

The Culture of Christ & American Politics

"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Romans 13:1

Does the Christian, simply by virtue of who he is in Christ, have a role and responsibility in the American political process? Arguments for and against a Christian's involvement in American politics are compelling. What should be our focus and where is the balance in this area of the Christian walk?

Applying Scripture

What does God's Word have to say about politics? In all the arguments for and against Christian involvement in American politics, I have never heard anyone quote a passage of Scripture that says, "All faithful Christians must/must not, if given the opportunity, involve themselves in a democratic system of government." If it were that clearly written in Scripture, we wouldn't be discussing it here.

Lacking any Scripture of that sort, how do we know the role and responsibility God has for His children in American Politics? There is a mind-set, which is deadly to the Truth of Christ, that if it isn't specifically commanded or admonished against, we have the "freedom to choose" what "works best" for each individual. Such thinking leads to every man doing what is right in his own sight (**Deuteronomy 12:8**).

What Scriptures apply when we look at situations such as politics?

Structure

Our governmental structure is different than what existed at the time Scripture was written. At the time, people lived under an unrepresented system of rule. There were no elections, no public debates, no public policy and certainly no voting. The king or governor ruled according to his pleasure. Even in that autocratic system of government, God gave specific directions as to how Christians were to respond. Paul said it very concisely, **"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."** (**Romans 13:1-6**) God does not say this is to be the response of Christians only if they have a say in the selection of the leaders or only if those leaders are righteous. Even when Christians are without a means of expressing their views or beliefs on how government is to be run, they are to obey.

Jesus affirmed the same teaching as it regarded religious leaders of the day in **Matthew 23:1-3**. Even though the Scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the position of authority, the seat of Moses, they were to be followed and obeyed. This was not because they were worthy, but because the "position" was worthy!

Before you can understand your role in American politics, you need to understand God's place in government and your place in the governmental process.

Roots

The place to begin to put all this in perspective is to look at God's intent for government. One of the hard statements of Scripture needing to be embraced is the truth of Romans 13:1, "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." You must recognize that ALL authority is from God. He has a purpose for every authority structure. In addition to that, He has ordained your role in that authority.

We have seen the roles God has given to us as we have discussed the role of husband, wife and children in the home. We have seen that as we have looked at the roles of authority in The Church, leaders and followers. God has also ordained government authority and your relationship with it. At some place in time God places each of us in a position of submission.

God's purpose for rulers is to be a source of fear and punishment for those who are evil and a minister to those who are good. The response of those who are good is subjection, while the response of those who are evil is rebellion.

The best leader, therefore, would be the one who knows the Truth about that which is good and that which is evil.

American Politics

We in America have an extremely unique and blessed opportunity to participate in choosing those who will represent us in leadership. In essence, we chose those who will rule over us. Yet some Christians refuse to participate while others insist that the world will be changed if Christians "take over" the political systems of our nation. I believe the Truth is somewhere in between these two perspectives.

Salvation and Politics

Having righteous leaders will not save a nation. That has been tried in the past and failed. We find the Truth about salvation in **Matthew 7:13-14** Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. 14 "For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." NAS This is Truth. It will not be changed either by mass media events or controlling the politics of a nation. The politics of a nation does not save a man or a nation. Spiritual change occurs from the inside out not outside in. God draws those to Himself whom He will, regardless of who is in political authority over them.

On the other hand, a political climate friendly to Christian values establishes a healthy environment in which to share the gospel. The past has shown that a healthy environment does not bring salvation.

Then there are those who say that politics of any kind is foul and no one should participate in them at any level. This is an interesting claim. At it's core, it dooms all mankind to be ruled by ungodly men. If Christians don't participate in politics, either running for office or electing our leaders, the only ones left to participate are the unrighteous. Some will be unrighteous from ignorance and some will be down right evil but they would all be unrighteous.

Balance

God has revealed to us that government is to be His instrument for His glory. It would be difficult to argue, therefore, against participating in governmental leadership at any level, in a government office or as one who selects those who take that office.

The question is not, "Should Christians participate in American politics?" The question is, "What is the role of Christians in American politics?"

Serving in a Political Role

Your purpose is to glorify God (Matt 5:16, 1 Cor 6:20, 10:31; 1 Peter 2:13, 4:15-16). Can God be glorified if, among the vast political positions in America, you were the only Christian in a position of governmental leadership? WOW! That would be a stretch, wouldn't it?

Jesus, in The Sermon on the Mount, says in Matthew 5:14 that you are the light of the world and in the 16th verse of the same passage that your light will be seen by men and cause them to glorify your Father who is in heaven. While He was not speaking specifically of politics He was speaking of the impact one life has on a world that is lost in the darkness of sin. The darker the situation, the brighter the light. Therefore, if you were the ONLY Christian in the American political process . . . just think how bright you would shine!!

If you were not the only Christian in American politics the light of God would be magnified. As the cold darkness of evil began to surround you there would be there to stand with you another from whom you could draw strength and warmth (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Together, God would begin to light the way for others. In His power, strength and wisdom, lives would be changed, maybe some would be saved and perhaps the hand of God would be revealed through you in the political process.

Participating In The Selection Process

Is there a mandate from God for you to participate in the selection process of political leaders for our nation? Put another way, "Would God have you used by Him to bring to our nation leaders who are holy and righteous before Him?" or how about, "Would it bring glory to God if this nation based its rule on Biblical principles?"

Voting is an aspect of faithful stewardship God has given to every Christian. That stewardship involves review of the character of those running for office. When possible, it involves interacting with the candidate to spiritually discern if the values portrayed are the values truly held.

The final filter through whom each candidate should be placed is that of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that when He left, God would indwell us with His Holy Spirit who would teach us all things and guide us into all Truth. Confused about who you should vote for after doing all the "homework" you can? Look to God for His guidance. (John 14:17, 26; 16:13)

Influencing Those In Office

Once someone is in office, would God use you to influence them and the decisions they make regarding the governing to which God has given them? All we do must be directed by the Holy Spirit. Scripturally speaking, God does not call anyone to be an antagonist of another. He does give some as counselors. Would He have you be a counselor to a politician?

Another strong Biblical principle is that of "appeal to authority." This principle runs through out the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. One example is Peter and John in the 4th chapter of the book of Acts. In the setting of American politics it would most likely be applied in this manner:

A decision needing to be made in American government is placed on your heart and God has prompted you to contact your representative. You would, in a righteous manner, inform the representative of the Biblical view on the matter God has given you. You would also pledge your support for them when those who oppose the position would rally against them. This has been sorely missing in the Evangelical response.

Rely on God to give you the direction and the words to speak. Recognize when it is God at work in you and when you merely don't like the direction you see your leader taking.

Above all, be willing to be used by God.