



## Religion & Public Life

Matt Waters

October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

As the Libertarian Senate nominee, I have called the Libertarian Party home since 2008. I arrived at the Libertarian Party because of my Christian faith. This may be counterintuitive to many of my fellow congregants, who see the Libertarian creed as one that promotes a live-and-let-live libertinism — yet I believe that is a flawed understanding.

As the only “evangelical” running in the U.S. Senate race in Virginia in 2018, and perhaps the only seminary student to have sought the office here in the Old Dominion, I have a unique perspective on the role religion has played in my public life.

David Boaz, executive vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, defines Libertarianism in his classic work, “Libertarianism, A Primer,” as a set of ideas that include rule of law, free markets and capitalism, small limited government, and peace. Boaz also points out that Libertarianism is not libertinism, the philosophy that is devoid of most moral or sexual restraints.

I agree. While Libertarianism may initially sound a lot like Republicanism, it differs on several very important points.

First, the Libertarian philosophy starts with the idea that the individual is sovereign. Republicans emphasize the family as the fundamental building block of society. And while I agree that healthy nuclear families are the bedrock of any free society, only the individual is subject to a government. Families don’t stand trial together or get put into jail together. Democrats, on the other hand, have an overly inflated view of the state. That is a broad assessment based on my 25 years of experience and interaction with the various political parties.

But the idea of starting with the individual is exactly where Jesus started. Jesus dealt with people as individuals, not as a collective, and often did so at his peril. Jesus was famous for his direct dealings with tax-collectors, prostitutes, Pharisees, and the like — all outcasts; yet for Jesus, they were unique people, all of whom had a shot at redemption. Jesus dealt with individuals. So do Libertarians. And we believe government must as well.

Jesus was never coercive, nor is the Libertarian philosophy. Christians know well the story of the Rich Young Ruler who was given a choice to sell all he had to follow Jesus, or not. The Rich Young Ruler chose to walk away freely from the offer of eternal life. Individuals in the Scriptures are allowed to choose their destiny. The “non-coercion” principle is uniquely Christian, and Libertarian.

The Libertarian promotes peace over war. Republicans and Democrats share an unusual affection for warfare. One of Jesus' most beloved titles is "the Prince of Peace" and the Scriptures regularly admonish believers to, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18).

This uniquely Christian idea is also uniquely Libertarian. And this is why I believe a recovery of President Washington's admonition to "avoid foreign entanglements," carefully filtering our engagements overseas through the lens of the Constitution and what is best for America and her citizens, is not only Libertarian, but Christian at its core.

David Boaz, in his collection of Libertarian writings, begins with 1 Samuel: 8, the very same passage cited by Thomas Paine in "Common Sense" – the book that stoked the fire of the American Revolution.

In the biblical narrative the Israelites, who up to this point only had human judges and no king, asked the prophet Samuel to ask Almighty God to give them a King. The character of God on this point is quite revealing. Here is the exchange:

*Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."*

*So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.*

*He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants.*

*He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day. –1 Samuel 8:4-5, 10-18*

The ideas of Liberty, the uniqueness of the individual and humanity, the power and corruption of the state, the non-aggression principle, the philosophy of choosing peace over war, among others, come straight out of the Old and New Testaments.

Ultimately the Bible is not a prescription for political government. It does tell us about the basic disposition of man and the character of God; it warns us of abuse of power, and serves as a reliable guide for anyone interested in governing with wisdom, justice, and virtue.

I could go on, and will in future writings. But for now, suffice it to say, of all the political philosophies, Libertarianism is the best expression of Christianity.

