

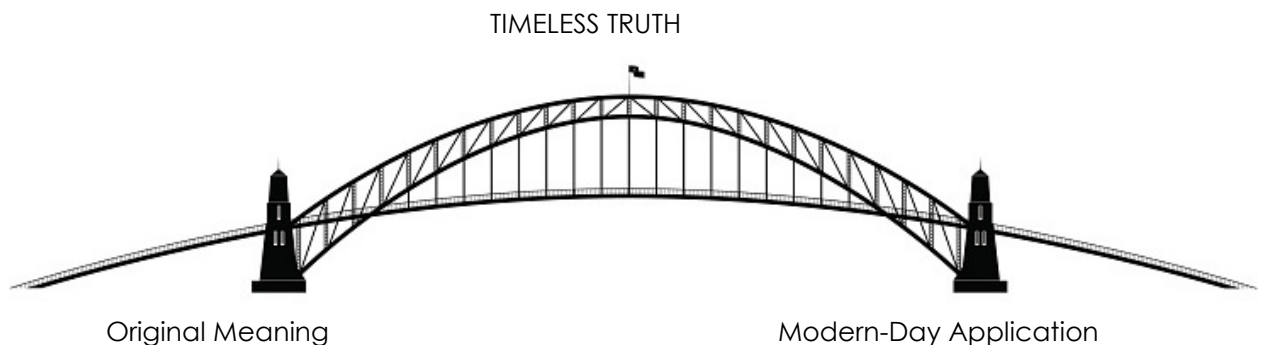


Politics and the Gospel

Special Edition for the 2016 Election

INTRODUCTION: GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

1. First, we need to all admit that we come to this topic with preconceived biases, our own family/social history, and with our own convictions/pet peeves about politics in general and this particular moment in U.S. politics in specific. We must remember that much of the political discourse we are exposed to today via 24-hour news channels and social media is toxic and negative rather than constructive and positive. **We need PERSPECTIVE.**
2. Second, we need to recognize the reality that live “between two worlds.” As disciples of Jesus we are citizens of two kingdoms: the one “not of this world” and the nation in which we live. This leads to inherent tensions that will never go away for us until Christ returns. In addition, we live between the “now and the not yet” – the time between the first and second coming of Jesus. The Bible gives us instructions and responsibilities that we bear as citizens of both kingdoms. We tend to over-emphasize one or the other. **We need a clear sense of PRIORITIES.**
3. Third, as followers of Jesus Christ we look to the Bible as our source of authority on these issues – not to the wisdom or persuasiveness of men (1 Cor. 2:1-5), nor to our own emotions or feelings. **We need TRUTH as a foundation for our convictions.**



- A. Our greatest degree of confidence on these issues can be drawn from biblical passages in which the Bible is **CLEAR, DIRECT**, and **DECISIVE**.

Example: Civil governments are ordained by God to punish evil and reward good (Rom. 13:1-7).

- B. Second, in many instances we can make an **ARGUMENT FROM BROADER BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES** for our convictions.

Example: Some form of democracy is the preferable form of government because of the fallen nature of man and because of the equality of all people created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 3:16)

- C. Third, we can **APPEAL TO FACTS IN THE WORLD** as a supporting argument.

Example: Lower taxes lead to greater economic growth which helps the common good as more people are able to have the dignity of holding jobs and earning income and as more businesses flourish and people are rewarded for hard work.

