



# VIEWPOINT FAITH, POLITICS & ELECTIONS

October 6, 2024

*The following is from Wayne Grudem's book **Politics According to the Bible** (2010)*

## **Five Wrong Views About Christians and Government<sup>1</sup>:**

### **1. Government Should Compel Religion**

- a. Jesus distinguished between the realms of God and Caesar. Matt. 22:17-21
- b. Jesus did not try to compel people to believe in him. Luke 9:52-55
- c. Genuine faith cannot be forced. Jesus and the Apostles always taught people and reasoned with them, and appealed to them to make a decision. Matt. 11:28-30, Acts 28:23, and Rom. 10:9-10
- d. The Kingdom of God is not a worldly kingdom. John 18:36 "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world."

### **2. Government Should Exclude Religion**

- a. It fails to distinguish the reasons for a law from the content of the law. Remember the First Amendment: there are religious reasons behind many laws, but those do not "establish" any religion.
- b. It changes freedom *of* religion into freedom *from* religion. Remember the words of the Declaration of Independence.
- c. It wrongly restricts freedom of religion and freedom of speech.
- d. It removes from government God's teaching about good and evil.

### **3. All Government is Evil and Demonic**

- a. This mistakenly interprets Luke 4:6.
- b. This view leads to moral equivalence between good and evil governments. Proverbs 29:2
- c. God has established both evangelism and the power of government to restrain evil. Romans 13:1-6

### **4. Do Evangelism, Not Politics**

- a. This is too narrow an understanding of "the Gospel" and the Kingdom of God. We are not just to preach the Gospel, but also to obey all of Jesus's commands in places

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<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2010) p.23-54

like Matt. 28:19-20. We must include what the Bible says about civil government and how we are to influence governments for good.

- b. The “whole Gospel” includes a transformation of society. The Son of God appeared to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), and that includes his influence in society.
- c. Which parts of the Bible should we not preach or teach about? Christians have influenced governments throughout history.

#### 5. Do Politics, Not Evangelism

- a. This view says we should focus on changing the laws and the culture. This gets into the error of the Social Gospel movement, which does external works but does not change the hearts of people. God looks for a change in a person’s heart, and not external actions over a desire to do good things. (Doing good things is not wrong, of course; but when not motivated by a desire to please God, they have no lasting value.)

### **The Better Approach: Significant Christian Influence on Government:**

#### 1. Examples from the Old Testament:

- Daniel 4:27 (Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar): “Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.” (Daniel gave advice about specific sins)
- Joseph in Egypt, an advisor to Pharaoh; Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the King of Persia; Queen Esther and Mordecai influenced Ahasuerus, King of Persia. Many of the Old Testament prophets addressed the sins of foreign nations around Israel.

#### Examples from the New Testament:

- Luke 3:18-20: “And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.”
- Acts 24:24-25: “And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he *reasoned* about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’” (Paul is an excellent example of a believer trying to influence civil governing officials- he reasoned, Greek *dialegomai* from which we get dialogue, or a back and forth conversation.)
- Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14. Put in the Bible not only so Christians would know how to relate to civil government, but also so civil rulers would know *what God expects from them*. Note Rom. 13:4: Was Nero put in power to “do good” to Paul and other believers? Did other Roman emperors follow do good? Paul

may have been writing to *instruct* rulers what the ideal was - why God had put them in power.

**Examples from history:**

- Roman practice of child abandonment, outlawing gladiatorial slaughter, ending branding faces of criminals, prison reform, child welfare laws, stopping human sacrifice practices, outlawing pedophilia, granting property rights and other protections to women, ending widow immolation in India, stopping practice of binding and crippling women's feet in China, promoting education and healthcare, combatting slavery and promoting civil rights, and many more.
- Charles Napier, British Army Commander in Chief in India:  
"Be it so. This burning of widows (Sati) is your custom; prepare the funeral pile. But my nation has also a custom. When men burn women alive we hang them, and confiscate all their property. My carpenters shall therefore erect gibbets on which to hang all concerned when the widow is consumed. Let us all act according to national customs."

**2. All Laws are Based on Some form of Morality**

There is no such thing as morally "neutral" laws. Many, if not most, of our laws are based on assumptions of Judeo-Christian values. Consider the Ten Commandments for one - we have laws against murder, theft, perjury. We see in the O.T. law the basis contract law, negligence law, fairness in procedural issues like the testimony of witnesses, and types of criminal or illegal activity.

