

# The Importance of Voting and Christian Involvement in the Political Arena

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## John Adams

We electors have an important constitutional power placed in our hands: we have a check upon two branches of the legislature, as each branch has upon the other two; the power I mean of electing at stated periods, one branch, which branch has the power of electing another. It becomes necessary to every subject then, to be in some degree a statesman: and to examine and judge for himself of the tendencies of political principles and measures.

[John Adams, *The Papers of John Adams*, Robert J. Taylor, ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977), Vol. 1, p. 81, from "'U' to the Boston Gazette" written on August 29, 1763.]

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## Samuel Adams

Let each citizen remember at the moment he is offering his vote that he is not making a present or a compliment to please an individual - or at least that he ought not so to do; but that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.

[Samuel Adams, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, Harry Alonzo Cushing, editor (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), Vol. IV, p. 256, in the *Boston Gazette* on April 16, 1781.]

Nothing is more essential to the establishment of manners in a State than that all persons employed in places of power and trust be men of unexceptionable characters. The public cannot be too curious concerning the character of public men.

[Samuel Adams, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, Harry Alonzo Cushing, editor (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), Vol. III, p. 236-237, to James Warren on November 4, 1775.]

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## Matthias Burnett

Consider well the important trust . . . which God . . . [has] put into your hands. . . . To God and posterity you are accountable for [your rights and your rulers]. . . . Let not your children have reason to curse you for giving up those rights and prostrating those institutions which your fathers delivered to you. . . . [L]ook well to the characters and qualifications of those you elect and raise to office and places of trust. . . . Think not that your interests will be safe in the hands of the weak and ignorant; or faithfully managed by the impious, the dissolute and the immoral. Think not that men who acknowledge not the providence of God nor regard His laws will be uncorrupt in office, firm in defense of the righteous cause against the oppressor, or resolutely oppose the torrent of iniquity. . . . Watch over your liberties and privileges - civil and religious - with a careful eye.

[Matthias Burnett, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Norwalk, *An Election Sermon, Preached at*

*Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 12, 1803* (Hartford: Printed by Hudson & Goodwin, 1803), pp. 27-28.]

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## Frederick Douglass

I have one great political idea. . . . That idea is an old one. It is widely and generally assented to; nevertheless, it is very generally trampled upon and disregarded. The best expression of it, I have found in the Bible. It is in substance, "Righteousness exalteth a nation; sin is a reproach to any people" [Proverbs 14:34]. This constitutes my politics - the negative and positive of my politics, and the whole of my politics. . . . I feel it my duty to do all in my power to infuse this idea into the public mind, that it may speedily be recognized and practiced upon by our people.

[Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, John Blassingame, editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), Vol. 2, p. 397, from a speech delivered at Ithaca, New York, October 14th, 1852.]

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## Charles Finney

[T]he time has come that Christians must vote for honest men and take consistent ground in politics or the Lord will curse them. . . . Christians have been exceedingly guilty in this matter. But the time has come when they must act differently. . . . Christians seem to act as if they thought God did not see what they do in politics. But I tell you He does see it - and He will bless or curse this nation according to the course they [Christians] take [in politics].

[Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1868), Lecture XV, pp. 281-282.]

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## James Garfield

Now more than ever the people are responsible for the character of their Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless, and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate ignorance, recklessness, and corruption. If it be intelligent, brave, and pure, it is because the people demand these high qualities to represent them in the national legislature. . . . [I]f the next centennial does not find us a great nation . . . it will be because those who represent the enterprise, the culture, and the morality of the nation do not aid in controlling the political forces.

[James A. Garfield, *The Works of James Abram Garfield*, Burke Hinsdale, editor (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1883), Vol. II, pp. 486, 489, "A Century of Congress," □ July, 1877.]

