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A SUMMARY

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: WORLDVIEW, ISSUES, AND VOTING

by David Closson

Do Christians have a moral or biblical obligation to participate in government?

Christians answer this question in a variety of ways. Some caution against associating too closely with elected officials or political parties, not wanting to conflate the church's responsibilities with those of the state. Others emphatically advocate for Christian involvement in partisan politics. Which approach is correct? Both have good intentions. However, if taken to extremes, both approaches are problematic.

We need a third approach, where actively engaged Christians can faithfully apply biblical principles to our nation's divisive political landscape. But what does this look like?

FRC's publication "Biblical Principles for Political Engagement" helps Christians think biblically about government—both in their response to and participation in public policy. What follows is a summary of this resource.

WHAT IS “POLITICS?”

The word “politics” comes from the Greek word “polis,” referring to city-states that were ruled by a body of citizens. Politics (properly understood) are the means by which groups of people order their shared lives. Politics can take on many forms. Examples include, a legislative body deliberating potential laws, a homeschool co-op deciding where to host meetings, or even neighbors agreeing to watch each other’s houses while on vacation.

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS CARE ABOUT POLITICS?

First, Christians should care about politics because government is appointed by God. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul describes the governing authorities as “ministers of God,” responsible for administering civil justice. Government is God’s idea, and Christians should therefore think about it and engage with it in a way that is consistent with its God-ordained purposes.

Second, God commands us to love our neighbors (Mark 12:31). Government decisions have a direct impact on people’s lives, and engaging in the political process should be part of a holistic approach to ministry where Christians seek to meet other people’s temporal as well as spiritual needs.

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS ENGAGE IN POLITICS?

Our engagement must be guided by prayer and biblical wisdom. Although we should never equate the church’s mission with the platform of any political party, Christians (and especially pastors) can and should do more than calling for polite discourse and preaching on a few moral issues. Pastors must help their people make the connection between biblical principles and political responsibilities, ensuring their congregations are equipped with the resources necessary for responsible political engagement.



SHOULD CHRISTIANS VOTE?

For Christians, politics is, at its core, about how we love our neighbor as we live and order our lives together. Given the impact government decisions have on people’s lives, downplaying the responsibility to vote amounts to a failure in Christian discipleship and loving our neighbors. Therefore, believers should become informed voters, aware of the issues and candidates on the ballot.

REALITY OF OUR TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

For better or worse, America has a two-party system, and we must acknowledge and operate within it. While Christians engaging in politics should seek to persuade members of both parties to approach issues from a biblical worldview, we must decide at election time who to support. Christians need to be aware of the issues at stake and where the political parties stand. This will help us make good voting decisions, even if the available options are less than ideal.

WHAT ISSUES ARE MOST CLEAR FROM SCRIPTURE?

Christians must be grounded in the teachings of God's Word. What does the Bible have to say about some morally weighty political topics, such as abortion, marriage, and poverty?

Abortion and Marriage/Sexuality

On both life and sexuality, the Bible is unequivocal—life begins at conception and abortion is murder (Ps. 139:13-16; Luke 1:39-45), and marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:22-23). Scripture is also unambiguous regarding the moral status of homosexual conduct (Rom. 1:24-28; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).



In terms of biblical clarity and priority, Christians have rightly recognized abortion and human sexuality as primary moral concerns. Public policy on these issues, if inconsistent with a biblical worldview, can have serious, even deadly, consequences. Defending the sanctity of life and God's intent for human sexuality can be a means of loving our neighbor.

Poverty

God's concern for the poor is a pervasive theme throughout the Bible. Exhortations to care for the poor abound (Prov. 22:22-23, 31:8-9; Zech. 7:8-10), and Jesus himself displayed remarkable concern and compassion for the poor in his healing and teaching ministry (Mat. 11:4-6; Luke 6:20-21). Jesus' half-brother James wrote that "pure and undefiled religion" includes care for orphans and widows (James 1:27). A Christian cannot open their Bible and ignore God's call to care for the poor. While solutions can be debated, it is clear we are to be concerned about the issue.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Neither political party is a Christian party in the sense that every policy position they advocate for lines up perfectly with the Bible. For the sake of intellectual honesty, it is important to recognize that the Republican party has generally embraced policy positions on abortion and human sexuality that are consistent with Scripture. In contrast, the Democratic party has embraced positions on these issues that are at odds with Scripture. Regarding poverty alleviation, there is no doubt members of both political parties care about the poor, though the parties often disagree on the best means of poverty alleviation. Christians should weigh these proposals carefully.

In short, if theologically conservative Christians appear increasingly aligned with one party, it is because the other party has taken positions on primary moral issues that oppose the Bible's explicit teaching.

WHAT IS A PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY?

As those charged with discipling their flocks, merely acknowledging the evils of certain policy positions is not enough. Voting is a matter of stewardship, so pastors must help their people make the connection between biblical principles and political responsibilities, ensuring their congregations are equipped to honor God and love their neighbor in the voting booth.”

CONCLUSION

Compelled by Christian love for our neighbors and a desire to steward our God-given responsibilities, we must engage in the political process from a biblical worldview. This means being prepared to grapple with the moral issues of our day, accepting the reality of our two-party system, and following our Christian convictions to their logical conclusions by voting for the candidates and parties that best align with biblical values.



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