Benjamin Watson

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God > Government

I remember my first Civics class. It was the class with the foreign terms that the older kids conversed about, their books always covered with newspaper or brown paper with 6 cryptic letters written across the front: C-I-V-I-C-S. The year was 1993 and I was an eighth-grader at Norfolk Christian High School in Norfolk, VA. Fortunately for my classmates and me, the commonwealth of Virginia's gubernatorial race was in full swing, pitting Delegate George Allen against Attorney General of Virginia Mary Sue Terry. It's one thing to learn about democracy, town hall meetings and government from a dusty old textbook. It's quite another to experience the textbook pages come to life, as campaign ads, yard signs, commercials and speeches fill the atmosphere with red, white and blue rhetoric, thoroughly overwhelming the senses for eight solid months. That first semester was the perfect introduction to politics for me, giving me a front-row seat on the campaign roller coaster.

Our semester-long project was to pick a candidate and compile a campaign scrapbook of newspaper articles, bumper stickers and photos of our candidate. I attacked the assignment ravenously, and by election time, I had read and collected more articles about George Allen and Mary Sue Terry than would fit on the brown paper pages of my burgundy scrap book. In a landslide victory, Allen defeated Terry, becoming Virginia's 67th governor. As a thirteen-year-old, even a smart one (lol), I can't say I had a firm grasp on all the issues, though. Taxes, employment, education, environment, abortion and public policy were not dominating my conversation at that age, but I did see how intently my parents and other adults in my sphere were watching the race. Politics has a way of consuming us at times. With so many media outlets, the predictions, commentary and mudslinging can be never-ending, instantly available at the next click or swipe.

A presidential election is no small matter, the victor leaving his or her indelible mark on a nation and the world. He or she will affect not only our lives, but also those of our progeny. Yet as this season's race continues to heat up, we must balance our duty of being involved, informed and interested citizens with an essential awareness of God's omnipotence and omniscience. When it comes to the role of government in our lives, Romans 13 instructs us to "Be subject to the governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." We all have our favorites, and our opinions on different issues are myriad. Whether we agree with the government and its laws or not, unless they command us to act contrary to the Word of God, we must obey with the respect and honor that is befitting the position God has placed them in. This obedience, in the face of an oppressive or tyrannical administration or the graces of a moral one, is an act of worship and an outward expression of our submission and trust in the God who is in control.

In addition to obeying our leadership, we are instructed to earnestly pray for those who have authority over us, that they may receive divine wisdom, protection and perhaps a change of heart and an awakening to truth (1 Timothy 2:1-2). To live like this is contrary to conventional understanding, where grumbling and civil disobedience sometimes prevail. I'm sure obeying and praying for the empire that would eventually murder him was no easy task for the apostle Paul as he wrote those words, but he faithfully did so while standing boldly for Christ against vicious persecution and hardship. We submit to authority to avoid the outward penalty as well as the inward violation of conscience, which results from violating the authoritative order God has erected.

Conversely, governments are charged with punishing evildoers, promoting the good, protecting and interceding for the poor and destitute and administering justice. They are to honor God as we honor them. When our rulers fail to serve their people correctly, even purposefully mistreating and abusing power, rest assured that God can use even the worst administrations to do His will and advance His story.

My son has the strangest fixation with puppets. It's actually a gripping fear. I'm not sure why, but the sight, thought and sound of puppets sends him into an uncontrollable tailspin. Marionette or sock puppet, it doesn't matter. (It'll definitely be one of those things we will laugh about around the dinner table in a few years). We try to explain that the puppets are not really miniature people waiting to spring out and attack him from behind the curtain, but to no avail. In his young mind, they are real, scary and not to be messed with. Although they may appear to be autonomous, puppets are lifeless creations, futile without the life-giving puppet master pulling their strings and giving them purpose. They are, in fact, just like their flesh-and-blood counterparts: lifeless without the hand of their creator.

I can't fully comprehend this truth, but God institutes good and even the most wicked governments alike to do His bidding. Like puppets, their movements mesmerize us, empowering us at times and striking fear and pain in our beings at others. We get so enthralled with the show and its outcome that it becomes our entire world and we forget about the master above who is pulling the strings. We forget about the one who wrote the entire play and who has already ordained the final act.

We have a great and exciting privilege in this constitutional republic to be intricately involved in the political process. May we freely exercise our civic duties with fervor this presidential race, resting in the assurance that God is the one who removes kings and sets up kings, regardless of how we feel about their policies. May we vow to honor the government unless, by God's word, we cannot. And may we rejoice that no republican, democrat or independent can ever take His place, because God > government!