SURVEY OF KEY SCRIPTURES RELATED TO GOVERNMENT

1. Like all issues, there are several fundamental truths about God and his relationship to the world and man that will ultimately affect nearly every political decision. This is why we must cultivate a **BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW** rooted in the gospel.
 - A. **GOD:** God is creator (Gen. 1:1) and everything that exists has been created by and for Him (Ps. 27:1) and is "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Our One True God reveals himself and His moral standards clearly in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15-16, 2 Peter 1:20-21).
 - B. **MAN:** Because Adam and Eve sinned, there is moral evil in the heart of every human being (Gen. 3, Rom. 5:12-19). This means that human nature is not basically good ("...no one seeks God"), capable of violence and evil, and humans are morally responsible agents before God. Because of "the curse," the natural world is a broken place and both man and nature need redeemed.
 - C. **CHRIST:** We are helpless to do anything about our broken condition, so the just and gracious Creator looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and sent his Son Jesus, God in flesh, to bear his wrath against sin on the cross and to show his power over sin in the resurrection, so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever (John 3:16, Eph. 2:1-10, Rom. 10:9-10).
 - D. **COMMISSION:** Only in Christ do we "reverse the curse" and live out the first commission: We were created to enjoy God's grace and extend his glory over the whole earth (Gen. 1:28). As disciples of Jesus we are commissioned to make disciples of "all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:21, Acts 1:8).
2. **GENESIS 9:5-6** – In instructing Noah to carry out the death penalty, God establishes the obligation to carry out the most severe punishment in retribution for the most horrific crime. Once this principle is established, the imposition of lesser penalties for lesser crimes is also validated. Since this occurred before the calling of Abraham/establishment of Israel, this would mean neither is this principle limited to the OT era/nation of Israel.
3. **GENESIS 41:37-57** – God uses governmental authorities to advance his purposes. In this case, God used Pharaoh to raise Joseph to a position of authority over the nation of Egypt so he could save both his people and the world from famine.

- God used Nebuchadnezzar to protect and raise up Daniel and his Jewish friends to positions of authority in Babylon (Dan. 2:46-49).
 - God used Cyrus, king of Persia, to restore the Jewish exiles to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4).
 - God used the peace enforced by the secular Roman Empire, the Pax Romana, to enable early Christians to travel and spread the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world.
 - **Daniel 4:25:** *The Most High God is Sovereign over all the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes.*
4. **JUDGES 21:25** – The stories in Judges are some of the most horrific in the Bible and they demonstrate in gruesome detail the course a society takes when there is no government or authority strong enough to restrain evil among fallen human beings. When “everyone does what is right in his own eyes” anarchy is the tragic result.
 5. **PSALM 82:2-4** – The psalmist declares that governments should execute justice and defend the weak. Rulers should not “show partiality.”
 6. **ECCLESIASTES 8:11** – Authorities should not only restrain evil, but they are charged to execute punishments swiftly as a deterrent to crime.
 7. **MATTHEW 22:20-21** – In Jesus’ statement he established the broad outline of a new order that was far different from the Old Testament theocracy. Jesus taught that there are now TWO DIFFERENT SPHERES OF INFLUENCE: one for civil government and another for religious life. This implies strongly that governments should give people freedom regarding religious faith and practices.
 8. **LUKE 9:52-55** – Jesus directly refused any attempt to try to force people to believe in him or follow him. Jesus and his disciples instead taught people, reasoned with them and then appealed to them to follow Him. True faith must be voluntary and thus genuine religious belief cannot be forced (see Matt. 11:28-30, Acts 28:23).
- “A religion that needs state power to enforce obedience to its beliefs is a religion that has lost confidence in the power of its Deity.” – Russell Moore, Onward*
9. **JOHN 18:36** – Jesus repeated refuted the Hebrew ideal that the Messiah would be primarily a political/military leader who would overthrow the hated Romans and re-establish the political monarchy of Israel as under David. Here he states clearly “My kingdom is not of this world” and he refused to have his disciples fight with swords or military power. His kingdom overcomes the world (1 John 3:8, 5:4-5) but by changing hearts and minds, not by military power.
 10. **ROMANS 13:1-7** – This is the longest passage focused exclusively on the role of government in the Bible. From it we draw several key principles:

