

# JESUS IS KING

## Week 4: A Believer's Relationship to Human Government

NCAC Sunday School: September 29, 2024

**Course Goal:** To explore how to engage in politics in a way that honors God.

### A Brief Review:

- The Bible presents Jesus as the King of Kings, who will not only one day return to establish His Kingdom in full, but who even now reigns sovereignly over all.
- Yet, as we await the full establishment of Christ's Kingdom, Scripture calls us to view earthly government as a gift from God, given for our common good.
- God's primary design for human government is to hold back evil, promote what is good, and establish peace and security so that people are able to flourish and live godly lives.
- Even though government is a good gift from God, that does not mean *all* rulers are good. Rulers who lead well can expect God's blessing; rulers who do evil can expect His judgment.
- As believers, we are called to engage in politics and with government in a way that aligns with the values of Christ's Kingdom, being careful to keep our hope rooted in Christ, not politics.

**What are some of the different positions Christians could hold regarding how to engage with earthly politics?**

### A FEW MISGUIDED\* APPROACHES REGARDING CHRISTIANS AND POLITICS

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**Push for the fusion of Christianity and civil life by dominion:** Once common in Europe and the source of many conflicts, this position holds that since all government is instituted by God, then governments have a divine mandate to enforce Christian values and beliefs.

**A verse that could be used:** *"For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."* (Romans 13:1b-2; See also Psalm 33:12).

**What's amiss with this view?**

**Engage in evangelism, not politics:** Because human governments are often corrupt and cannot truly solve the problems of the world, some Christians argue that we should avoid involvement in worldly politics altogether and should instead focus entirely on God's Kingdom.

**A verse that could be used:** *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."* (John 18:36; See also Philippians 3:19-20 or Hebrews 11:13-14)

**What's amiss with this view?**

**Engage in politics, not evangelism:** Recognizing God’s heart for the disenfranchised and His concern that governments promote justice, some denominations have promoted a “Social Gospel,” which focuses on overcoming social evils without much concern for encouraging personal faith in Christ.

**A verse that could be used:** *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”* (James 1:27)

**What’s amiss with this view?**

**Engage in both, but keep them separate:** Based on a conviction that church and state are to be kept separate, some Christians seek to maintain a clear distinction between their allegiance to God and their responsibilities to the state, attempting to avoid having one influence the other.

**A verse that could be used:** *“And Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’”* (Matthew 22:20-21)

**What’s amiss with this view?**

## **A MORE BIBLICAL APPROACH: ENGAGE IN POLITICS WITH KINGDOM VALUES**

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“The ‘significant influence’ view says that Christians *should* seek to influence civil government according to God’s moral standards and God’s purpose for government as revealed in the Bible (when rightly understood). But while Christians exercise this influence, they must simultaneously insist on protecting freedom of religion for all citizens.

“In addition, ‘significant influence’ does not mean angry, belligerent, intolerant, judgmental, red-faced, and hate-filled influence, but rather winsome, kind, thoughtful, loving, persuasive influence that is suitable to each circumstance and that always protects the other person’s right to disagree, but that is also uncompromising about the truthfulness and moral goodness of God’s Word.” (Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, p. 55)

**Do you agree? If Grudem is right, what are some challenges of this pursuit for believers?**

**Throughout the Old Testament we see examples of God’s people exerting influence over pagan kings.** Consider Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 41:37-45); Moses before Pharaoh (Exodus 8:1); Nehemiah as cupbearer to the king (Nehemiah 1:11); Esther over the King of Persia (Esther 5:1-8; 7:1-6); and many of the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Amos. Daniel is another example:

*“Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”* (Daniel 4:27, Daniel speaking to King Nebuchadnezzar)

**What stands out to you regarding Daniel’s words to the king? How might we do something similar in our context?**

**We also see examples in the New Testament of believers seeking to influence government leaders.** Although descriptive examples are not the same as prescriptive commands, Scripture shows us that throughout history God's people have believed it was right to seek to influence governing officials:

*"So with many other exhortations [John the Baptist] preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprovved by [John] for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison." (Luke 3:18-20, indicating John the Baptist spoke to governing officials about the moral right or wrong of their actions)*

*"After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed..." (Acts 24:24-25a, indicating Paul sought to speak persuasively to a governing official about not only right and wrong, but also about the Gospel of Jesus Christ)*

**Outside of Scripture, can you think of examples of men and women who sought to positively influence human governments in accordance with Kingdom values?**

**How might each of the following passages shape how and why we engage in earthly politics?**

*"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." (Jeremiah 29:7, to God's people in exile in Babylon)*

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39, on the second greatest commandment)*

*"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus speaking about the values and ways of His Kingdom)*

## **HOW ARE WE TO RELATE TO THOSE ALREADY IN POWER?**

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Although Scripture calls believers to work toward the good of all people out of love for our neighbors, we sometimes find ourselves under authorities who are far from Christlike in their character and who are hostile to God and His ways. It's helpful to remember that many of the commands of Scripture were given to believers who lived in such an environment.

*<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and*

*you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup>for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Romans 13:1-7)*

**What are all the things Paul tells us to do here? What reasons does He give?**

*<sup>1</sup>Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup>to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. <sup>3</sup>This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (Titus 3:1-4; See also 1 Peter 2:13-14)*

**What are all the things Paul tells us to do here? What reasons does He give?**

*<sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup>If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup>But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18, in which Daniel's friends were told to worship an idol; See also Exodus 1:17, 20-21)*

**Why do these men disobey their king? How would you describe their attitude as they do so?**

*<sup>18</sup>So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup>But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, <sup>20</sup>for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20)*

**How would you describe the principle Peter and John used to decide whether or not to obey those over them? How would you describe their attitude as they did so?**

**When it is appropriate for Christians to disobey their governing officials, how can Christians do so in a way that still shows respect and honor?**

*"You can be well-intentioned and entirely wrong. You can be blind to the truth. That in itself is the important lesson: we do have to make judgements about how best to serve Christ, and it is difficult; but we must always be aware of our own propensity to justify ourselves. This calls for Christians to examine themselves constantly against the measure of the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures, with the awareness that what we think is serving him may not turn out to be serving him at all. May God have mercy." (Michael Jensen, *Subjects and Citizens*, p. 104)*