



A RESOURCE OF
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The Nations Belong to God

*A Christian Guide for
Political Engagement*

ANDREW T. WALKER



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ENDORSEMENTS

“The last decade of cultural and political turmoil has convinced many church leaders and members they need a quick tutorial on public theology. What exactly does God’s Word say about the authority of the government and its relationship to the state? And how does this impact Christian engagement in the public square? Andrew Walker offers just that tutorial in a concise, readable, and faithful fashion. Start your instruction here.”

—**JONATHAN LEEMAN**

9 MARKS

“The fraught and fractious nature of American political discourse has caused many Christians to either retreat from, or rely on, political engagement. Andrew Walker has provided a principled, and non-partisan framework for believers in the public square—one that enables Christians to work toward just and right laws, to join non-Christians in good and worthy aims, and to keep distinct the spheres of civic authority and Christian mission. Read it and share it with every disciple of Christ who wonders whether he or she can change her community for the common good.”

—**KATIE MCCOY**

AUTHOR OF *TO BE A WOMAN*

“What a gift this concise and thorough political catechism is to Southern Baptists! We need biblically grounded definitions as we take seriously our responsibilities as to be salt and light in our post Christian society. We need informed commentary that dispels confusion. We need clarity as we seek to stay on track and steer clear of the ditches of political obsession and political disengagement. Andrew Walker wisely and winsomely provides much for us to consider and apply in this timeless booklet.”

—**MARY K. MOHLER**

DIRECTOR, SEMINARY WIVES INSTITUTE

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Every election cycle, pastors and church leaders are faced with the responsibility to shepherd their congregation through the political rhetoric to help them stand on truth and vote wisely while also working to maintain the church’s unity. In this ever-increasing polarized culture, that is a tall order. But Andrew Walker provides us with a brilliant resource: a catechism. In *The Nations Belong to God: A Christian Guide for Political Engagement*, Walker addresses the questions we all have about politics and political engagement in a biblical, understandable, and approachable question and answer format. We won’t all share the same political theology or preferences, but we will all benefit from this primer on political engagement. I heartily commend this resource to you and your church.”

—**JUAN R. SANCHEZ**

SENIOR PASTOR, HIGH POINTE BAPTIST CHURCH

“Christians, as alien residents in the world, are sometimes tempted to resist and isolate themselves from the culture and from politics. Yet, we know that God’s mission of redemption and reconciliation reaches into every arena and segment in society, including the political realm. This timely resource helps Christians understand that while their true citizenship is in heaven, that God has called them today to be salt and light in the world in an effort to be faithful to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.”

—**PAUL AKIN**

PROVOST, THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“*The Nations Belong to God* is one of the best resources I have seen to help Christians in the church think through political issues in a way that is both scriptural and wise. With this brief volume, Andrew Walker brilliantly redirects us away from blunt force partisanship and toward a view of politics that helps develop real thought and contemplation. These kinds of efforts can improve our ability to debate and to govern.”

—**HUNTER BAKER, J.D., PH.D.**

PROVOST AND DEAN OF THE FACULTY, NORTH GREENVILLE UNIVERSITY

“For those questioning whether followers of Jesus can or should be involved in our nation’s politics this is the resource you need. For those who feel called to contribute to human flourishing by being engaged in the political process you will be enlivened and enriched by Andrew Walker’s question and answer format and the biblically faithful roadmap he has provided for such involvement. I highly recommend *The Nations Belong to God* for your consideration.”

—**TODD GRAY**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR-TREASURER FOR THE KENTUCKY BAPTIST CONVENTION

“Politics can feel like a minefield to a pastor, parent, or Christian leader. We want to stand on God’s Word, stand against evil, and stand up for what is right. But how? This guide by Andrew Walker speaks to the challenges believers face in our polarized culture, and its Q-and-A format offers searchable, accessible, helpful content. This resource will encourage you to speak with clarity and conviction on the most important issues of our day.”

—**JIMMY SCROGGINS**

SENIOR PASTOR, FAMILY CHURCH

“Not every Christian engages deeply in government affairs, but every believer has a stake in a society that enables individual and communal thriving. This little book corrects the twin errors that Christianity’s message is predominantly political or, conversely, so spiritual that it becomes detached from political realities. Walker strikes a balance, showing how the gospel’s implications naturally extend to shaping a society that mirrors the righteousness at the heart of the Christian faith. This work calls for Christians to thoughtfully and actively participate in the political realm, aligning it with the transformative power of the gospel.”

—**KEN KEATHLEY**

DIRECTOR OF THE L. RUSS BUSH CENTER FOR FAITH AND CULTURE
SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Andrew Walker has done a brilliant service for the Church with *The Nations Belong to God*. As a pastor for over 30 years, I always dread election season, but this booklet has reframed politics and the government in a thoroughly biblical way. Such a great tool. I look forward to getting it into the hands of my people.”

—**CLINT PRESSLEY**

PASTOR, HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

“I firmly believe that faithful Christian discipleship in a democratic nation necessarily entails thinking biblically about political engagement. To that end, Andrew Walker has proven himself a trustworthy disciplemaker. This excellent booklet offers considerable wisdom that will help believers and local churches navigate elections in a way that glorifies God and advances the common good.”

—**NATHAN A. FINN**

PROFESSOR OF FAITH AND CULTURE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INSTITUTE FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP, NORTH GREENVILLE UNIVERSITY

“American citizenship is a gift from God to be stewarded well for his glory. This helpful guide rightly considers politics as a matter of faithful discipleship. Christians who desire to know how to rightly order their political lives and who care about the flourishing of the country should read this resource. Pastors who wish to equip their people should distribute this widely. Andrew Walker has given the church an indispensable resource for a confused age.”

—**DANIEL DARLING**

DIRECTOR OF THE LAND CENTER FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT
SOUTHWESTERN SEMINARY

FOREWORD

EVERY ELECTION IS ABOUT GETTING the most votes—whether it is at the local level directly from voters or at the presidential level in the Electoral College. Any number of initiatives have been launched to inspire, inform, and mobilize voters to go to the polls and cast their ballot for a particular candidate. Of course, not all campaigns use aspirational means to attract voters. A survey of history and our modern political landscape confirms this.

Anxiety and animosity are a driving force behind a number of candidacies. Think of how many times you have heard an office seeker paint the next election as a battle between “us vs. them” or deploy dehumanizing language against opponents, specific groups, or the media. Perhaps you have even heard the phrase “this is the most important election of our lifetime,” which has been uttered in every election cycle I can recall.

The ploys have a tendency to reduce complex issues to soundbites. As a consequence, voters are not required to think deeply about problems and solutions. Instead of substantively engaging, voters are asked to become partisan automatons or polarized performers. So how do we see through the political gamesmanship and grift? What can be done to think more deeply how to steward our votes instead of falling into the lazy “binary choice” framework? Most importantly, how can we honor God as we engage in political decisions on Election Day—or any other day?

The resource before you, patterned off the ancient model of a catechism, is a starting point for Christians thinking about how to engage the political processes around them. It is not the end of doctrine or teaching on any of these subjects, but a place to begin, a call to consider anew what it means for us to declare “Jesus is Lord.”

Though this political catechism was written to help Christians facing an election year, and in a time when there is a growing sense of fear, polarization, vitriol, and apathy about the current landscape of politics, it is also a guide to how life should be lived every other day besides a Tuesday in November every four years. Our political participation should not be boiled down to a vote cast on one day, important as that

vote may be. Politics is about life in community with others, and those relationships exist even when candidates aren't vying for our votes, donations, and attention.

So my hope is that this document would cause us to step back and consider, like those new believers being introduced to all that is contained in the baptismal profession that Jesus is Lord and Savior, what our faith has to teach us about life in the public square.

In the face of an election year sure to be filled with angst, division, and fearmongering, those teachings will be all the more important for a witness that is bold and hopeful. The hope flowing from a confidence that no matter who occupies the White House, Congress, or seats of power, our citizenship lies in heaven, and our work as ambassadors continues.

F. Brent Leatherwood

President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN THINGS SEEM DARK, WE must remember that God is in control.

That may sound like one of the most obvious and simple truths of Christianity. But oftentimes, we can forget it or overlook it, especially when it comes to the topic of politics.

When we look around our world, it is easy to see why the Bible refers to Satan as the “god of this world” who “has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4). There are so many things we can point to in our society right now and think to ourselves, “This is not how things are supposed to be.” If we’re honest, pushing back against the darkness can seem futile.

But here’s what we must etch into the deepest recesses of our heart: God is in absolute control over everything—over this world, governments, candidates, platforms, and parties. Nothing is happening that God is not using in his sovereignty to bring about his will (Gen. 50:20).

God is in control of the nations. They belong to him. Why? Because the earth is the Lord’s (Psa. 24:1). No matter where we go, what happens, or who is ruling, everything is underneath God’s ultimate sovereignty.

Consider Israel when it was exiled into Babylon. Israel could have feared that it would be overtaken and stamped out of existence. But what does God say to do while they are in exile?

“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” (Jer. 29:4-7).

God says for Israel to get rooted: to build houses, plant gardens, and build families.

In other words, while in exile—in a state of things where they are not in control—God calls them back to his original plan and creation mandate. Israel’s seeking of Babylon’s welfare was going to look extremely ordinary. It was not going to be revolutionary. It was going to look like what God intended from the very beginning: be fruitful, multiply, steward the world around you.