A. God appoints our ruling authorities (v. 1-2).

- B. The main role of government is to restrain evil (v. 3) and promote the common good (v. 4).
 - C. Governmental officials are accountable to God (v. 6) – they are not only “civil servants,” they are God’s servants.
 - D. We should give thanks for “good” governments because they serve “for your good” (v. 4).
 - E. While Paul tells Christians not to take personal vengeance (Rom. 12:19), he explains that one of the ways that God carries out His wrath is through the civil government that He has ordained to carry out justice.
11. **1 PETER 2:13-14** – Peter commands us to “be subject” to human institutions because they are established by God.
12. What about **MATTHEW 5:39**? Context! Jesus is not talking about the responsibilities of government, but about principles for individual personal conduct. In addition, Jesus isn’t giving commands (see 5:42!) but illustrating what “out of the ordinary” changes in perspective come to those who follow Him.

SUMMARY OF KEY PRINCIPLES FROM SCRIPTURE

1. God is **SOVEREIGN** over all nations, and all people are accountable to Him.
2. Governments are **ORDAINED** by God to restrain evil and promote the common good. Along with the church and home, government is the only other institution established by God and it exists ideally to protect the church and home so they can fulfill their mission. It’s no wonder why Satan puts so much effort into corrupting leaders and governments.
3. Governments should serve the **PEOPLE** and seek the good of the **PEOPLE**, not the rulers. Compare and contrast the faithfulness of Samuel as a judge (1 Sam. 12:3-4) with his warning about what a king would demand (1 Sam. 8:11-17).
4. As a general principle, since God establishes authority, as citizens we should be **SUBJECT** to government and obey the laws of the government (Rom. 13:1-2, 1 Peter 2:13-14).
5. However, God requires His people to disobey the civil government IF obedience to man would mean directly **DISOBEYING** God. Biblical examples:
 - Exodus 1:17 – The Hebrew mid-wives refuse Pharaoh’s command to kill the boys
 - Daniel 3:13-27 – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
 - Acts 4:13-20 – Peter and John witnessing in the name of Jesus
6. Governments should safeguard human **LIBERTY**. The Bible consistently places a high value on individual human freedom and responsibility to choose one’s actions. Slavery/oppression of any type are always viewed negatively in Scripture. Every

governmental increase in governmental regulation of life is also an incremental removal of some measure of human liberty.

7. The church should not try to govern the “thing that are Caesar’s” (see Jesus’ response in Luke 12:13-14) but neither should the government attempt to have authority over the “things that are God’s.” The government should not tell people who, when or how to worship. The government should not choose or appoint church leaders (see Matt. 10:1-4, Acts 6:3, 1 Tim. 3:1-13) or **INFRINGE** in any way on the church’s right to govern itself.

“We can render unto Caesar and we can render unto God only if we know the difference between the two.” – Russell Moore, Onward

8. Governments should **ENCOURAGE** and **SUPPORT** churches and legitimate religious non-profits that serve the “common good” and “promote the general welfare.” *Note that this idea is already under attack and expect to see churches struggling with zoning approval and losing their tax exempt status due to our “intolerant” beliefs despite the fact that all credible research points to churches contributing billions to the economy and being exponentially more efficient at using resources to meet societal needs.*
9. Because of the presence of sin in every human heart and because of corrupting influence of power (“absolute power corrupts absolutely”), governments should establish a strong and clear **SEPARATION of POWERS**.

*“If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”
– James Madison in the Federalist Papers*

10. The rule of law must apply even to the **RULERS** of a nation (Deut. 17:18-20, 2 Sam. 12, Gal. 2:11-12).

WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN POLITICS?¹

Five Competing Views:

1. Government should **COMPEL** religion.
2. Government should **EXCLUDE** religion.
3. All government is **EVIL** and **DEMONIC**.
4. Do **EVANGELISM**, not politics.²

¹ Adapted from Grudem, Wayne. *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2010.

² See MacArthur, John. *Why Government Can’t Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2000.

