

Christians and Government

Intro

“We believe that civil government is of divine appointment for the interests and good order of human society; magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored, and obeyed—except in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the King of the kings of the earth. Though our ultimate hope is not in governmental policies or politics, Christians have an ethical responsibility, to the extent that they are able, to promote and practice biblical justice and morality to and within a lost and dying world.” –The Parkway Church, Statement of Faith

What are some things the Bible teaches about government?

1. God has established the rule of law, order, and the government for the good of mankind, and Christians are commanded to submit to the government.

Romans 13:1–7 - Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

1 Peter 2:13–21 - Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

What do you do if two governmental authorities disagree?

You are commanded to follow your leaders, but what happens if the federal government clashes with the state government? Or what if a county disagrees with a state?

Answer: You obey the one that is right (first biblically and then legally).

2. However, Christians are not to obey the government if they are asked to personally commit sin.

Acts 5:29 - But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Daniel 6:10 – [when King Darius makes it a law that people cannot pray to God] - When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

3. Christians are to pray for their leaders, whether they like them or not.

Ezra 6:10 - that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 - First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

4. Christians may critique (but may not slander, misrepresent, or curse) their political leaders.

Titus 3:1-2 - Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people

Ecclesiastes 10:20 - Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

5. Christians should work for the good of their country.

Jeremiah 29:4–7 - "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

How should Christians engage with politics? 5 wrong views:

1. Government should compel religion

Why people think this: If my religion is right it would be best for everyone.

Problem: The government could compel the wrong religion.

2. Government should exclude religion

Why people think this: Religion has led to a lot of evils in the world.

Problem: People cannot practice their most important beliefs.

3. All government is evil and demonic

Why people think this: Every government has problems.

Problem: God is the one who institutes government for our good.

4. Do evangelism, not politics

Why people think this: It is more important to get people saved than to be involved in policies that affect our day-to-day lives.

Problem: You have an ethical obligation to use whatever means God has given you to promote righteousness.

5. Do politics, not evangelism

Why people think this: You can't do evangelism if certain political rights are taken away.

Problem: The gospel must always be primary.

What should Christians think about being involved in governmental affairs?

1. Realizing that the gospel is primary, we should (secondarily) be involved in helping those in need, protecting the life of the unborn, protecting our civil and religious liberties, holding those in authority accountable, promoting what is moral, fighting what is evil, and anything that promotes righteousness and human flourishing - *All of which requires that you be involved in politics.*

2. Christians should seek to have a significant governmental influence.

3. In a democratic republic (like the U.S.), you partially help rule the country (by your vote) and will, therefore, be held accountable by God for how you use this small amount of influence.

4. Should you try to enact your morality into law?

5. How involved should you be?

6. Are you confusing the role of the church with the role of the state?

“We” should care for the poor.

“We” should accept the alien and the immigrant.
“We” should go fight the terrorists.

Some silly things I’ve heard Christians say regarding the government

1. “Taxation is theft.”
2. “Jesus wasn’t involved in politics.”
3. “Our citizenship is in heaven; we should only care about the Kingdom of God.”

Acts 22:25-27 - But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?” When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.” So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.”

4. “I can’t vote for that person because they are personally immoral, so I’ll vote for someone with an immoral policy.”
5. “Jesus wouldn’t be a Democrat or a Republican.”
6. “Abortion is only one issue.”
7. “Making sure people have a good life is being ‘pro-life.’”
8. “If you care about politics you must not be hoping in the gospel.”
9. “We can’t really enact change anyway.”
10. “We should promote some evil action to prevent more of that evil action.”
11. “I don’t want to read my morality onto other people.”

Presuppositions in America’s two-party system

Left	Right
Red (now blue)	White (now red)
Liberal	Conservative
Truth and goodness in the future	Truth and goodness in the past
Looks to new ideas	Looks to historical ideas
Progressive	Traditional
Mass rule (democracy)	Limits on mass rule (republic)
Large, federal government	Smaller, state government
Equality of result or starting point	Equality before the law
Regulated market	Deregulated market
Asks: What would be ideal?	Asks: Would that actually work?
Promotes utopianism	Promotes realism

Positive rights
Optimistic about human nature

Negative rights
Less optimistic about human nature

Question your presuppositions

1. Plato's view of rulership
 - A. Monarch or aristocracy of philosophers
 - B. Timocracy (soldiers/land owners hold power)
 - C. Oligarchy (the rich, who have stable appetites hold power).
 - D. Democracy (the masses or the poor, with unstable appetites hold power).
 - E. Tyranny (a ruler with bestial appetites holds power).
2. How much of world history held a separation of church and state?
3. Should everyone have an equal vote? (land holders, the uneducated, etc.).
4. What is true equality?: equality of starting point, equality of result, or equality before the law (formal equality)?
5. If you think you have a right to do what you want with your own property or person, do you have a right to suicide? Do you have a right to be a prostitute? Do you have a right to take illegal drugs? If all the farmers across America decided to burn all their crops (thus leading to people starving) should the government have the right to step in? If one person created the only cure for a deadly disease, do others have a right to take it from him if he won't sell it?
6. Are all types of equality good?
7. In what ways is a democratic republic different than the government described in the Bible?
8. Is individual freedom more important than communal freedom? If you have a neighbor who doesn't have enough money to go to the doctor or doesn't have enough money for food for his kids, and you are building a swimming pool, do you have an obligation to give that money to him?
9. All people are equally valuable but are all cultures equally valuable? What about a culture that practices cannibalism? What about a culture that says other cultures are inferior? Are they equally valuable?
10. Is the government's job primarily to protect our personal safety or to protect our liberties?