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## Francis Grimke

If the time ever comes when we shall go to pieces, it will . . . be . . . from inward corruption - from the disregard of right principles . . . from losing sight of the fact that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but that sin is a reproach to any people" [Proverbs 14:34]. . . .[T]he secession of the Southern States in 1860 was a small matter with the secession of the Union itself from the great principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, in the Golden Rule, in the Ten Commandments, in the Sermon on the Mount. Unless we hold, and hold firmly to these great fundamental principles of righteousness, . . . our Union . . . will be "only a covenant with death and an agreement with hell."

[Rev. Francis J. Grimke, from "Equality of Right for All Citizens, Black and White, Alike," March 7, 1909, published in *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence*, Alice Moore Dunbar, editor (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), pp. 246-247.]

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### **Alexander Hamilton**

A share in the sovereignty of the state, which is exercised by the citizens at large, in voting at elections is one of the most important rights of the subject, and in a republic ought to stand foremost in the estimation of the law.

[Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Harold C. Syrett, ed. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1962), Vol III, pp. 544-545.]

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### **John Jay**

Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation, to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.

[John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, Henry P. Johnston, ed. (New York: G.P. Putnams Sons, 1890), Vol. IV, p. 365.]

The Americans are the first people whom Heaven has favored with an opportunity of deliberating upon and choosing the forms of government under which they should live.

[John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, Henry P. Johnston, ed. (New York: G.P. Putnams Sons, 1890), Vol. I, p. 161.]

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### **Thomas Jefferson**

The elective franchise, if guarded as the ark of our safety, will peaceably dissipate all combinations to subvert a Constitution, dictated by the wisdom, and resting on the will of the people.

[Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Bergh, ed. (Washington: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), Vol. 10, p. 235.]

[T]he rational and peaceable instrument of reform, the suffrage of the people.

[Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Paul Leicester Ford, ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), Vol. 12, p. 136.]

[S]hould things go wrong at any time, the people will set them to rights by the peaceable exercise of their elective rights.

[Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Paul Leicester Ford, ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), Vol. 10, p. 245.]

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## William Paterson

When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.

[Supreme Court Justice William Paterson reminding his fellow justices of Proverbs 29:2. *United States Oracle* (Portsmouth, NH), May 24, 1800.]

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## William Penn

Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend upon men than men upon governments. Let men be good and the government cannot be bad. . . . But if men be bad, let the government be never so good, they will endeavor to warp and spoil it to their turn. . . . [T]hough good laws do well, good men do better; for good laws may want [lack] good men and be abolished or invaded by ill men; but good men will never want good laws nor suffer [allow] ill ones.

[William Penn quoted from: Thomas Clarkson, *Memoirs of the Private and Public Life of William Penn* (London: Richard Taylor and Co., 1813) Vol. I, p.303.]

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## Daniel Webster

Impress upon children the truth that the exercise of the elective franchise is a social duty of as solemn a nature as man can be called to perform; that a man may not innocently trifle with his vote; that every elector is a trustee as well for others as himself and that every measure he supports has an important bearing on the interests of others as well as on his own.

[Daniel Webster, *The Works of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1853), Vol. II, p. 108, from remarks made at a public reception by the ladies of Richmond, Virginia, on October 5, 1840.]

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## Noah Webster

In selecting men for office, let principle be your guide. Regard not the particular sect or denomination of the candidate - look to his character. . . . When a citizen gives his suffrage to a man of known immorality he abuses his trust; he sacrifices not only his own interest, but that of his neighbor, he betrays the interest of his country.

[Noah Webster, *Letters to a Young Gentleman Commencing His Education to which is subjoined a Brief History of the United States* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1823), pp. 18, 19.]

When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers, "just men who will rule in the fear of God." The preservation of government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizens will be violated or disregarded. If a republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the divine commands, and elect bad men to make and administer the laws.

[Noah Webster, *History of the United States* (New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1832), pp. 336-337, ¶249.]

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## John Witherspoon

Those who wish well to the State ought to choose to places of trust men of inward principle, justified by exemplary conversation. . . . [And t]he people in general ought to have regard to the moral character of those whom they invest with authority either in the legislative, executive, or judicial branches.

[John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon* (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1815), Vol. IV, pp. 266, 277.]