

Should Christians Be Involved in Politics? ©

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I. Preliminary Remarks:

I was recently asked by the College of Biblical Studies to briefly answer the question, “Should Christians be involved in politics?” As a result, I thought I would share my answer to a broader Christian audience since so many of us wonder where the line should be drawn between engaging and not conforming to the cultural, political, social, and even “religious” ideas and values that can corrupt the best parts of us. The bottom line is that we have to recognize as believers that we are not above or outside of culture; we are in culture. Thus, I contend from a biblical Judeo-Christian worldview that we are obligated by God to engage culture, and that this is possible without having to conform to a culture that seeks to captivate, capture, and change us. But before we can engage culture without conforming to a post-Christian culture, we must establish and possess a biblical worldview that is complete, coherent, and corresponds to how things actually are.

For a more comprehensive look at the various positions regarding Christian involvement in politics, I commend Wayne Grudem’s informative book, *Politics – According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], for your review. If you are interested in understanding how Christianity contributed to many of the cultural, scientific, and social advances in Western thought and culture and *why* it is still important to continue our active engagement in view of the pressing issues our human civilization is facing today as followers of Jesus Christ who represent God’s interests, read Alvin Schmidt’s incredible sociological study, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

II. Brief Answer:

Should Christians be involved in politics? The answer to this question is simply and emphatically “yes!” Why? As Christians we are not merely commissioned to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20), but to also live out the gospel in every area of our lives (Mark 8:34-36; Romans 12:1-2). But we are not merely called to live out the gospel in every area of our lives, we are also called to be faithful stewards of all that God has given to us (Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 9:1). Let us take a closer look at these claims.

Like Joseph and Daniel who were planted within political systems in foreign governments as stated in Hebrew Scriptures, we are “pilgrims” (1 Peter) commanded to be “salt and light,” pointing people to the liberating and satisfying truth in Jesus Christ by the decisions we make, the values we promote, and the activities we pursue (Matthew 5-7). Against the backdrop of a society(s) where corruption, evil, and false pleasures wreak havoc upon the uninformed and the misinformed, any God-given opportunity that we take to address the ills that are captivating young minds, stripping

the young and the old of their inherent values, and maligning our freedoms, reflects good stewardship of all the blessings we have received from God. Similarly to Joseph's story, we can also offer protection for those who remain in spiritual darkness. This can only result from intimately knowing God's Word and inculcating it into our very identity whereby biblical truth becomes our habituated way of seeing and doing. In other words, like these two men, we must possess a biblical worldview that is complete, coherent, and corresponds to the way things actually are. On that foundation, we are able to strategically and in a winsome way, engage society without compromise.

Thus, when a venue is open to us, whether local, state, or federal, we have the opportunity and the absolute standard (God's revelation) to call out acts of injustice, serve the needy, comfort the hurting, and stand for what we know is right, true, and trustworthy (Philippians 4:8). In fact, when we vote, or when we talk about candidates or those who are in office, or when we financially support certain causes, all is to be done to the glory of God. The question we need to ask with every decision is, "Will this _____ [activity, cause, idea, plan, or vote] demonstrate my utmost love to God?" See, loving God His way involves knowing, practicing, and defending truth, serving Him on His terms and not our own.

How is this even possible? We are able to claim in the public square what is unjust and just, good and evil on the basis of what God's revelation, namely, natural law and the precepts of the Bible. First, we have what is called natural moral law as mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Romans 2:14-16 where he states that all of us stand unexcused because the moral law is written upon the human heart:

¹⁴For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus [ESV].

In other words, we are designed to be moral. Woven into our human design are ethical standards that are right for everyone everywhere; they are moral principles which are at some level known by all. C. S. Lewis discovered this to be true when he was an atheist. In fact, he admitted that he could not avoid natural, moral law. In his famous treatise on the subject, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes:

[As an atheist] my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust. A man does call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?¹

Even the problem of evil actually affirms the existence of an all-good God. In a 2006 lecture titled, "Is there Meaning in Suffering and Evil," Dr. Ravi Zacharias gave on the problem of suffering and

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45.

evil, he tells the story about the time he was asked by a student how he could reconcile the reality of evil with the belief in the existence of an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God.² Ravi Zacharias responded this way:

Can you not see what is brought in through the back door in that question? Because if there's evil, there's good. If there's good there has to be a moral law. If there's a moral law there has to be a transcendent moral lawgiver. But that's what the skeptic is trying to disprove and not prove. Because if there is no moral law giver, there's no moral law. If there's no moral law there's no good. If there's no good there's no evil. So what's the question, really? The strongest argument against the existence of God actually assumes God in the objection.

Interestingly, in the same lecture, Ravi Zacharias went on to claim that an (1) objective moral law cannot be grounded in a materialistic, atheistic universe; (2) there is no explanation for even for noble deeds if self-preservation is the foundation for generating moral values; (3) heinous evil cannot be adequately explained apart from a Judeo-Christian worldview; (4) the Judeo-Christian worldview is able to explain why evil is a problem from within; evil does not simply exist "out there."