The picture in Jeremiah comes closer to what it means to be “political” than volunteering for your local political organization. As we’ll explore in this volume, *politics is how we arrange ourselves in society for the sake of justice and mutual benefit*. In this way, politics is very ordinary. It consists of the small, daily actions of citizens stewarding the parts of creation order that are meant to be honored: life, family, and engagement in society.

Keep in mind that this command was given by Jeremiah to Israel while the Israelites were in exile, meaning they were not the ones in charge, politically speaking.

But in exile, guess what? Babylon still belonged to God, as all other nations do. Babylon exists in a world created by God, so the world or political systems cannot rewrite God’s creation order. In a way, Israel was to tell Babylon the truth of living in a world created by God. Babylon was not free to do whatever it wanted or to claim authority that did not belong to it. Jesus says the same thing in a different way in Matthew 22. He says to render to God what belongs to God and to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. The implication of this is that Caesar can claim some authority, but Caesar cannot claim ultimate authority. Caesar is under God’s sovereign rule.

The same is true of the nations today. But that brings us to an important consideration: What are Christians to do while in their own earthly nations? Should we expect to always be on the losing side? Or the winning side? Christians are not promised total victory or total defeat as history progresses. We’re called to be faithful and to speak the truth, in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2).

We’re to be engaged. We’re to be citizens, but citizens who understand that their primary citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). In the same way that Jeremiah called Israel to seek the welfare of the city, we, too, are to seek the welfare of the United States, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, or any nation where we reside with the type of love that God meant for us to give—not an ultimate love, but a love born of gratitude for the place where God has providentially placed us (Acts 17:26).

Metaphorically speaking, every country in the world is some type of Babylon. That is not meant to be a pejorative about our country; it is to recognize that while politics is not everything, it is not insignificant, either. We should be paying more attention to politics than we often are.¹ Politics has real-life implications for the world we live in and the conditions of society that our neighbors encounter. If we are to love our neighbors, paying attention to and being involved in politics is just one way to do that. In doing so, we want to avoid the extremes of either political obsession or political apathy.

Politics is a calling to be engaged within a world that belongs to God, not ultimately to princes, presidents, or prime ministers.

I want to say upfront a few important things about this resource. First, it is designed to be timeless, meaning that its use is not tied to one particular election cycle. This resource does not address all the pressing issues of the moment. It provides a framework for how to think about politics and our engagement. Second, I've also avoided any categories like Republican or Democrat. Why? Because labels evolve over time. Ten years from now, either (or both) parties may have different platforms and policy preferences. Third, this volume is structured like a traditional catechism. Catechisms have long been used for training Christians in the substance of their faith. The question-and-answer format is meant to be brief so that busy individuals can get the basic biblical truth. The commentary digs in a bit deeper. Of course, I could not go as deep as I would like. I wanted to keep this resource readable and accessible. But please know that each question could, at least in some instances, have an entire book written as an answer.

My goal in writing this resource was to move Christians to a place of strategic engagement. That begins, first and foremost, with understanding that the nations belong to God.

1 If you want a bit more on this subject, please read my article "Politics isn't everything, but it's not nothing," *WORLD Opinions*, May 18, 2022, <https://wng.org/opinions/politics-isnt-everything-but-its-not-nothing-1652872221>

QUESTION 1

WHAT IS POLITICS?

Answer

Politics is the practice of organizing and regulating our lives in society under God-ordained legal authority for the sake of justice.

Commentary

It's a common assumption that politics is just about partisanship and polarization. While partisan divides end up being the natural consequence of people disagreeing about important matters, politics is not simply about conflict, nor is it reducible to election cycles or television punditry.

Politics is fundamentally about how we, as human beings, go about the process of organizing our lives around common goods, goals, and values in whatever setting we

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When God calls human beings to be fruitful and exercise dominion over creation (Gen. 1:28), that is God's call for human beings and human societies to order themselves for the purpose of cultivating God's creation.

Some may not consider themselves political in the sense of being overly engaged in the day-to-day events of what is happening in government, but every single person has a vested interest in making

sure that our society is organized in such a way that individuals are provided every opportunity to flourish.

Routine things like making sure that roads are safe to drive on and that justice systems exist to restrain and punish criminals are elements of ordering our life together in society, which means they are necessarily political. In that sense, every person is political because every person is seeking to live their lives peaceably. Of course, conflicts naturally arise as disagreements about how to order society emerge. It is the act of political organizing that seeks to persuade citizens and mobilize voters to channel their energies toward a particular vision for a just society.

QUESTION 2

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Answer

Christianity calls for the assertion of objective truth claims that are binding on all persons in society while also providing the grounds for treating human beings with dignity amid serious disagreement.

Commentary

When we look around our world today, we are confronted with a stark reality: Without objective truth being at the center of our culture and civilization, societies bend toward anarchy, moral decay, and political collapse. Because secular society believes it can operate without considering God's existence and authority, we collapse meaning into whatever we want it to be or whatever we believe will make us happy. The book of Judges warns us that apart from following God's moral law, everyone tends toward doing what is "right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Societies cannot, however, exist on a platform of relativism without

The same Christianity that teaches us that truth exists also tells us that every single human being is made in God's image and is therefore deserving of dignity and respect regardless of how strongly we disagree with them.

moral anarchy causing society to eventually unravel. Christianity makes the provocative claim that truth exists and that truth is found in God's Word, God's creation, and in God's Son, Jesus Christ. Every society that rejects God's moral law is a society that robs itself of flourishing.

The same Christianity that teaches us that truth exists also tells us that every single human being is made in God's image and is therefore deserving of dignity and respect regardless of how strongly we disagree with them. No other belief system exists that can hold these truths together consistently like Christianity.

QUESTION 3

WHAT SHOULD MOTIVATE A CHRISTIAN TO ENGAGE POLITICALLY?

Answer

Christians should engage in politics because we are called to glorify God in every area of our life and to seek just conditions for our neighbor's flourishing. We should seek to bring every sphere of life under the influence of Jesus Christ.

Commentary

The earth is the LORD's, and he has established the order by which humanity must align itself with if humanity is to prosper (Psa. 24:1). A Christian should engage politi-

Even though politics can never save individuals, politics is an important vehicle to stop moral decay and injustice from taking further root in society.

cally to foster the conditions of society that direct human beings to the purposes for which they were created. Even though politics can never save individuals, politics is an important vehicle to stop moral decay and injustice from taking further root in society.

Government has an obligation to foster the conditions conducive to persons learning what is true and ordering their lives in

accordance with truth (Psa. 1). While governments are not expected to be Christian in a legal sense, governments are accountable to God's moral law.

At the deepest level, however, Christians are called to love their neighbor, which means we are to seek what is in their best interest. Of course, in a fallen world, there will always be disagreement between Christians and non-Christians about what is truly good. Nonetheless, a Christian should be motivated at their core by a God-honoring desire to see everyone in their community thrive.

By striving to see society leavened by the influence of Christianity, we hope to see as many obstacles removed as possible that would be an impediment to the gospel's proclamation.

QUESTION 4

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOSPEL AND POLITICAL ACTION?

Answer

Christian political engagement is animated by the gospel taking root in our lives and extending the righteousness of the sanctified life outwardly into society.

Commentary

So much confusion and error persists around the relationship between the gospel and political action. Some Christians wrongly believe that the Christian message is primarily political and that society's renovation is the primary calling of the Christian. Other Christians spiritualize the gospel so heavily that it becomes irrelevant to politics. The truth is found somewhere in between. A society may reject the gospel but that in no way undermines the truthfulness of the gospel. A society may be heavily influenced by the gospel, but that will not eliminate the reality of sin still manifesting in society.

The call to help order society in a way that reflects the righteousness of the gospel flows out of the gospel's implications in our life. As the heart and conscience are transformed by the renewing of the mind, a Christian will desire to see culture, government, and law reflect the purity of God's moral law. Baptist theologian Carl F.H. Henry was

correct when he said that the mission of the Church is to “declare the criteria by which nations will ultimately be judged, and the divine standards to which man and society must conform if civilization is to endure.”² Baptists should understand that evangelism is the major vehicle of social transformation.

A heart and conscience transformed by the gospel will seek to model and communicate that transformation in their daily lives, including which policies and which candidates best reflect God’s moral law, even while acknowledging that politics can never fully address man’s greatest problem and man’s greatest need: sin, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

A heart and conscience transformed by the gospel will seek to model and communicate that transformation in their daily lives, including which policies and which candidates best reflect God’s moral law.

2 Carl F. H. Henry, “An Ecumenical Bombshell.” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 15, 1967.

QUESTION 5

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

Answer

Justice first begins with giving God what is owed to him and giving to human beings what is rightly owed to them (Psa. 45:6-7). Justice originates from God’s standards of righteousness that reflect his righteous and glorious character.

Commentary

There is no word more contested than “justice.” Everyone claims to act on behalf of justice. The challenge comes in choosing a standard to define justice that is not arbitrary, inconsistent, or contradictory. If humans alone are left to define what justice means, it is always the case that at some point in the debate, justice will become distorted. Biblical justice, however, begins with a commitment to God’s character and works outwardly from that fundamental reality. We might consider the command to “love God and love others” as a helpful way to summarize the command to pursue justice. When we love God because he is due our love and as we love others with the love that is due to them, we are acting justly.