5. Do POLITICS, not evangelism.

A Biblical Solution: Significant Christian INFLUENCE on Government

"Christians should seek to influence civil government according to God's moral standards and God's purposes for government as revealed in the Bible (when rightly understood). But while Christians exercise this influence, they must simultaneously insist on protecting freedom of religion for all citizens. In addition, "significant influence" does not mean angry, belligerent, intolerant, judgmental, red-faced, and hate-filled influence, but rather winsome, kind, thoughtful, persuasive influence that is suitable to each circumstance and that always protects the other person's right to disagree, but that is also uncompromising about the truthfulness and moral goodness of the teachings of God's Word." – Wayne Grudem

1. **Biblical Examples:** Joseph (Gen. 41-50), Daniel (4:27), Jeremiah (29:7-11), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:11), Esther (5:1-8), John the Baptist (Luke 3:18-20), Paul before Felix (Acts 24:24-25).
2. **Historical Christian Impact** on Secular Government: human rights, freedom of religion, equality before the law, separation of church and state, abolishment of slavery, the civil rights movement and human trafficking are all social issues in which Christians were the primary catalysts. The Magna Carta, the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were all heavily influenced by both Scripture and Christians.
3. Without Christians as "**salt and light**," governments will have no clear moral compass. If Christians do not speak publicly and winsomely about moral and ethical issues facing a nation, who will? Where will people learn about ethics? Where will a nation learn right from wrong? *If we leave a moral vacuum, adversaries of the gospel will quickly fill it.*
4. Per 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, there are different parts of the body of Christ with different functions. Some Christians may be called to **heavy** involvement in the political process (running for office), others to **moderate** involvement (active campaigning, involvement in specific issues such as abortion), and others to **minimal** involvement (voting, being informed about key issues, equipping their children) but ALL Christians need to be engaged and informed.

5. THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN:

- A. **PRAY** – *"First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority, so that we may lead and tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."* – 1 Tim. 2:1-2 Prayer is commanded (Matt. 6:9). Prayer matters (Mark 9:29). The prayers of God's people shake the earth (Acts 4:31, Rev. 8:5).
- B. Be **INFORMED** about the issues – Abortion. Immigration. Same-sex marriage. Health care reform. Do you understand the issues (1) biblically and (2) culturally? What is your source of information? Are you being spoon-fed media bias,

succumbing to peer pressure, or are you doing your homework, discussing the issues in biblical community and equipping those around you?

- C. Commit to healthy **DIALOGUE** not toxic rhetoric – Practice what we teach our kids: (1) Does this need to be said (2) by me (3) right now (4) in this way? Beware of social media. 140 characters are not sufficient to unpack a Christian worldview about most issues. What witness are you giving the world about Christians beliefs and how Christians interact with one another (John 13:34)?
- D. **VOTE!** – Every Christian citizen has at the least a minimum obligation to be well-informed and to vote for candidates and policies that are most consistent with biblical principles. The opportunity we have in a democracy is a **STEWARDSHIP** that God entrusts to us that we should not neglect nor fail to appreciate. We might not like the candidates we have to choose from but there are always options and there are many issues beyond the Presidential election that often have a greater immediate impact on our communities and states on the ballot.
- E. Consider **INVOLVEMENT** beyond the ballot box – The freedoms that we have came only as a result of great sacrifice on the part of millions of others. We must question whether it is right to “receive great benefits from a nation but to give almost nothing in return.” It’s easy to complain and be critical. It’s much more difficult to get involved personally.
- Give time and money to support God-honoring candidates.
 - Consider running for local office such as the school board or as an alderman.
 - Get directly involved with the issues themselves: For example, if you want to be more informed about the immigration issue, volunteer with World Relief (one of our mission partners).
- F. Never **COMPROMISE** the gospel or your witness for politics.

“We must not shrink from our callings as citizens, but we also must not see our citizenship of the moment as the final word. We are Americans best when we are not Americans first.” – Russell Moore

Recommended Reading:

- Grudem, Wayne. *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2010.
- Moore, Russell. *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*. Nashville: B&H, 2015.
- Platt, David. *A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture*. Tyndale, 2015.
- WORLD Magazine. <https://world.wng.org/>