Christians seeking to enact laws that harmonize with God's truth are not "establishing" a religion, but rather advocating for a form of civil government that we believe will bring the greatest happiness and prosperity to a culture. Others will not agree; they are free to make their case and advocate for reasons, and we support their freedom to do so because we believe in conscience and government not dictating beliefs.

Power is entrusted to citizens through the ballot box, therefore we have both the privilege and responsibility to vote and to try to positively influence the laws to reflect the kind of laws and moral standards God wants people to follow.

Christians respect conscience so we can live how we believe before God. This freedom extends to all persons (within limits we set as a society), and so protects the right to disagree. Consider a modern alternative, the Uyghurs in China. Estimates range from 1.5 - 2 million Uyghurs in internment camps, sometimes called "re-education" camps.

Laws based on Christian truth inevitably confer the greatest dignity on all people, since we believe everyone is made in the image of God. And Christian truth seeks to protect life, with the understanding that all life has value, because God is the Creator of all living things.

## Is There a Place for Civil Disobedience?:

*First, challenging an unjust law in court is not the same as civil disobedience. Paul's appeal to Rome is an example.*

- Examples of civil disobedience: Daniel (Daniel 6) and the three Hebrew children (Daniel 3) in Babylon (both sides - commanding to bow, and forbidding worship of God - ordered to kneel or stand).
- Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29).

The unconstitutionality of a law is not the same thing as an unbiblical law. In asking questions about civil disobedience we should not conflate these two. Civil disobedience is *not* "We must obey the constitution rather than men," it *is* "We must obey God rather than men." As Christians we can submit to laws that are unconstitutional but we cannot submit to laws that are unbiblical. This requires that we be absolutely *biblically* persuaded of our duty.

There are times when as Christians we need to disobey our governing authorities. **But it is only when they require us to disobey to God — when the only way we can obey them is to be unfaithful to God.** It does not arise out of being inconvenienced by strict measures, or a general feeling that the law has gone too far. Legal challenges can (and should) address those. *For the Christian the only motivation for civil disobedience is a deep biblical conviction that obedience to man would be disobedience to God.* And when we make such an informed conscience decision, we should be prepared to accept the penalty, as the Apostles did. "When they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:40-41).

Difficult and needs to be done with great wisdom and prayer. There are times we are called to fight like Joshua; and times we are told not to resist and put away the sword. Such decisions need to be done with much prayer and the wisdom of counselors. (Jesus at his arrest in Gethsemane.) We should always render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but only to God that which is God's. *We may draw the line in different places as our conscience demands, and as much as possible we should respect the conscience of another.*

### **Other Examples of Civil Disobedience—Examples in Scripture**

In Exodus 1, the Egyptian Pharaoh gave the clear command to two Hebrew midwives that they were to kill all male Jewish babies. The Bible says the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh and "feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live" (Exodus 1:17). The Bible goes on to say the midwives lied to Pharaoh about why they were letting the children live; yet even though they lied and disobeyed their government, "God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them" (Exodus 1:20–21).

In Joshua 2, Rahab directly disobeyed a command from the king of Jericho to produce the Israelite spies who had entered the city to gain intelligence for battle. Instead, she helped them

escape. Even though Rahab had received a clear order from the top government official, she resisted the command and was saved when Joshua and the Israeli army destroyed the city.

Another example of civil disobedience in keeping with biblical submission is found in 1 Kings 18. A man named Obadiah who “feared the Lord greatly” defied Queen Jezebel’s order to kill all of God’s prophets. Obadiah hid one hundred prophets so they could live.

### **Civil Disobedience—Summary**

What conclusions can be drawn from the above biblical examples? The guidelines from Scripture for a Christian’s civil disobedience can be summarized as follows:

- Christians should resist a government that *commands* or *compels* evil and should work nonviolently within the laws of the land to change a government that permits evil.
- Civil disobedience is permitted when the government’s laws or commands are in direct violation of God’s laws and commands.
- If a Christian disobeys an evil government, unless he can flee from the government, he should accept that government’s punishment for his actions.
- Christians are certainly permitted to work to install new government leaders within the laws that have been established.

Lastly, Christians are commanded to pray for their leaders and for God to intervene in His time to change any ungodly path that they are pursuing: “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:1–2). *We are supposed to pray whether we like a leader or not.*

### **Conclusion:**

We are called to be good citizens and influence a culture in positive ways. That requires more than looking back on what other Christians did in their time. It necessitates that we look at the issues of our own day and approach them with grace, biblical clarity, and courage.

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### **truthXchange**

For more information or resources referenced by Dr. Jeffrey Ventrella, see his website <https://truthxchange.com/directors-dicta/>

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