Pursuing justice means pursuing things as God intends. Rectitude—the term for when everything is as it was designed to be—captures the heart of the pursuit of justice. It means rightly ordering our relationship to God, to ourselves, to others, and to society. To correct an “injustice” means to restore things to where they are meant to be. Justice is harmed when individuals deny God what he is owed and what other human beings are owed. We act unjustly when we judge with undue bias, give special favors or treatment, exploit others, or illegitimately harm others. The chief aim of our political engagement is to pursue justice.

QUESTION 6

WHAT IS THE COMMON GOOD?

Answer

The common good is the set of conditions where individuals and institutions in society are able to flourish as God designed them to flourish. Acting justly helps ensure that the common good is realized.

Commentary

“The Common Good” is one of the most important concepts in all of Christianity’s reflection on politics and political responsibility. We might even say that it is the unifying purpose that should animate Christians to get involved politically. In the

As we are called to love our neighbor, the common good reminds us that we are called to love not only our individual neighbor, but each of our neighbors overall.

same way that a baseball team organizes its actions in order to pursue a collective goal—winning—we, as human beings living within political communities, are called to channel our collective efforts toward a comprehensive vision for what is true and just. Striving toward that shared vision of the true and just is the point of politics. As we are called to love our neighbor, the common good reminds us that we

are called to love not only our individual neighbor, but each of our neighbors overall. In fact, to pursue the common good is just another way of saying that we should love everyone in our society—even those we don’t know personally—by ensuring that everyone’s interests are protected and promoted. Pursuing the common good is

similar to God's call for exiled Israel to "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" (Jer. 29:7).

To ensure that the common good is realized requires personal and political responsibility. Every single individual is responsible for acting in such a way to guard their actions in accordance with what is just, and it also requires careful political vigilance, too. To pursue the common good means we are intentionally looking out for the ways that politicians, platforms, and ideologies harm or help individuals reach their full potential.

QUESTION 7

WHAT IS COMMON GRACE, AND HOW DOES IT SHAPE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS?

Answer

Common grace is a Christian teaching that despite humanity's sinfulness, God restrains the sinfulness of humanity in order to allow human societies to be built and prosper.

Commentary

In Christian theology, there are two types of grace: Saving grace and common grace. Saving grace is the grace extended to sinners through the gospel of Christ that reconciles us to God. Common grace is a different type of grace. Though still a grace because it is undeserved, common grace is what allows human societies and human individuals to experience nonredemptive blessings. For example, while politics and government can never save individuals, government is ordained by God to pursue justice so that human beings can live together. Another example of common grace is marriage. Though marriage is ultimately

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understood in light of the Christ-Church union in Ephesians 5, marriage is a common grace institution because any man and any woman who enter into a marriage can prosper and benefit from it.

The reason common grace matters to Christian political engagement is because it shows us that God's intention for government is purposeful. It also shows us that despite humanity's propensity for doing horrible evil, we are not as bad as we could be because God restrains humanity from devouring itself entirely. And the government plays an enormous role in restraining the ferocious nature of humankind.

The fact that human societies can work together, that economies can be built, and that we can enjoy culture even amid our sinfulness shows God's commitment to love the world and the people he has created.

QUESTION 8

WHAT IS NATURAL LAW, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT?

Answer

Natural law is the biblical teaching that God has created a universal moral order that every human being can know to some degree. Natural law serves as the foundation for how Christians and non-Christians can think together about how to order their societies.

Commentary

Natural law has a prominent role in the history of Christian political thought. Grounded in passages like Psalm 19 and Romans 2:14-15, the existence of the natural law does three main things. First, it holds us accountable for our sins against God because Scripture teaches that we do know when we sin because God has given us a conscience (Rom. 1:20-21). According to the logic of Scripture, for us to know our need for a Savior, we must know that we have violated God's moral law. God's moral law is implanted in every human person. Some may deny the natural law with their mouths but they cannot with their hearts or in their lives without tragic consequences resulting. It is God's natural moral law that he holds us accountable to in our law breaking.

Second, the natural law supplies the world with a minimal moral standard that it must honor or else society will fall apart (Rom. 1:18-32). If there was no possibility

of having moral consensus whatsoever, political communities would descend into anarchy. All societies are in some manner of rebellion against God, but not all are equally in rebellion. A society that honors God's natural law is a society whose

The primary value of the natural law is not that it would persuade everyone to agree with us (as desirable as that is), but that it would help Christians understand that the convictions we hold around moral issues are not only holy and honorable, but true, good, and beautiful.

citizens will be more blessed and happy, even if not all are Christians. Natural law is a feature of common grace.

Three, understanding the natural law helps Christians understand the way that God has created the world. Natural law helps explain the rationale for Christian ethics. The primary value of the natural law is not that it would persuade everyone to agree with us (as desirable as that is), but that it would help Christians understand that the convictions we hold around moral issues are not only holy and honorable, but true, good, and beautiful.

QUESTION 9

WHAT WAS JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT?

Answer

Jesus held the position that government was legitimate, but he never saw government as the direct means by which his Kingdom would come.

Commentary

There are three major truths to consider when looking at Jesus' attitude and engagement with political rulers.

First, when Jesus was tempted to wield political authority for the sake of advancing his Kingdom, he refused to do so (Luke 4:5-8). The episode of Jesus' temptation involving the use of politics and worldly power is profoundly important. This

Jesus' Kingdom does not evacuate individuals from earthly kingdoms; his Kingdom calls us to a higher allegiance.

was not Jesus rejecting the government entirely as illegitimate. No, Jesus was rejecting the temptation to use worldly power as the means by which his Kingdom would grow and be ushered in. Jesus understood his Kingdom to not be of this world (John 18:36), meaning that it would operate unlike the normal patterns of fallenness.

Secondly, Jesus understood that in this age, the government has legitimate authority over distinct areas of a person's life. In Matthew 22:15-22, Jesus declares that Caesar has legitimate authority to tax individuals for the sake of the government

maintaining itself, but he also limits government's authority by placing government under the ultimate authority of God. Jesus' words here seem to indicate that the government's authority pertains only to temporal matters, not eternal matters.

Based on the two points above, we can conclude that Jesus seemed to have an attitude of detached respect for government. Jesus never seemed frenzied by government and politics. Government was legitimate and limited. Government and politics matter because they impact our life on earth. However, Jesus seemed to be concerned with the preeminence of his Kingdom and saw that his Kingdom was not like earthly political kingdoms. Jesus' Kingdom does not evacuate individuals from earthly kingdoms; his Kingdom calls us to a higher allegiance.

QUESTION 10

WHAT WAS PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT?

Answer

Paul understood that the government is an honorable institution ordained by God for the purpose of pursuing justice that Christians should honor and regularly pray for.

Commentary

Three examples from Paul's writings and life show us his approach toward government. Romans 13:1-7 is the most important Pauline text for understanding his

If government is acting as it ought, it should leave room for Christians to live quiet lives of discipleship and to be about the task of sharing the gospel.

attitude toward government. There, Paul says that the government has been established by God in order to pursue order through a system of retributive justice. In other words, the government is there to protect human beings from arbitrary violence and to help maintain just conditions in society.

Second, in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul calls on Christians to specifically pray for our political authorities. There's a logic behind Paul's wording in 1 Timothy 2. As we pray for our political authorities, Paul's understanding is that political authorities would learn to conduct their affairs within the narrow scope that God has called them. In other

words, if government is acting as it ought, it should leave room for Christians to live quiet lives of discipleship and to be about the task of sharing the gospel. Government should not impede either of these callings on Christians.

Lastly, all through the book of Acts (chapters 16, 22, 24, and 26), Paul interacts with various government authorities. He does so on the grounds that political authorities can be a major assistance or obstacle to his personal ministry because governing authorities can protect the rights of a citizen against unjust treatment.

QUESTION 11

WHAT IS THE OVERALL GOAL OF CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Answer

Remembering that Christ is the true King of kings, Christians should pursue wisdom, justice, and righteousness for the sake of the earthly common good, with a view toward recognizing how God has ordered and preserved the world for our good, and ultimately, for his glory.

Commentary

There is no better explanation to offer than what the *Baptist Faith and Message* Article 15 teaches.

“All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life

from conception to natural death.

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all

men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and his truth.”

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love.

QUESTION 12

WHAT IS PRUDENCE, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Answer

Prudence clarifies how topics clearly commanded or prohibited in Scripture apply to modern political life from topics where no obvious clarity exists.

Commentary

“Prudence” is another word for “wisdom.” In the Bible, wisdom is the pursuit of us learning the ways of God and how to apply God’s Word to our life, including in society and in law. What this means, practically speaking, is that some issues in Scripture are more direct and clear in the application to law and society, while other issues are less clear.

Prudence is helpful because it deescalates political debates and shapes how we disagree on issues where the Bible permits disagreement.

Let’s take two examples: Same-sex marriage and nationalized healthcare. Same-sex marriage does not exist in God’s order since marriage is only the institution of one man and one woman. There is little need for prudence in this particular instance because the principle prohibiting same-sex marriage is clear and relevant to modern law.

The debate over nationalized healthcare is a debate where Scripture does not speak as clearly. This is not a mark against the Bible's sufficiency, for Scripture does speak about the role of government. But Scripture is not, on its own terms, clear on whether having a nationalized healthcare system is inherently right or wrong. Christians of goodwill can disagree on these prudential questions, without allowing it to break the bonds of Christian fellowship.

