

# Politics: How Involved Should Christians Be?

The Biblical foundation for proper political engagement

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Do Christians have a moral or Biblical obligation to participate in government? Is there a

distinctively Christian way to engage in the political process? Do Christians have a duty to vote, and if so, what principles should inform them as they cast their ballots?

Some say that Christians ought to be wary of associating too closely with elected officials or political parties because it risks conflating the responsibility of the church with that of the state. They ask: If God is sovereign and controls the heart of the king (Proverbs 21:1), why risk compromising our Gospel witness by getting involved in something so divisive? Others maintain that Christians ought to be heavily involved with politicians and partisan politics. They say that because politics are so important, it is worth investing significant resources to educate and mobilize the congregation for political activity.

**“Scripture advocates neither total withdrawal from the political process nor overinvestment in it.”**

The Gospel applies to all areas of life, and the Bible instructs us about government and political authority. Scripture advocates neither total withdrawal from the political process nor overinvestment in it. Thus, we need a third approach, a model in which actively engaged Christians faithfully apply Biblical principles to the current political challenges. But what does this model look like? What are the principles that can help us navigate our divisive political landscape?

### **WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT POLITICS?**

There seems to be an assumption in some circles that politics is inherently defiled, and that political involvement is inappropriate for those serious about the Gospel. This view fits into what theologian Wayne Grudem calls the “Do Evangelism, Not Politics” approach to civic engagement. Adherents of this view suggest that Christians should exclusively focus on sharing the Good News and discipling others in the faith because Jesus’ final command was to make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). In other words, because political engagement does not lead someone to faith in Christ, it is not considered a top priority.

However, upon closer examination of Scripture, this objection fails to account for a broader perspective of politics, one that incorporates how people order their lives and affairs and the reality that the Christian worldview has much to say about civic responsibility. Moreover, the objection does not consider the responsibility Christians have to steward the blessings and

opportunities entrusted to them. Because voting is a matter of stewardship, Christians living in a constitutional republic should seek to vote in a way that honors God and advances the well-being of their neighbor.

In Romans 13:1-7, Paul describes the governing authorities as “ministers of God” and says they are responsible for administering civil justice. Although God is sovereign, He chooses to use human governments to carry out His will in the civil sphere. A Biblical basis for government is also found in Genesis 9, where God provides general authorization for action against murderers (Genesis 9:5-6). This passage implies that communities must form or support governments capable of administering justice.

**“Government was God’s idea, and Christians should engage with it in a way that is consistent with its God-ordained purpose.”**

Thus, the important role of government is one reason why Christians should care about the political process. Government was God’s idea, and Christians should engage with it in a way that is consistent with its God-ordained purpose.

A second reason Christians should care about politics is that the Bible contains numerous examples of God’s people engaging in politics as part of a holistic approach to ministry that meets both spiritual and temporal needs.

In the Old Testament, for example, Joseph and Daniel served in foreign administrations and used their influence to implement policies that benefited society. In the case of Joseph, during a devastating famine (Genesis 45:9-12), God used his position in the Egyptian government to protect and provide for his extended family (which would become the nation of Israel).

Queen Esther used her influence in the Persian government to save the Jewish people from a state-sanctioned genocide (Esther 8). The Prophet Jeremiah instructed the exiles in Babylon to seek the welfare of their new city. He also commanded them to pray for the city, “for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). A thriving society would benefit God’s people as well as the city’s other inhabitants.

Because government and its laws are an inextricable part of our lives, there is no way to avoid some level of involvement. This is true for Christians, who, though “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11) in this world, are nevertheless citizens of the “City of Man” as well as the “City of God.”

Christians ought to endeavor to be good citizens of both cities and leverage their influence for the advancement of laws, policies and practices that contribute to the flourishing of our neighbors.

## HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS ENGAGE IN POLITICS?

We should never equate the church's mission with the platform of a political party. But should Christians, and especially pastors, do more than call for cordial discourse and preach on a few moral issues? What Biblical principles should guide us when we vote?

In a republic like the United States, the locus of power is the citizenry; the government derives its authority from the people. Unlike billions of people around the world, Americans, through the ballot box, control their political future. Indeed, we are stewards of it, as we are stewards of everything else God has given us.

For Christian citizens, the implications of America's form of government are even more significant when considered alongside Paul's teaching on the purpose of government in Romans 13.

According to Paul, government is ordained by God to promote good and restrain evil. God authorizes the government to wield the sword for the administration of justice.

Because power resides with the people in our republic, when Christians vote, they are delegating their ruling authority to others. In other words, by voting, Christians are entrusting their "sword-bearing" responsibility to officials who will govern on their behalf. Seen from this perspective, voting is a matter of stewardship; failure to vote is a failure to exercise God-given authority.

Further, given the United States' far-reaching influence in the world, how can American Christians love the people of the nations well without having a vested interest in how our government approaches the issue of religious liberty and human rights worldwide? Will America's ambassadors be stalwart defenders of religious freedom overseas? Christians who support missionaries should care about the state of international religious freedom, an area of advocacy in which the U.S. exerts

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significant influence. Will abortion, under the euphemism of “family planning,” be funded overseas by American taxpayers, or will U.S. foreign policy value the life of the unborn? Again, American believers, by exercising their right to vote, have a direct say in these matters.

In light of these considerations, pastors should exhort their members to be involved in the political process and to vote. But voting is not enough. Pastors should also help educate and equip their members to think Biblically about moral issues, candidates and party platforms.

Although neither political party perfectly represents Christians, party platforms allow us to make thoughtful judgments regarding who we will support at election time. These platforms, which serve as proposed governing philosophies, allow Christians to see if and how the political parties prioritize issues on which the Bible clearly speaks.

Compelled by love for our neighbors and a desire to steward our God-given responsibilities, we must, as Christians, engage in the political process. But we must engage Biblically. This requires that we be prepared to grapple with the moral issues of our day, the reality of our two-party system, and follow our Christian convictions to their logical end by voting for candidates and parties that support clear Biblical values. ©2020 Family Research Council

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