



Faith and Politics

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Dual Citizenship: Christians first...Texans second

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Kingdom life...

Christians have dual citizenship. Our primary citizenship is to the reign of God in Christ, or as Paul puts it, "Our citizenship (politeuma) is in heaven" (Phil. 2:30). It is also the case that this primary citizenship entails a second citizenship: "Live your life (politeuesthe) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27). Precisely because we are subjects of God's reign, we are called to live as sojourners in the kingdoms of this world.

In a different context and using different imagery, Jesus also taught his disciples that they had stewardship of influence in the world:

You are the salt of the earth. . . .You are the light of the world. . . .Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:13-14,16)

In addition, Jesus' response to the trick question about paying taxes to the emperor has always served as a benchmark for Christian citizenship. Pointing to the image of the emperor on a Roman coin, he said, "Give

therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Christians are citizens of two realms, the world and the Kingdom of God, and Jesus affirms in his famous answer that we have duties to both realms.

Political life...

The upcoming campaigns, the Texas legislative sessions, and other critical decisions raise fundamental questions for Christians about the meaning of Christian citizenship.

How can our earthly citizenship most faithfully embody our Christian calling?

Paul told the Philippians that their commitment to Christ would make them "shine like stars in the world" (Phil.2:15). But it is easier to say that we should shine like stars in the world than it is to know what that image actually means.

Scripture is clear in teaching both respect for government and government leaders...

Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it's God's order. So live responsibly as a citizen...The police aren't there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and he uses them to do it. That's why you must live responsibly—not just to avoid punishment but also because it's the right way to live. That's why you pay taxes—so that an orderly way of life can be maintained. Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders. Romans 13:1-7, *The Message*

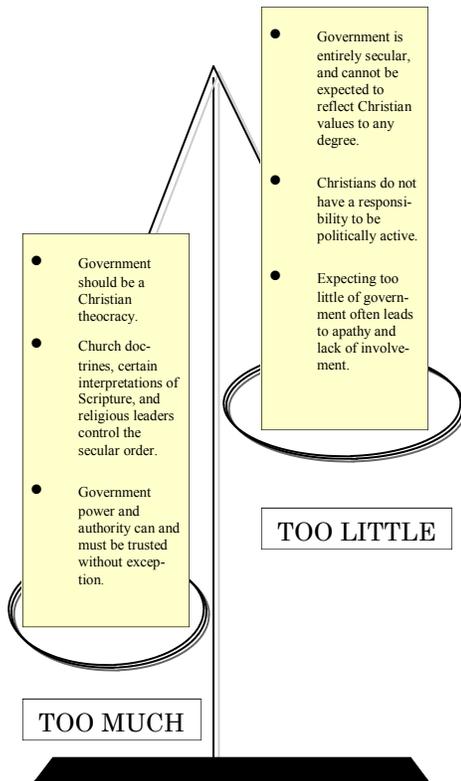
and a circumspect resistance to rulers who overreach their authority ...

Consider Moses and Aaron's dramatic confrontation of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, an act of resistance which ultimately led to freedom for all the Hebrew slaves.

And remember Peter and John's act of civil disobedience in Acts 4:19-20. The Jerusalem authorities had commanded them to stop teaching and speaking in the name of Jesus, but Peter and John did it anyway, choosing to be Christians first...Roman citizens second.

Balancing the Scales

Unbalanced Expectations...



Sometimes our expectations of government can get a little off balance. We either expect too much or too little.

What do Christians want from government?

1. We should want **freedom of conscience generally and freedom of conscience regarding religious belief specifically**. The First Amendment requires that government should neither advance nor hinder religious belief, and this requirement correlates exactly with the Baptist conviction that true faith is by definition un-coerced.
2. We should want government to **attend to the interests of the weak, the poor, and the helpless**. The Bible is abundantly clear on this issue. God cares about the weak and the disadvantaged and expects those in authority to pay serious attention to their needs. (Deut. 10:17-19).
3. We should want government to **restrain the powerful**. Even King David was indicted for using power without moral restraint (2 Sam. 12:1-15).
4. We should want government to **strive for peace and order**. We who are called by our Lord to be peacemakers should expect government to use force justly and as a last resort.
5. We should expect government to **assure justice for all**, regardless of economic status, race, religion, or gender. Government is the primary institution in society positioned to assure justice, and the people of God should vigilantly call for the very justice God demands (cf. Amos 5:24 and Micah 6:7-8).

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Religious Liberty Clause of the First Amendment

Healthy Church/State Boundaries

- ◆ Politicians **neither solicit, nor accept, the endorsement or direct political support** of houses of worship.
- ◆ Religious views **infuse** the political process without controlling it.
- ◆ Differing political and religious views are **freely expressed and respected** in the public square.
- ◆ Christians argue for public policies which our religious tradition seems to support, but religious groups **do not use** public funding to pay for religious teachings and worship.

Protecting Sacred Space: Healthy Church/State Boundaries

When our expectations of government get off balance, it is also easy to blur important church-state boundaries. In Old Testament times, prophets influenced kings, proclaiming God’s will for the people of Israel and warning about the consequences of disobeying God’s will. Church and state boundaries were not clearly drawn, and Israel was a distinctly religious state. But current American politics reflects a different model for church-state relations, one built on freedom of religious expression and separation of church and state.

Unfortunately, in recent years, healthy church-state boundaries have been comprised in America. When the boundaries between church and state become so heavily blurred, the Church ceases to play a prophetic role in society, becoming just another special interest group, and the American commitment to genuine democracy and religious liberty is severely threatened.

Churches... What role can they play in facilitating responsible Christian citizenship?