Prudence helps us sort out political debates from the areas where Christians must have total consensus (e.g., same-sex marriage) from those areas where Christians of goodwill could reasonably disagree based on the Bible's lack of explicit warrant (e.g., nationalized healthcare). Practically speaking, prudence is helpful because it deescalates political debates and shapes how we disagree on issues where the Bible permits disagreement. Every political debate in a society is going to be determined by its cultural context, so prudence helps establish the bounds of a Christian position and how to implement Christian ideals in society.

QUESTION 13

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH?

Answer

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and to expand his Kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel.

Commentary

There are two ways to conceive of the Church: (1) The Church “gathered” and (2) The Church “scattered.” As Baptists, we must hold onto both simultaneously while maintaining important distinctions. As the “gathered” body of believers who meet together on Sunday and throughout the week, the purpose of the Church is to make disciples, grow in holiness, and to spur one another on in good works. We gather together as the family of God to submit ourselves to the preached Word of God and to order our lives under the authority of the local church and its leaders. The local church witnesses and prepares individuals for eternal life in God’s Kingdom in the present age.

As the “scattered” body, Christians take their transformed lives into every sphere of their existence and are called to reflect the righteousness of God in every domain they can. This necessarily includes the political arena, but is by no means limited to the political arena. Wherever

God has called you, you are to live on mission for him by holding fast to God’s moral law.

Why this matters for politics is that great confusion can result when Christians are confused on what the calling of the local church is from the calling of individual

The local church witnesses and prepares individuals for eternal life in God’s Kingdom in the present age.

of Christians. Generally speaking, churches are not political lobbying arms making official pronouncements on public policy. But Christians are called to extend the life of righteousness in whatever they do. There are times, of course, when matters of public policy directly implicate Christian ethics. Then, on those occasions, it is right and good for pastors to speak when issues hit upon urgent matters of clear ethical priority.

For Baptists, cultural transformation results from conscience transformation. That sort of transformation happens through the means and operation, centrally, of the local church. While this may seem like a hair-splitting difference, as Baptists, it's important to keep those lines clear because we do not want to get in the habit of calling things "Christian" that are not truly born again and residing under the authority of a local church.

QUESTION 14

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNMENT?

Answer

The proper end of any earthly government is to execute justice, secure the basic rights of all human beings, promote the common good, and punish evil deeds committed by God's image-bearers against each other.

Commentary

One of the biggest areas of conflict in public theology is the purpose of government. Is the government meant to help citizens in their spiritual lives? Or are there negative consequences that result when the government gets involved in religious matters? According to Scripture and the Baptist tradition, the government is not

Christians are to be scripturally faithful citizens who view the state as a legitimate extension of God's authority on earth established for their and society's welfare.

designed to judge Christian doctrine, establish a state religion, or directly interfere in religious matters. The government is an earthly and temporal institution limited to this age that is designed to restrain violence and promote the good. Nowhere in Scripture is the government assigned the responsibility to directly promote the Christian faith.

Because Christians understand that there is a positive purpose to God ordaining government, Christians are to be scripturally faithful citizens who view the state as a legitimate extension of God's authority on earth established for their and society's welfare. They must ensure that it keeps to its

temporal jurisdiction and not ascribe to it any sacred authority. Government and officials are accountable to God's moral laws for the laws they pass, but government and officials are not competent to decide what is true religion from false religion.

The state is a "servant" and "minister" of God, an instrument of common grace, to oversee the conditions of a just society. Christians should respect, obey, and honor the state and comply with its laws insofar as they do not command disobedience to God.

The state is under God's authority with jurisdiction only on affairs pertaining to temporal matters. The state is powerless to cause religious belief, so neither should it impede religious belief. The state protects only the conditions that foster an orderly common good. By confining itself to the temporal common good only, the state leaves room for its citizens to pursue what they perceive as their spiritual good.

QUESTION 15

WHAT IS THE PROPER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENT?

Answer

The Church and the government are distinct institutions but when rightly ordered, they can accommodate each other's purpose.

Commentary

As we have established so far, the calling of the government is vastly different than the calling of the Church. We have established that each has its own unique authority, unique competencies, and unique calling. Even still, keeping them separate as an institutional and legal matter does not mean that religion and politics can be entirely sealed off from one another. Religion informs our deepest moral and political convictions on how we believe our world should be organized. Religiously formed moral convictions spill over into our political life. This is both right and inevitable. Baptists are not strict separationists who argue that political life should bar the influence of religion. We believe that religion should absolutely influence our politics.

The government is a means for achieving earthly peace so that the gospel might spread, rightly protecting the freedom of the Church to fulfill the Great Commission.

We believe that when the state limits itself to the jurisdiction it is called to have authority over, it leaves room for the Church to go about its mission without hindrance or burden. Thus, the Church teaches what it means to be a human and how humanity flourishes. The state then looks to citizens who possess the capacity for moral reflection and virtue to speak into the direction that the government should go. A properly ordered government understands that biblical Christianity encourages civic engagement, love for one's fellow citizens, and active participation in helping the government better execute justice.

The government is a means for achieving earthly peace so that the gospel might spread, rightly protecting the freedom of the Church to fulfill the Great Commission. In response, the Church respects the civil powers granted to the state by pursuing moral righteousness in humble citizenship.

QUESTION 16

DOES THE GOVERNMENT HAVE TOTAL AUTHORITY OVER SOMEONE'S LIFE?

Answer

No, the government's authority is derived from God's authority and has authority only on those areas God has assigned to it.

Commentary

If you were to survey world history, you would observe a constant duel: Balancing the relationship between the government's authority and the individual's and family's authority. How a particular regime or government is evaluated is often measured by how involved it is in the lives of its citizens. The most authoritarian, totalitarian, and godless regimes have been those regimes that view all power as originating from itself rather than any notion of God. The logic for why this occurs is quite clear: If rulers see themselves accountable to no God above them, rulers are prone to take up as much power and authority as they can. A similar error can occur in the reverse: Rulers who see themselves acting directly on behalf of God in such a way that every action of the state—whether good or bad—gets baptized as inerrant and divinely sanctioned. Both the secular and the religious state end up pushing a form of unchecked totalitarianism.

Compare this unbiblical reality with how the Bible depicts government—it is a legitimate institution given a clear purpose but also underneath God's authority. Hence, we

would say that all earthly government authority is “derived,” meaning it comes from somewhere else—God. This teaching is clear from Romans 13:1-7 and Matthew 22:15-22. Earlier, we established that the purpose of government is to pursue earthly justice. The other purpose of the government is to solve problems of “coordination.” In other words: Government exists to address the problems that arise in society that individuals cannot fix all on their own. For example, private individuals cannot create militaries that could reasonably defend all persons equally. So the government establishes protective outlets to guard the well-being of the nation. Baptists affirm “limited government” if only because Scripture does not portray the government as an omniscient entity meant to direct the entirety of a person’s life.

If rulers see themselves accountable to no God above them, rulers are prone to take up as much power and authority as they can.

QUESTION 17

DOES SCRIPTURE COMMAND A PARTICULAR FORM OF GOVERNMENT?

Answer

No, Scripture offers no exact formula for what the ideal government structure must be. Government structure is a matter of wisdom.

Commentary

It is tempting to believe that the government you grow up under is the best and therefore the most biblical form of government. While there are better and more biblical principles of government than others, Scripture provides no set blueprint detailing what the best structure of government ought to be.

Fundamentally, a government that sets itself in opposition to God's moral law is a government that is unbiblical and will not survive for long as its ultimate destiny is one of chaos.

What's important in considering whether a government's design is biblical or not is asking whether the government recognizes what all governments are called to recognize, namely, that their authority does not come ultimately from one person (monarchy), a few people (oligarchy), or many people (democracy), but ultimately from God. Scripture offers examples of each of these types of government. Govern-

ments can take many forms as long as these governments do not set themselves against God's moral law. But Christians should be wary of any government that tends to want to increase its power and involvement in people's lives. In general, the tyranny of the few or the tyranny of the many should be avoided. Distributing and limiting power through a system of checks and balances seems to accord with the Bible's depiction of humanity's fallenness.

The government and the world are a mixed body composed of Christians and non-Christians who may differ about God's identity or existence, but they cannot differ on fundamental creation-order realities. These issues include the concept of human dignity, the nature of male and female, the place of the natural family, and justice. Each of these are intelligible because of the natural law which teaches that God has implanted his moral law on every person's heart. In blessings that follow from obeying the natural law or in curses that stem from disobeying the natural law, every government and every person is accountable to it and to God.

Fundamentally, a government that sets itself in opposition to God's moral law is a government that is unbiblical and will not survive for long as its ultimate destiny is one of chaos.

QUESTION 18

MUST POLITICAL AUTHORITIES BE CHRISTIAN IN ORDER TO BE JUST?

Answer

No, God has not made a saving relationship with Christ a requirement for the political rulers to know or pursue justice.

Commentary

God has made himself known in two ways: General revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to how non-Christians have a non-saving knowledge of God the Creator by looking at creation order. Special revelation is God's revealed Word that gives knowledge of God the Creator *and* Redeemer.

Nowhere in Scripture is it required for governments to have Christianity as their established religion or for magistrates to have a saving relationship with Christ in order for them to be just. We should say, however, that it is right and good for as many Christians as can be elected to be in office, but it is not a biblical requirement.

