

Four reasons Christians should care about politics

By [David Closson](#)

During the course of a presidential campaign, it is common to hear evangelicals, especially younger ones, quip, “I’m just not that interested in politics,” or, “Politics just aren’t my thing.” These dismissive remarks are often delivered with a veneer of piousness implying that political engagement is inherently defiled, occupying an arena unfit for those serious about the gospel. For those inundated with television ads, robo-calls, campaign mail and the overall negative tone of politics, this might be a tempting position to adopt. However, it is not a position Bible-believing, gospel-loving Christians can or should accept as congruent with Scripture.

The message of the gospel is that by grace through faith sinners can be reconciled with God (Ephesians 2:7-8). This message transforms individuals and enables them to lead godly lives. Mandated by Scripture (Matthew 28:19-20), Christians are charged to share the good news and disciple others in faith.

The gospel is a holistic message with implications for all areas of life, including how Christians engage the political process. Here are four reasons Christians should care about politics:

1. The Christian worldview speaks to all areas of life.

A frequently raised objection against Christian engagement with politics is that anything besides explicit preaching and teaching of the Bible is a distraction from the mission of the church. However, this is a limited understanding of the kingdom of God and contrary to examples in Scripture.

The Christian worldview provides a comprehensive understanding of reality. It speaks to all areas of life, including political engagement. In fact, the Bible speaks about civil government and provides examples of faithful engagement.

- In the Old Testament, Joseph and Daniel served in civil government, exerting influence to further the flourishing of their nations.
- In the New Testament, Jesus engaged in holistic ministry, caring for the spiritual and physical needs of people. Feeding the hungry and healing diseases were an outworking and extension of the reconciliatory message of the gospel.

- Paul also advocates this approach: “As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone” (Galatians 6:10). And: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Engaging in “good works” should include participating in the political process because of the legitimate and significant role of government. The decisions made by government have a substantial impact on people and the way we interact with them. A Christian worldview should include a political theology that recognizes every area of life must be included in the “good works” of believers, especially politics, an area with significant real-life implications for people.

2. Politics are unavoidable.

As “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11), it can be tempting for Christians to adopt a mindset that earthly governing systems are inconsequential to the task of furthering the gospel. But ask a pastor in an underground church or a missionary attempting to access a closed country if politics are inconsequential. Religious liberty, passports and visas are not unnecessary luxuries but are often vital for pastors and missionaries seeking to preach and teach the gospel.

Augustine’s *City of God* offers guidance on this point. Believers are citizens of the “City of God,” but on this side of eternity, we also belong to the “City of Man” and therefore must be good citizens of both cities. There are biblical examples of how membership in the earthly city can be leveraged for furthering the reach of the heavenly. Paul’s appeal to his Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37, 22:25) is a model of this.

In an American context, engaging these dual cities takes on added significance because of the words prefacing the Constitution: “We the people.” In the United States, ultimate national sovereignty is entrusted to the people. James Madison explained that the “consent of the people” is the “pure original fountain of all legitimate authority.” This reality makes politics unavoidable for American citizens who control their political future.

Because politics have real-world implications for Christian evangelism, missions and preaching the gospel, Christians ought to engage the political process by leveraging their rightful authority, advocating for laws and policies that contribute to human flourishing.

3. We need to love our neighbor.

When questioned by religious authorities on the law, Jesus explained that loving God with heart, soul and mind was the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37). He added that second in priority was: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

Followers of Christ are called to love and serve their neighbors (Matthew 28:19-20). When asked about the qualifications of “neighbor,” Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), indicating that irrespective of race, background, social status or occupation, neighborly love is owed.

In a very real sense, politics is one of the most important areas in which Christians demonstrate love to neighbor. In fact, how can Christians claim to care about others and not engage the arena that most profoundly shapes basic rights and freedoms? Caring for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and lonely is important to Jesus and should be to His followers as well. Jesus said, “As you did it to one of the least of these you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Fulfilling the biblical mandate to love neighbor and care for the “least of these” should be a priority for every believer. Again, a holistic approach is essential. Loving neighbor includes volunteering at a homeless shelter, as well as influencing laws that encourage human flourishing. Good government and laws are not negligible factors in the prosperity and freedom of a society.

For example, the majority of North Koreans are held in economic bondage by corrupt political forces, whereas in South Korea, citizens are given liberty and a system that encourages prosperity. The people of North Korea need more than food pantries and improved hospitals; they need political leadership and policies that recognize human rights. Advocating for these changes in totalitarian countries is crucial for loving our neighbors in oppressed areas.

Obedience to the golden rule includes seeking laws that protect unborn children, strengthen marriages and families, advocate for the vulnerable, and provide opportunity for flourishing. Politics is a means of effecting great change and must be engaged by Christians who love their neighbor.

4. Government restrains evil and promotes good.

Government derives its authority from God to promote good and restrain evil. This mandate is expressly stated in Romans 13:1-7. Elsewhere, Paul urges that prayers be made “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Paul understood the need for Christian participation in government.

Government plays a role in the work of God’s kingdom on earth. Good government encourages an environment conducive for people living peaceably, whereas bad government fosters unrest and instability. Because of sin, the legitimate institution of government has, at times, been used illegitimately throughout history. However, numerous examples persist of Christians reasserting their influence and redeeming government to promote good and restrain evil.

In *How Christianity Changed the World*, Alvin Schmidt documents Christian influence in government. Examples include outlawing infanticide, child abandonment and gladiatorial games in ancient Rome, ending the practice of human sacrifice among European cultures, banning pedophilia and polygamy, and prohibiting the burning of widows in India. William Wilberforce, a committed Christian, was the force behind the successful effort to abolish the slave trade in England. In the United States, two-thirds of abolitionists were Christian pastors. In the 1960’s, Martin Luther King Jr., a Christian pastor, helped lead the civil rights movement against racial segregation and discrimination.

Carl Henry rightfully stated that Christians should “work through civil authority for the advancement of justice and human good” to provide “critical illumination, personal example, and vocational leadership.” This has been the historic witness of Christians concerned about government promoting good and restraining evil.

Jeremiah 29:7 says: “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.” Referring to Babylon, the prophet recognized that secular government served a legitimate purpose in God’s plan for Israel. This is still true. Today, good governments promote literacy, advance just laws, provide religious liberty and allow churches to preach and teach. Good government can serve as a conduit for the furthering of the gospel and human flourishing.

Christian witness in the public square contributes transcendent values about moral and ethical issues. Christian withdrawal opens a moral vacuum susceptible to influences that pressure government to move outside the purview designated by God. Politics affects government, shapes society and influences culture. Because of what the Bible teaches and the inevitability of its effect on our culture, Christians must care about politics.