Without threatening their tax-exempt status, churches:

- Can sponsor representative debates or forums on issues and amendments.
- Can sponsor forums for candidates to speak at church, as long as all candidates are invited.
- Can teach the importance of involvement in political decision making.
- Can encourage people to vote and register to vote. *Each church can select one member to be a “deputized voter registrar.” It requires only a quick visit to the County Tax Assessor-Collector’s office to get authorization and registration materials. Deputy registrars can then register all eligible members of the congregation to vote.*
- Can distribute information on issues and on candidates’ voting records.

Keeping Your Church Tax Exempt & Out of Court

As local congregations productively engage with political processes, they must be careful *not* to cross important legal boundaries:

Churches must comply with IRS rules related to political activities. If a church does not follow IRS rules

- it can lose the exemption from federal taxes
- the donors can lose the tax deductible status of their gifts and offerings.

Internal Revenue rules prohibit a church from engaging in the following activities:

1. endorsing candidates
2. making donations to candidates’ campaigns
3. engaging in fund raising on behalf of a candidate
4. distributing statements supporting or opposing a political candidate, and
5. becoming involved in any other activities that may be beneficial or detrimental to any candidate.

In addition, care should be used not to have statements issued from the pulpit, on church letterhead stationary, or in official church publications or communications which would violate these prohibitions.

Church staff and members may support any candidate or issue they choose, **on an individual basis.**

Individuals...How can they responsibly exercise their citizenship in two kingdoms?

VOTING

Voting is a primary right and obligation of representative government. Christian citizens must resist becoming disillusioned with politics. Every citizen can make a difference by actively participating in the democratic process.

ISSUE POLITICS

Think about a social, political, or economic issue that is particularly important to you, perhaps one that has impacted your life or the life of your loved ones.

Get involved with this issue by seeking out an advocacy group that can provide information and opportunities for action. On virtually all significant issues, there are advocacy groups which provide responsible information (eg. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Texans Against Gambling, Texans Care for Children, just to name a few).

Write a Letter to the Editor regarding the issue of concern.

Visit your elected official(s) to express your stance on the issue.

Host a forum, inviting elected officials from all parties to discuss their views on the topic.

PARTY POLITICS

Consider seeking election as a delegate to local, state, and national party conventions.

Consider volunteering help or giving donations to political campaigns. Candidates will either receive their major support from volunteers or from special interests. To the extent candidates can avoid special interest support, the more they are free to vote their convictions.

Remember that God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and no political party perfectly reflects the will of God. Consider and respect political opinions that differ from your own, and use your involvement in party politics to challenge corruption, incivility, hate politics, and special interest control.

RUNNING FOR OFFICE

Some Christians are called to be politically active in an especially devoted way by pursuing an elected office, and Christian citizens should see public service as Christian vocation.

If you should choose to run for public office, be careful to remember your primary calling to follow Christ and take care to avoid sacrificing your character or your ethics for power or prestige.

Faith communities flourish when there is a commitment to a true separation of church and state. This has long been a Baptist distinctive.

A Word from Phil...



If our actions on behalf of democracy reflect our beliefs, most Americans no longer believe deeply in democracy. Alarming numbers of citizens are unwilling to make even the smallest investment of time to preserve the democratic ideal.

When people do not vote and participate, democracy quickly begins to transform into another form of government, oligarchy, government by the few. In America, that transformation is rapidly taking place. Power is being concentrated in fewer and fewer people and organizations.

Until we begin to see political engagement as responsibility, not just privilege, we will linger at the sidelines of national and local decisions. Until we realize that we have a responsibility to discern truth rather than totally embrace the jargon of one political party or group, we will be ineffective.

Phil Stuckland



Get F.I.T. is a citizen leadership development program for people of faith, to help you and your congregation **participate** in the public policy debate in ways that **express** your faith, **honor** diversity of opinion, and **respect** laws governing political activity by religious organizations.

FITness Quiz

1. Do you vote in every election, or at least every statewide primary and general election?
2. Do you ever give money to candidates or volunteer for campaigns?
3. Are you familiar with the state platforms of the major political parties, and do you know how to be involved in developing and changing them?
4. Can you discuss at least three key Texas public policy issues well enough to explain them to someone else?
5. Do you know how to help new voters get registered and vote for the first time?
6. Do you know how to run for office if you want or get involved in your party's local leadership?
7. Do you know how to find out how your senator and representative voted on bills you care about?
8. Have you ever contacted an elected official about an issue you cared about?
9. Have you ever written a letter to the editor, given a talk, or otherwise borne public witness to your opinion?
10. Do you know the names of the governor, lieutenant governor, comptroller, attorney general, agriculture commissioner and land commissioner, as well as your own senator and representative?

0-2 : It's never too late to get started!

3-6 Yes: You're on the right track! Don't be afraid to speak your mind, to elected people and to other members of your community.

7-9 Yes: Don't forget, mentorship is mandatory. Someone helped you figure out how to get involved, so don't forget to pass your knowledge on to other members of your community.

10 Yes: You're a Lone Star Leader! Thanks for all you do for Texas, and keep up the good work!

The Get FIT Challenge

- Vote in the Texas primary and general elections in 2006.
- Understand at least three key Texas public policy issues well enough to explain them to someone else.
- Write at least one letter to the editor of your local or denominational newspaper on an issue you care about.
- Help organize or participate in at least one event in your community that builds democracy—a candidate or issue forum, voter registration drive, or get-out-the-vote effort like driving people to the polls.
- Introduce yourself to your state representative and senator.
- Visit www.getfittx.org or www.texasimpact.com.

Pray for your elected leaders and actively pursue a new interest in 2006 !