It is right and good for as many Christians as can be elected to be in office, but it is not a biblical requirement.

Political justice is a form of moral knowledge that God grants to non-Christians. Government is indeed considered a “servant” of God (Rom. 13:4). A servant in this

capacity does not mean that rulers are direct ministers of God in a redeeming sense. Rather, if officials pursue justice by punishing “those who do evil and praise those who do good” (1 Pet. 2:14), they are serving in their God-designated role as political rulers. Justice is recognizable to all within God’s created order and elected officials are able to discern what is just according to natural law principles. Political rulers are enabled in this way to steward society under the canopy of common grace.

Furthermore, just because a political ruler is a Christian is no guarantee that they will be a good or just ruler. The reverse is also true: There are historical examples of figures who were non-Christians (e.g., Winston Churchill) who were also wise and good rulers.

QUESTION 19

SHOULD THE STATE PROMOTE A FORMAL RELIGION OR DENOMINATION?

Answer

No, Scripture indicates that the government’s jurisdiction is related to earthly affairs only and is not to hinder, promote, or directly interfere with religious matters.

Commentary

The Baptist Faith and Message Article 17 states, “The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends.” Southern Baptists believe the Bible teaches the autonomy of the Christian faith apart from direct promotion by the government.

A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.

It’s important to clarify what this does and does not mean. It does not mean that it is wrong for the government to recognize religious holidays like Christmas or to even recognize the important influence of religion on law and culture. Rather, there should be a separation of any formal unity between one religion or one denomination with the state, as with the Anglican Church as the established religion of England.

Baptists look on established church-state arrangements with great concern. For one, nowhere has the long-term vitality of the Christian faith been nursed by the state’s

relationship with it. Where church-state establishments have occurred, they have always resulted in a secularized and nominalized faith accommodated to the needs of the state. By failing to distinguish that which is Christian from non-Christian, Christian identity becomes diluted.

The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 also goes on to state, “A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.”

QUESTION 20

WHAT EXPECTATIONS SHOULD CHRISTIANS HAVE ABOUT POLITICAL SUCCESS IN THIS AGE?

Answer

A Christian should have chastened expectations about politics in this age. We are not promised total defeat or total victory apart from Christ ushering in his Kingdom.

Commentary

The twin temptations in the Christian political imagination is toward either total conquest or total marginalization; in other words—that Christians can lay waste to our enemies and supplant Christ’s enemies from having any political power in this age or, alternately, that politics is futile since Satan is the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4).

We are called to tell the truth not because we wish to condemn, but because we are called to love the world for which our Savior died.

Christians should not look to either Constantine (victory and conquest) or the catacombs (exile and retreat) as the controlling metaphor for how we think about politics. Christians are called to be in the world but not of it (John 17:11, 14-15).

Christians should practice an active confrontation and convictional courage toward

the world and understand that we are called to witness to the truth for the sake of the truth, regardless of its success or the consequences.

A historic phrase in Christian political thought captures the heart of the Christian political imagination: *Contra Mundum, Pro Mundo* (“Against the World, for the World”). Like the phrase suggests, our political witness will oftentimes put us as aliens and exiles in this world—possibly within our own political party—even as we testify to the truth that the earth is the Lord’s (Psa. 24:1). Nonetheless, we are called to tell the truth not because we wish to condemn, but because we are called to love the world for which our Savior died (John 3:16-17).

QUESTION 21

IS IT APPROPRIATE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TO INFORM AND INFLUENCE ONE'S POLITICAL WORLDVIEW?

Answer

Yes, Scripture calls Christians to bring their God-shaped conscience into every arena of life, including politics, to promote truth, righteousness, and justice.

Commentary

In Scripture, Christians are called to be “salt” and “light” (Matt. 5:13-16). The purpose of salt is to preserve. The purpose of light is to expose and illuminate. These metaphors are appropriate descriptions of why it is appropriate for a Christian’s faith to be brought into consideration on matters of political engagement. Though not reducible to politics alone, the witness of the Christian necessarily includes politics. Christians should care about every arena of culture and should seek to leaven it with the truth of Scripture and the gospel. If Christians take their faith seriously, it’s impossible for their faith to not influence their political worldview. The political implications of Christianity are simply the truths of Christianity declared publicly.

Christians should care about every arena of culture and should seek to leaven it with the truth of Scripture and the gospel.

Christianity is not just a set of beliefs to tuck away into the privacy of your own heart. Christianity offers profound teachings on matters related to the existence of truth, human dignity, the importance of family, and other moral considerations. If Christians do not get involved, someone else surely will, and there is no assurance that what the dominant teachings in society are will be just and oriented to the common good. As Baptist theologian Carl F. H. Henry eloquently stated about the stakes of Christians failing to bring their faith to bear on their politics: “If the church fails to apply the central truth of Christianity to social problems correctly, someone else will do so incorrectly.”³

3 Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 82.

QUESTION 22

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOVE OF NEIGHBOR AND POLITICS?

Answer

Seeking the common good of all through political engagement is one forum through which God allows us to love our neighbor by seeing them flourish.

Commentary

One of the most explicit and simplest commands in Scripture is the command for us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31). To love our neighbor means to seek after

To love our neighbor means to seek after their best interests as individuals who are made in God's image.

their best interests as individuals who are made in God's image. To do that politically means to seek the conditions of society where individuals have the maximal opportunity to flourish. Political engagement is just one forum for Christians to seek to love their neighbor. It's not the

only forum, to be sure. But it's an important forum no less, because the types of laws a society has will communicate what that society's values are. As Christians are to seek after righteous and biblical values understanding that it is only those principles which are conducive to human flourishing, we should seek to see those principles taught and enforced at the most influential levels in society, which necessarily entails politics.

As human beings organize themselves into communities and nations, centralizing authorities are necessary to oversee the systems of justice that make flourishing possible. This requires active engagement and stewarding one's resources and agency to seek after the best persons who will help bring human flourishing into fruition.

As noted, Scripture commands us to “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” (Jer. 29:7). This verse has a profound teaching in it: It says that as we seek to order society justly for the benefit of others, we are seeking our betterment and flourishing as well.

QUESTION 23

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR POLITICS TO SOLVE ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS?

Answer

No, political engagement can never remove the greatest problem confronting humanity—sin.

Commentary

The way that we get energized by politics sometimes suggests that if we elect all the right candidates and enact all the right laws, then society will be unbothered by injustice and moral corruption. But there is no such thing as a political messiah in this age. Politics will never bring about the perfect society. Politics can, however, bring about a more just society. God never promises the full unveiling of his Kingdom within earthly kingdoms. We must temper our excitement about earthly political pursuits by the promise of a perfect kingdom that comes on God's terms, not ours.

The reality that we cannot erase through politics what plagues us the most, sin, does

If we had every candidate we wanted and every policy we wanted in the law, society would still be affected by the condition of the human heart. We should never invest politics with a degree of hope that it can never fulfill.

not mean that we should throw our hands up in despair and resignation. Politics gives shape to the type of society we have and the moral direction it is going to go. Politics is a form of common grace given to us by God to organize ourselves into governable societies that can restrain the ferociousness of fallen human nature. This means that good politics is merely stopping even worse politics from taking root.

What all of this suggests is that we should have realistic expectations about what politics hopes to accomplish. If we had every candidate we wanted and every policy we wanted in the law, society would still be affected by the condition of the human heart. We should never invest politics with a degree of hope that it can never fulfill.

QUESTION 24

HOW DO WE MISUNDERSTAND THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

Answer

We misunderstand the separation of church and state by assuming it means that religion cannot influence politics.

Commentary

“Secularism” is a movement that seeks to eliminate the influence of religion on society because advocates for secularism think religion is irrational, oppressive, and backward. Phrases get used to quickly capture that idea. “The separation of church and state” is one of the most popular and has become one of the most common phrases in political life. It is so commonly mentioned that one could easily believe that the phrase comes from the Constitution itself. It does not.

The phrase comes from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson, which means it is not a law. Most latch onto this phrase to immediately reject the place of religion in society. The problem is that while Jefferson did pen the phrase, his voice is just one voice among many in the American founding. Other Founders, such as John Adams, saw religion as a necessary force for teaching virtue and morality.

All of this leads to asking the question of how we should understand this phrase. Should Baptists reject the separation of church and state? Yes and no. We should reject the union of the government with a particular religious body (which is what most

scholars argue this phrase originally meant). Again, secularists want far more than just disestablishment. They want religion banished from influencing public opinion and public policy. We must reject that. Religion is indeed one of, if not the greatest influence for shaping one's convictions about how to order life in a political community. Baptists should argue for the formal separation of church and state, but never for removing religion's influence on one's politics.

Baptists should argue for the formal separation of church and state, but never for removing religion's influence on one's politics.

QUESTION 25

HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN LOVE THEIR COUNTRY?

Answer

A Christian should love their country by showing devotion to the country's traditions, valuing their fellow citizens, obeying just laws, honoring authorities, and fervently participating in the political process.

Commentary

There are often two equal and opposite errors when it comes to a Christian evaluating their love for their country. One Christian is tempted to give uncritical love to their country as the "patriot." Another Christian is always critical of their country, believing themselves the "prophet." A better model is prophetic patriotism: A person who loves their country while acknowledging its fallenness and who loves their country even when

he or she feels criticism is necessary in order to reform it.