As a result of the moral law written upon the heart of everyone, we discover why moral absolutes are undeniable. Once again, at some level these moral laws are known by all. These moral laws provide a measurement for moral choices, explain why serious moral disagreements are not mere opinion, and even help us understand why we become defensive when we are caught violating them.³

But the moral law also coheres with the existential feelings of accountability within. We feel the affirmation of conscience when goodness is pursued. But we also feel the condemnation of conscience when evil deeds are done. Thus, flowing from natural law, we understand why people are qualitatively nourished when noble and altruistic deeds are performed, and why we can cross-culturally claim certain activities are evil and good.

And second, when we Christians consistently live out the truths of Christianity as disclosed in the Bible (which correlates with natural, moral law) we not only demonstrate love to our God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Psalm 19:7-11; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), but we also commit our will to the true good of others (1 John 3:16-17). Thus, when we carefully obey the Scriptures, we are able to love the unlovely, meet the practical needs of others, recognize the inherent value of all people (no matter age, gender, race, and religion), and generate values, duties, and accountability that enables our societies to flourish. In other words, when we obey God's Word, we imitate Jesus

² The lecture, "Is There Meaning in Suffering and Evil" is available on DVD at www.rzim.org. It is a two-volume DVD whereby Ravi Zacharias offers a lecture on the subject. His presentation is followed by three scholars who debate and discuss Zacharias' answer.

³ For an excellent treatment of moral law, see J. Budziszewski, *What We Cannot Know*, revised and expanded edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).

Christ (Mark 8:34-36) who loved the “down and out,” the hated (e.g., tax collector), the mocked (“prostitutes”), and the rejected (e.g., Samaritans). We are able to tell the truth as it is, protect the innocent, promote justice, offer hope to the hopeless, and experience His satisfying peace in the midst of life’s greatest troubles. All this is possible because our infinite and personal perfect God has spoken, revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Second Person of the one and only Triune God (Philippians 2:5-11), and guides us with our best interests at heart (Romans 8:28; 37-39).

But when Christians fail to consistently live out the truths of Christianity, then all sorts of acts of evil find expression as revealed in the horrific advocacy of African Slavery and religious anti-Semitism, and acts of barbaric evil as exemplified in the Medieval Crusades and the European wars of religion.

Being involved in politics in a God-honoring way, whether it is by casting a vote or serving the community might demand that we spend hours researching an issue or a candidate’s voting record. Our efforts are not in vain since good ideas have good consequences and bad ideas have bad consequences. Stated differently, forces and influences are at work that are worth our attention as God’s representatives (Genesis 1:26-27). If Christians were to educate themselves and consistently apply what the Bible teaches, I suspect the political landscape might be a different scene

In his classic work, *How Should We Then Live*, Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer examined the collapse of civilizations. While ideas generated from man seemed to offer hope, they delivered alienation, oppression, and violence. Thus, he concluded that only God’s Word offers a foundation strong enough to address the sinfulness of humanity and generate values that can bring about what is truly in our best interests. The backdrop of civilizations not rooted in God’s emancipating truth is a counterfeit system that seeks to capture, corrupt, and destroy all that is good, noble, and true. Thus, with all the evil that seek to prey on the weak and tempt the strong in the most subtle and creative ways, it behooves us to not only know what we as Christians believe, but why we believe what we believe.

Interestingly, Schaeffer’s insights correlate with an acute observation made by the brilliant philosopher, historian, and atheist Will Durant (1885-1981) in an interview with the *Chicago Sun-Times* many years ago:

In a frank interview with the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the famous atheist Will Durant admitted that the common man will fall to pieces morally if he thinks there is no God. ‘On the other hand,’ said Durant, ‘a man like me... I survive morally because I retain the moral code that was taught me along with the religion, while I have discarded the religion, which was Roman Catholicism.’ Durant continued, ‘You and I are living on a shadow... because we are operating on the Christian ethical code which was given us, unfused with the Christian faith.... But what will happen to our children...? We are not giving them an ethics warmed up with a religious faith. They are living on the shadow of a shadow.’⁴

⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Is Man the Measure?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 170-71.

So, even though he rejected the God of the Bible, Durant believed that the Judeo-Christian worldview is the only basis that can handle the weighty problems society experiences.

Some Christians may argue that since we know that the world will deteriorate until Christ's return at His Second Coming (Revelation 19 & 20), we should only share the gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the question, "Why polish the brass if the ship is sinking?" While receiving Jesus Christ as one's Savior is the means by which we receive eternal life, Christians are called to be faithful in everything and engage the world's affairs on every level. We have to be good parents, good neighbors, good citizens, and good leaders. Israel was called to be light unto its pagan neighbors to testify of God's goodness; the church is called to be a light on the hill. Who knows, perhaps we can reach more for Christ through politics rather than in spite of them.

As a result of our willing involvement, we will find ourselves being used by God in the most amazing ways to protect the innocent, offer hope to those have none, and bring His healing touch of truth to a culture that is wounded and blinded by evil.