Prophetic patriotism:

A person who loves their country while acknowledging its fallenness and who loves their country even when he or she feels criticism is necessary in order to reform it.

Scripture calls us to pray for those who have authority (1 Tim. 2:1-2), love our neighbor (Mark 12:31), and obey authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). We should understand that where God has placed us is intentionally in line with his kind providence (Acts 17:26). Scripture does not call us to reject

where God has placed us or to hate our country or those God has entrusted with political authority. Our salvation does not cancel or suspend our sex, ethnicity, or nationality (Gal. 3:28). But a love for Christ calls forth a higher love than what we can give to our country or nation. Christ demands our ultimate allegiance, and it is that ultimate allegiance that informs how we are to act and live amid the nation where God has placed us. We can love our country best by not ascribing to it a love that Scripture deems it not worthy of having.

Fundamentally, we love our country when we seek its welfare in accord with what God determines the definition of welfare to be—truth, justice, and honoring God’s moral law.

QUESTION 26

CAN WE LEGISLATE MORALITY?

Answer

Legislating morality is inevitable as every law serves some explicit or implicit purpose that accords with how a person, a family, or a nation ought to be.

Commentary

Common phrases become so routine that they can take on the status of being assumed and unquestionable. “You cannot legislate morality” is one oft repeated phrase that, upon deeper reflection, is simplistic and false.

Every law is advancing some explicit or implicit moral reality. Laws against murder, for example, advance an obvious morality: Life is worth protecting, so the law is going to penalize persons for taking life unjustly. But take something like a sugar subsidy. That seems to have no direct moral dimension

whatsoever. However, a subsidy exists to keep supplies and prices at levels that make goods like sugar available for citizens. The idea of affordability to purchase food supplies that contribute toward your livelihood all of a sudden has a real moral actuality attached to it.

Every law aims at advancing the common interest. Political authorities are necessary to establish the legitimate grounds to enforce rules that society must have to be peaceful. Those “rules” are “laws.” By necessity, some moral viewpoint will guide a society’s understanding of what laws it passes. The question is not whether morality will be legislated, but *whose* version of morality is to be legislated.

The question is not whether morality will be legislated, but whose version of morality is to be legislated.

A Christian should feel no remorse or regret for wanting to see Christian morality enacted across the land. That's because we believe that Christian morality is at the foundation for what constitutes true morality for everyone. So it is fine to bring your religion into the public square to argue for a particular moral outcome, but it would also be good and wise for a Christian to communicate how a religiously based question relates to public order more broadly.

Christian engagement with the world is built on profoundly important moral pre-suppositions about humankind that affects its well-being. Christian truths related to family, authority, and morality are important for public consideration, so we should feel free to want to see those teachings enacted into law.

QUESTION 27

SHOULD THE GATHERED CHURCH EVER SPEAK TO POLITICAL TOPICS?

Answer

The gathered Church should speak on all issues that are unambiguously clear from Scripture, relevant to the Church's mission, and vital to creation order and the common good.

Commentary

Two equal and opposite errors form the background to this question. First is the gathered assembly that speaks to every political issue under the sun and sees its assembly as motivated primarily by matters of social justice. The second error is to see the Church as a sectarian colony on the margins of society that is indifferent to political matters and thus silent from ever speaking on important topics.

The challenge is finding a responsible balance. Three principles should form our thinking on when the gathered assembly should speak to political matters. First, the political issue should have clear biblical evidence supporting the Church's position as the truly biblical position. Second, the issue at hand should directly impact the ability of the Church to do its mission in society. Third, the political issue is attacking a creation order institution (e.g., human dignity, the natural family). Then, and only then, does the Church have the authority, mandate, and competence to speak to political issues.

Members in a church might favor charter schools, but that is not a political issue one can say is immediately clear from Scripture, and thus, the gathered Church should not speak to it. A proposal that would harm the Church economically or its liberty are within the interest of the gathered Church's purview. Third, a referendum on abortion is a matter that implicates the very foundation of society and social ordering and is clear from Scripture, so the Church would have the ability to speak as the Church and not simply as individuals.

The individual Christian may engage in a variety of partisan political activities and make particular political judgments, though never expressly against Scripture, that would typically be outside the gathered Church's authority, competence, and jurisdiction.

QUESTION 28

WHY IS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO UPHOLD?

Answer

Religious liberty is an acknowledgement of the government's limited authority and the rights of citizens to live in accordance with their consciences.

Commentary

Religious liberty should be understood as the ability for a person to grasp the truth without negative consequence and seek to align their life with the truth in every area of their life.

A government's attitude toward religion will reveal important attributes about how the government views its own power over its citizens. An authoritarian and totalitarian government will seek to eliminate any authority in the lives of its citizens that challenges the authority of the state. We see this today in regimes like China and North Korea. A government that voluntarily limits itself to issues that concern political life only (and not spiritual life) is a government less prone to abuse power.

Religious liberty restrains the power of the government but also protects the ability of the citizen to live out what their consciences convince them is true. This should not be construed to suggest that the government can never limit someone's liberty. It

can, but it should not do so arbitrarily, and only when an individual's behavior crosses a threshold where their actions become a threat to social order and the common good (i.e., an appeal to religious liberty does not mean that a religion should be able to practice human sacrifice).

Because Jesus Christ is the sole authority to judge the conscience (Acts 17:30-31), Baptists take this to mean that the state is a competent authority over actions only, not the conscience.

Fundamentally, an ecosystem of religious liberty protects the ability to disagree peaceably and decreases the threat of violence, and develops a healthy skepticism of the government's over-involvement in its citizens' lives.

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QUESTION 29

SHOULD CHRISTIANS STRIVE FOR IDEOLOGICAL PURITY OR PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS?

Answer

Christians should work to accomplish as much good as is politically feasible and work to prevent as much evil as is politically feasible.

Commentary

Ideological purity should guide how a Christian attempts to solve problems in society. We act politically with a view toward seeing the ideal become the law of the land. But unless Christians have total control over every area of government, which is very unlikely, Christians are going to have to work alongside individuals who disagree

in part, or disagree entirely with the Christian worldview. This is, of course, lamentable. The question of how we handle difference and disagreement is almost as important as the moral issue that is being debated.

Political compromise does not mean moral accommodation. Oftentimes, Christians will find themselves in the position of having to

The question of how we handle difference and disagreement is almost as important as the moral issue that is being debated.

minimize the spread of immorality and injustice. Working to reduce moral evil or injustice does not mean that a Christian officeholder is accepting of injustice or moral evil; it simply means that he or she does not have the power to wave a magic wand and cause problems to disappear.

Christians should, of course, use every legal means at their disposal to see justice enacted through the land. Often, Christians must work incrementally to see injustice corrected and just law spread throughout the land.

QUESTION 30

IS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION A FORM OF WORLDLY COMPROMISE?

Answer

Engaging in politics is not worldly compromise, but a vehicle that God has called all individuals to be actively aware of and engaged in.

Commentary

It's common to hear that politicians are dishonest and that political activity is dirty and corrupt. While there are many examples of dishonesty and corruption, neither are inherent to political engagement. Christians should be on guard against creeping cynicism in our hearts.

A Christian is called to love their world, and to love their world means seeing societies and governments aligned with God's intentions. A Christian interested in running for office should conduct themselves with Christian virtue. A Christian who follows politics closely is obligated to love their neighbor as their self and to practice integrity and honesty. Politics is worldly compromise if and only if someone succumbs to the

Acknowledging the reality of imperfection, Christians should still see politics as a form of creational caretaking even while they do all that is within their power to act honorably.

temptation to act worldly. But there is nothing at all wrong with a Christian seeking justice through political power. Power is inherently neutral; it is what one does with power that is to be evaluated.

At the same time, politics is a fallen enterprise just like everything else. Sin affects and corrupts all human endeavors. Even still, Christians cannot isolate themselves from their world, but rather they ought to confront politics and the world realistically and soberly. Things will never be perfect. Acknowledging the reality of imperfection, Christians should still see politics as a form of creational caretaking even while they do all that is within their power to act honorably.

Political engagement is a worthwhile pursuit. Though imperfect, politics is a legitimate sphere of God's providence that allows Christians the ability to leaven their society with the gospel, helping political institutions orient themselves toward justice, human flourishing, and the common good.

QUESTION 31

CAN A CHRISTIAN RUN FOR POLITICAL OFFICE?

Answer

Yes, a Christian has just as much responsibility to see their society governed properly as any other person in society does.

Commentary

Christians who are called by God to consider running for office can do so without compromising their faith.

Christians are called to leaven their world with the moral truths that stem from the gospel. Politics necessarily includes the ends to which Christians are called: justice, human flourishing, the common good.

At the same time, it's no guarantee that a Christian will make wiser judgments than the non-Christian if they are in office. Politics is a temporal, common-grace institution meant to serve all. As a common-grace institution, there is nothing inherently preventing non-Christians from understanding the proper ends and goals of government. That's because government and politics run according to the principles of natural law. It's incumbent on Christians running for office to have a good understanding of God's law, but a Christian being in office is no guarantee that the nation will be better off simply because that person is a Christian.

Christians are called to leaven their world with the moral truths that stem from the gospel. Politics necessarily includes the ends to which Christians are called: justice, human flourishing, the common good.

There are examples of Christian government officials who were not effective political leaders, just as there are examples of non-Christian government officials who were quite effective. All of this speaks to the reality of what politics is: A non-redemptive institution meant to restrain evil and pursue justice. Government is not a means by which God's Kingdom is directly brought into the world even while politics necessarily affects the conditions in which the church ministers. From a Christian point of view, politics upholds creation order and the common good for the sake of the gospel's advance.

QUESTION 32

DO I HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO VOTE?

Answer

A Christian has a duty to practice faithful citizenship proportionate to what their political context allows. In a democracy, therefore, it is advisable to participate in the political process by voting to ensure just policies.

Commentary

Since the government has legitimate earthly authority and nothing in Scripture suggests that it is wrong or compromising for a Christian to respect government and the political process, it is highly advisable that a

Christian vote.

Christians should maintain an expectation that leaders will set a positive example by upholding the highest moral and ethical standards—both as they pursue office and as they carry out their duties.

At the same time, it would be wrong to suggest that not voting is in itself intrinsically sinful. Saying so would go beyond what is clear from Scripture. Not voting, however, is generally irresponsible since God has vested authority, at least in a democratic context, in the will of the individual person and their vote. When individuals complain about the state of

their country or the low quality of elected officials in office and they also did not vote themselves, the criticisms should ring hollow when they have chosen to forego their ability to make changes.

Christians should maintain an expectation that leaders will set a positive example by

upholding the highest moral and ethical standards—both as they pursue office and as they carry out their duties. This is a recognition that those in authority do grave harm when they make poor moral choices or employ degrading tactics in order to win political office. Given this, there are scenarios where principled abstention from voting could be justified. If there are no candidates of sufficient quality or all party platforms are committed to wicked moral policies, then a Christian could reasonably decide that a vote for either candidate would be a sin against their conscience. Generally speaking, however, a Christian should exercise the degree of authority delegated to them by God and the state in order to see justice enacted.

QUESTION 33

WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE LOCAL CHURCH PLAY IN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Answer

The local church has a role to play in shaping its congregants' consciences, informing its congregants of important issues facing their community, and reminding its congregants of their primary allegiance to God's Kingdom.

Commentary

The primary mission of the local church is to grow mature believers of the Lord Jesus Christ and to evangelize the lost. A secondary mission flows out of the primary mission: the local church should train and equip its members to desire righteousness.

A mature believer will understand that biblical righteousness reflects the righteousness of God's moral law, and obedience to God's moral law is necessary for the community to thrive.

Desiring righteousness will spill over into church members wanting to see righteousness in their community's laws even while understanding that earthly political kingdoms are different than and subordinate to God's Kingdom.

As the Word of God is preached, individuals are to have their consciences transformed in the direction of biblical truth. As such, a mature believer will understand that

biblical righteousness reflects the righteousness of God's moral law, and obedience to God's moral law is necessary for the community to thrive.

A local church can host seminars on healthy biblical engagement, the pastor can preach on biblical citizenship, and when necessary, the pastor should formally speak to issues of political consequence that have a direct impact on the creation order and the common good.

A local church should, however, refrain from seeing itself as an instrument meant to rally for partisan political action. While local church involvement should influence how a person sees the world and votes, the church is not any other institution—it is singularly distinct in bearing witness to Jesus' Kingdom.

QUESTION 34

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR WHEN IT COMES TO POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Answer

By expounding God's Word, a local church pastor can teach his congregation God's purpose for government, the obligations of biblical citizenship, and the need for and limits of political engagement.

Commentary

The power of the pulpit is a privilege that cannot go easily overlooked when it comes to political engagement. While a pastor is not a political candidate or a political lobbyist, the pastor enters the pulpit each Sunday under the authority of God's Word. His job is to expound the Word of God for the people of God.

The pastor should not preach on his favorite pet political causes or favorite candidates. The beauty of scriptural authority is that it requires bringing the Word of God to bear on all areas under his authority—which necessarily includes politics.

When a pastor comes upon a passage that deals with God's purpose for government (e.g., Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:13-17), it is his duty to explain and

The local church pastor has a profound opportunity to shape the consciences of his local congregation to prioritize the things that God loves and cares for.

apply the text in an evenhanded and responsible way. While it is always prudent for a pastor to preach God's purpose for government and Scripture's requirement for biblical citizenship, there are times such as election cycles when it may be good for focused attention on the topic.

Chiefly, the local church pastor has a profound opportunity to shape the consciences of his local congregation to prioritize the things that God loves and cares for. The pastor can also prophetically critique political corruption or governments that have abandoned God's moral law. Lastly, one of the most important things a pastor can do is preach on why politics matters while at the same time cautioning his flock against putting their hopes in politics.

QUESTION 35

IS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE EVER JUSTIFIED?

Answer

Yes, civil disobedience is justified when the government prohibits you from doing something that Scripture requires or commands you to do something that Scripture forbids.

Commentary

The Christian moral tradition has thought deeply about when it is permissible for a Christian to disobey a law. When a government requires a Christian to do something that is explicitly forbidden from Scripture, or when it prohibits a Christian from doing something that Scripture commands, a Christian is justified to not follow the law in the form of civil disobedience.

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This topic springs from a discussion of both biblical ethics and natural law. Scripture offers examples where individuals disobeyed illegitimate commands from government officials (Ex. 1:15-22; Dan. 3) and acted when they were ordered not to (Acts 5:29). Human law is subordinate to divine law. The natural law tradition has taught that if a law is truly unjust and wicked, it does not have the true force of law. All law, if it is truly binding, must promote a moral good, which a command to perform evil or

to prohibit good cannot do. If it is not truly a law, then “breaking” the law is not really an infraction.

Even still, the Christian tradition has argued that a Christian should only engage in civil disobedience as a last resort. Additionally, Christians must be willing to do so publicly to openly expose the law’s wrongfulness, and there should be a reasonable goal of success for the action. Finally, Christians should be willing to accept the penalties for breaking a law.

QUESTION 36

WHAT ISSUES SHOULD DRIVE A CHRISTIAN'S POLITICAL FOCUS?

Answer

A Christian should strive to attain justice, love their neighbor, and promote the common good of all in their political focus.

Commentary

Political debates are always going to be unique to the time and place where a Christian finds themselves, but biblical principles of righteousness are unchanging.

As established above, it is reasonable and expected for Christians to disagree on secondary or tertiary political issues like methods of taxation or education vouchers.

Other areas of political debate are of such basic earthly consequence that to get them wrong is to fundamentally destabilize society. As of this writing, Western culture promotes abortion, sows confusion about the nature of man and woman, attempts to deemphasize and even redefine the natural family, and in some instances seeks to exclude religiously based viewpoints from the public square. In other words, our society is very unwell and ill. Candidates, officials, and entire platforms and parties in the West are devoted to upending God's pattern for creation order.

As a Christian evaluates what to prioritize in their political witness, the first and most important thing they should ask is whether the political system they are in is honoring God's creation design.

As a Christian evaluates what to prioritize in their political witness, the first and most important thing they should ask is whether the political system they are in is honoring God's creation design. If it is not, a Christian should be most attentive to confront and rectify the areas in political debate that dishonor God the Creator.

One cannot allow their unique situation or background to improperly skew their interpretation of the world. If Scripture speaks clearly and authoritatively, we must give priority to what Scripture prioritizes and views as essential components of the common good—not just our favorite issues.

QUESTION 37

WHAT VIRTUES SHOULD CHRISTIANS SEEK TO PRACTICE IN THEIR POLITICAL WITNESS?

Answer

A Christian should strive to pursue justice, speak reasonably, model wisdom, evaluate impartially, avoid unbending partisanship, exercise humility, and be consistent.

Commentary

Christians are called to a higher standard—God’s standard—in how they understand and engage in politics. There should be a difference between Christians and the rest of the world. A Christian should pursue justice on God’s terms and apply that justice to God’s world. A Christian needs wisdom in order to judge shrewdly. To exercise wisdom,

Christians must seek to understand their contexts fully so that they can judge them against the biblical standard.

Scripture also commands Christians to be “reasonable,” meaning that we should not act absurdly, engaging in wild speculation or entertaining conspiracies. We are to be impartial, not weighing or evaluating with bias. We must be consistent in applying our moral principles. If someone from our own political

Christians are called to a higher standard—God’s standard—in how they understand and engage in politics. There should be a difference between Christians and the rest of the world.

persuasion does something wrong, we should not be silent or ignore the error. Neither can we let those in power dictate what we will or will not speak about. We cannot curry favor with the powerful in order to gain their approval, which often results in silence about topics the powerful wish to avoid.

While it is fine for a Christian to identify with a particular political party, there are limits to such identification. A political party and its platform can change, so a Christian should always keep a loose affiliation with parties and not allow partisanship to unduly influence them. Furthermore, we should expose ourselves to a diversity of viewpoints and media resources in order to prevent ourselves from being in a silo. This is not because all viewpoints are equal, but only because if we become unwilling to read viewpoints that do not favor our own, we can become intellectually fragile.

QUESTION 38

HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN TRIAGE MORAL CONCERNS WHEN IT COMES TO VOTING?

Answer

Christians should vote with wisdom, justice, and public righteousness in view and should be impartial in evaluating the moral worldview of all policies, candidates, and platforms. A Christian should avoid voting for a candidate or platform that would undermine first-tier creation-order issues: human dignity, support for the natural family, and the ability to exercise one's faith.

Commentary

Voting is a controversial matter in Christian circles and understandably so. Different perspectives offer a range of interpretations on what one is doing when they are voting. Whatever else one would say, voting is not a morally neutral matter. Voting is the use of one's agency to empower or disempower views that promote the good or obstruct evil.

Voting is not necessarily endorsing everything about a candidate's personality or unqualified approval of everything for which a candidate stands. Because there is no perfect candidate whose views are perfectly flawless, voting is always done with degrees of compromise in view. This is not necessarily a "lesser of two evils" approach

since that paradigm assumes all parties and candidates are equally corrupted. All candidates certainly are fallen, but not all platforms and administrations are necessarily morally equal.

Voting is symbolically larger than just a vote for one man or one woman. In a federal election, voting means installing an entire administration whose collective power will be used either in the direction of morality and justice or immorality and injustice. At other levels of government, where the vote is only for a single candidate, voting is about the ideals and values that will be advanced by that candidate. A Christian should vote with one major question in mind: Will the candidate/platform that I'm installing into office promote just policies or intrinsically unjust policies?

With that in mind, here is a set of moral principles to help us triage our moral concerns when we vote:

1. Christians should aspire to vote for the candidate or platform that they believe best pursues and approximates biblical righteousness and biblical justice in their policies and character.
2. Christians should avoid willfully and knowingly voting for candidates or platforms that undermine first-tier creation-order issues that include the dignity and nature of human life, support for the natural family, and the ability to exercise one's faith.
3. Christians can reasonably disagree on political candidates and platforms where the dispute is not related to the pursuit of an intended evil.
4. Christians can conscientiously abstain from voting or vote for an alternate candidate if neither candidate or platform satisfies criteria 1 and 2.

A Christian should avoid voting for a candidate or platform that would undermine first-tier creation-order issues: human dignity, support for the natural family, and the ability to exercise one's faith.

QUESTION 39

HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN MAKE ARGUMENTS IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE?

Answer

A Christian can make a number of arguments in public square, including explicitly biblical arguments and arguments from reason, sociology, and philosophy that coincide with what the Bible authoritatively teaches.

Commentary

Our society tells Christians that they cannot appeal to the Bible when making political arguments. That is, of course, wrong and sets the biased standard that nonreligious arguments are better for public discourse than religiously informed arguments.

At the same time, while a Christian should have the freedom to make explicitly biblical arguments, it can be advantageous for Christians to demonstrate how non-religious arguments agree with the truth of biblical arguments. For example, one need not be a Christian to understand that abortion is wrong (even though the Bible is against abortion). A non-Christian can understand that taking innocent life is immoral because God has placed the moral law on every heart. A principle we should

A principle we should put to memory: A moral claim found in Scripture can be understood as true without citing the Bible.

put to memory: A moral claim found in Scripture can be understood as true without citing the Bible. Sure, individuals may disagree with us, but that does not mean our moral claim is wrong, only that individuals are deceived in their sin.

A Christian should understand that when the Bible makes a moral argument, it is making a moral argument that is true and binding on all persons regardless of whether someone accepts the authority of the Bible. That's because the Bible is speaking comprehensively, truthfully, and authoritatively over all of creation.

A Christian should deploy whatever arguments are available to help move the political needle in the direction of biblical justice. That will necessarily include citing the Bible, but also how reason-based claims testify to the truthfulness of the Bible's moral claims. A Christian might find themselves using arguments from reason, sociology, or political philosophy insofar as those viewpoints agree with what the Bible teaches.

QUESTION 40

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN'S TRUE AIM AND HOME WHEN IT COMES TO POLITICS AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Answer

Remembering that Christ is the true King of kings, Christians should pursue wisdom, justice, and righteousness for the sake of the temporal common good with a view toward recognizing how God has ordered and preserved the world for our good, and ultimately, for his glory.

Commentary

The confession that the Christian must make before allegiance to any political ideology, party, or institution is simple: Jesus Christ is Lord. There is no salvation apart from him. All authority is his, and all persons, nations, and government officials are obligated to bow their knee to his Lordship (Psa. 2; Phil. 2:10-22; Acts 4:12).

We must remember that no earthly political system will ever deliver the perfect society. No political figure will ever be an earthly messiah. Politics is about achieving as much justice as is possible in this age and limiting evil's reach.

But this does not mean that Christians are evacuated from political responsibility.

Hardly. Christians are called to honor their authorities, obey laws, and live justly. Citizenship in an earthly political community need not subvert, conflict, or be con-

Citizenship in an earthly political community need not subvert, conflict, or be confused with one's heavenly citizenship. Christians are to seek the welfare of their community.

fused with one's heavenly citizenship. Christians are to seek the welfare of their community.

National and earthly political loyalties are not incompatible with Christian faith. We should understand that God calls us to give our highest allegiance to him and our lower allegiances to our family and our nation. God places us where we are (Acts 17:26). As Paul appealed to

his heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20) and his Roman citizenship (Acts 22), so can we order our loyalties accordingly. We are called to dwell richly where we are (Jer. 29) even as we seek another city (Heb. 11).

AFTERWORD

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR INDIVIDUAL AND CHURCH-BASED POLITICAL EQUIPPING

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO NEXT if you've been inspired by reading this booklet and want to get more involved politically as a Christian?

First, we need to make a critical distinction between a Christian individual's interest and engagement and their local church's engagement. A local church is not a gathering to speak to every political controversy under the sun, and it should not do so. But sometimes issues arise where the permissibility and obligation of the church to speak is necessary. The challenge is having the prudence to know when and when not to speak.

The goal of this third and final section is to offer practical advice on how individuals and local churches can understand their political obligations as a feature of discipleship and the Church's mission.

Advice for Individuals

First, *individuals should know their country's governing documents*. You would be shocked to learn how many citizens do not even know what their country's governing documents say. Civic literacy is an absolute essential.

Second, *individuals need to know who their governing officials are at every level*. Most individuals cannot even name their local city officials, their state representative, or their state senator. It's far more likely that individuals know who their federal officials are before they're aware of their local officials.

Third, *think globally, act locally*. Before you think you can change the world, focus on cultivating a love and awareness of what is local to you. Instead of thinking, “The United States needs to change,” ask, “How can I help bring attention to an issue in my city or my county?”

Fourth, *stay informed*. In my experience, most people can tell you who their favorite athlete is or when the latest blockbuster movie is going to come out, but they cannot tell you what’s going on politically. Individuals need to be informed by reading a wide array of news sources and avoiding the tendency in our age to only read one particular news source. Additionally, Christians should get their news from a wide array of sources rather than from social media feeds alone, which tend to incentivize partisanship and extremism.

Fifth, *be immune to political hype*. If individuals do not have a grasp of history, they can easily believe that our moment is unlike any other period in history and fall prey to over-zealous commentators who prey on fear and outrage. When someone says, “This is the most important election of our lifetime,” you should quickly realize that individuals say this about every election. That is not to relativize the importance of some elections over others (some elections do matter more!), but only to encourage you from getting caught in the moment’s frenzy.

A famous quote attributed to the theologian Karl Barth is good advice on how to begin your day: “Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”

Advice for Local Churches

First, *the pulpit is the most important vehicle for political and cultural change*. A pastor has a tremendous burden and opportunity to use his pulpit and the Word of God to change the hearts and minds of those who enter a sanctuary. From preaching on texts that have tremendous consequences on moral issues of our day, to taking a couple of Sundays during an election season to preach on God’s purpose for government and our obligation as Christians, the pastor’s influence in shaping the worldview of church members cannot be overstated. A pastor might also consider forming a network of other local church pastors in order to stay in communication about issues facing their communities.

Second, *offer equipping events*. The following are a few examples of what local churches can do to stay better engaged politically:

1. Offer Sunday night or Wednesday seminars on Christian worldview and responsible Christian political engagement.
2. Engage your state Baptist convention to identify solid Christian public policy groups and individuals in your state. State convention leaders can help you discern groups that are engaging in political activity in a way that is Christ-honoring and fruitfully advancing Christian principles in government.
3. Host book clubs where individuals get together to read a work of Christian political thought and discuss it together over fellowship.

Third, *consider forming a public affairs committee*. Baptist churches joke about having enough committees already, but here's a suggestion: Have a standing committee that meets two or three times a year for the purpose of evaluating issues locally and nationally that could impact the life of the church. This committee could be tasked with presenting a deacon or elder board with their recommendations concerning how church leadership should inform the church about an issue of great significance; whether, for example, the pastor needs to address the issue from the pulpit or not.

Fourth, *show honor to elected officials*. Of course, churches should be impartial and nonpartisan in this regard, but allowing opportunities for engagement and prayer for local elected officials, including allowing them to educate the church about their role in a gathering outside of the formal worship service, can be appropriate. These should not be “political” events, but rather occasions for members to learn about what the official is doing in their community to help improve public affairs. Additionally, churches help their members to think politically as Christians when they publicly demonstrate the command to pray for all those in authority (including civic leaders who may be members of the church), calling them to execute justice and reminding them that they are accountable to God for their work (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

Fifth, *be publicly hospitable*. It would be a mark of the local church's love for its community if it went out of its way to tell local officials and local associations that your church wants to be a valuable asset to the community and to help out in ways

that are manageable and appropriate. For example, a church I'm familiar with was asked by their city to host a public meeting in their sanctuary over a very important public health issue because there was no venue large enough except the church. The church and the town leadership worked collaboratively together to help facilitate an important meeting.

BIOGRAPHY



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