



BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW SERIES




BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:

WORLDVIEW, ISSUES, AND VOTING

2nd Edition

by David Closson

FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL
Washington, D.C.

A diagonal banner of 'I VOTED' stickers with an American flag design, running from the top left to the bottom right. The stickers are semi-transparent and overlap each other. Each sticker features the word 'I VOTED' in a stylized font, with 'I' and 'VOTED' in blue and 'I' in red. The background of the stickers is white with blue stars and red stripes.

**BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:
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BY DAVID CLOSSON
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by David Closson

Do Christians have a moral or biblical obligation to participate in government? Is there a distinctively Christian way to engage in the political process? Do Christians have a duty to vote, and if so, what principles should inform them while casting their ballots? How should pastors think about politics, and how can they shepherd their congregations well during an election season?

Christians in every generation have debated these questions. Over the years, several models and suggestions for Christian political and cultural engagement have been proposed.¹ While these proposals differ in a few particulars, they all share the common goal of helping Christians apply biblical principles to the moral issues that shape and influence the world around us.

In 1947, theologian Carl Henry warned his post-war contemporaries that historic Christianity risked losing cultural influence because of the church's hesitancy to apply the gospel to "pressing world problems."² In Henry's day, many evangelicals were tempted to withdraw or had already withdrawn from the public square. As a result, evangelicals were becoming increasingly inarticulate about the social relevance of the gospel. This withdrawal, as Henry rightly feared, signaled to the world that Christianity could not compete with other ideologies. Instead of withdrawing, Henry encouraged Christians to engage the public square by applying the fundamentals of their faith to the full range of issues to which the gospel speaks—including government and politics, the sphere that fundamentally orders people's public lives.

Thankfully, many Christians in the mid-20th century followed Henry's lead, pursuing a path of active engagement with the world. However, the rise of secularism and the sexual revolution's repudiation of Christian sexual ethics have steadily pushed biblical principles to the periphery of the public square over the last several decades. As a result, it is not uncommon for today's Christians to be uninformed or confused about how their faith ought to influence their public engagement.

Moreover, we live in a time of acute political polarization, exacerbated every election cycle by a 24-hour barrage of candidate advertisements on every communication platform. Unfortunately, the toxic tone and extremely partisan nature of our political system discourage many Christians from studying what the Bible teaches about government and considering how faith should inform one's view of politics.

Some say that Christians ought to be wary of associating too closely with elected officials or political parties because it risks conflating the responsibility of the church with that of the state.³ They ask: if God is sovereign and controls the heart of the king (Prov. 21:1), why risk compromising our gospel witness by getting involved in something so divisive? Others maintain that Christians ought to be heavily involved with politicians and partisan politics. They say: because politics are so important, it is worth investing significant resources to educate and mobilize the congregation for political activity.

Which approach is correct? Both have good intentions. However, if taken to extremes, both approaches are problematic. The former can cause us to withdraw from the public and political space. The latter threatens to obscure the purpose of the church by elevating politics to a level of importance God never intended it to have. Scripture advocates neither total withdrawal from the political process nor overinvestment in the political arena. The gospel applies to all areas of life, and the Bible instructs us about government and political authority. Thus, we need a third

approach, a model in which actively engaged Christians faithfully apply biblical principles to the current political challenges. But what does this model look like? What are the principles that can help us navigate our divisive political landscape?

HOW SHOULD WE MAKE SENSE OF ALL OF THIS?

This publication seeks to help Christians navigate the issue of political engagement from a biblical worldview. It will do this by connecting the implications of the gospel to the political process.



- First, we will ponder the “why” of Christian engagement in politics. We will define “politics” and explain why it is something Christians ought to care about. We will then examine God’s Word to see if the biblical worldview offers a framework or set of principles that can help us navigate the field of politics.
- Second, we will consider the “how” of Christian engagement in politics. We will discuss the role of government, voting, America’s two-party system, party platforms, and some public policy issues on which the Bible speaks very clearly.
- Finally, we will address how pastors can navigate sensitive moral questions and shepherd their congregations well, acknowledging that within our churches exists a diversity of opinion on many issues, including public policy.

WHAT IS “POLITICS?”

Definitions are crucial for mitigating confusion. For many, the term “politics” is synonymous with deception, conflict, and division and invokes images of candidates clashing on TV or a nasty campaign ad denouncing an opponent. However, narrowly interpreting politics to refer to politicians, campaigns, or an apparatus of the state is a truncated view.

POLITICS, PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD, IS ABOUT HOW GROUPS OF HUMANS ORGANIZE THEIR AFFAIRS.

The word “politics” comes from the Greek word “polis,” which referred to Greek city-states (political entities ruled by a body of citizens). Significantly, for the ancient Greeks, politics was “concerned with the struggle over the control and distribution of power across a range of sites.”⁴ It was not limited to the domain of the state. Thus, politics, properly understood, is about how groups of humans organize their affairs—whether a homeschool co-op’s decision of where to host meetings, a group of neighbors deciding that trash needs to be picked up off their street, or an agreement between neighbors to watch each other’s houses while on vacation. In this sense, politics is intimately connected to community—how we relate to other people—and inextricable from the concept of loving one’s neighbor. If we convince ourselves that politics only deals with a narrow subset of clashing politicians, and thus choose to withdraw from politics at large, society—and our neighbors—will be worse off.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT POLITICS?

Why should Christians seeking to live out their faith care about politics? Although not explicitly stated, there seems to be an assumption in some circles that politics is inherently defiled, and

that political activism is inappropriate for those serious about the gospel. This view fits into what theologian Wayne Grudem calls the “Do Evangelism, Not Politics” approach to civic engagement.⁵ Adherents of this view suggest that Christians should exclusively focus on sharing the good news and discipling others in the faith because Jesus’ final command was to make disciples (Mat. 28:16-20). In other words, because political engagement does not lead someone to faith in Christ, it is not considered a top priority.

However, upon closer examination of Scripture, this objection fails to account for a broader perspective of politics, one that incorporates how people order their lives and affairs and the reality that the Christian worldview has much to say about civic responsibility. Moreover, the objection does not consider the responsibility Christians have to steward the blessings and opportunities entrusted to them. Because voting is a matter of stewardship, Christians living in a democratic republic should seek to vote in a way that honors God and advances the wellbeing of their neighbor.

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT GOVERNING AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED BY GOD (ROM. 13:1-7).

The Bible teaches that government is appointed by God. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul describes the governing authorities as “ministers of God” and says they are responsible for administering civil justice. Although God is sovereign, he chooses to use human governments to carry out his will in the civil sphere. A biblical basis for government is also found in Genesis 9, where God provides general authorization for action against murderers (Gen. 9:5-6).⁶ This passage implies that communities must form or support governments capable of administering justice.

Thus, the important role of government is one reason why Christians should care about the political process. Government was God's idea, and Christians should think about it and engage with it in a way that is consistent with its God-ordained purpose. A second reason Christians should care about politics is that the Bible contains numerous examples of God's people engaging in politics as part of a holistic approach to ministry that meets both spiritual and temporal needs.

The Old Testament provides examples of faithful political engagement. For example, Joseph and Daniel served in foreign administrations and used their influence to implement policies that benefited society. In the case of Joseph, during a devastating famine (Gen. 45:9-12), God used his position in the Egyptian government to protect and provide for his extended family (who would become the future nation of Israel). Likewise, Queen Esther used her influence in the Persian government to save the Jewish people from a state-sanctioned genocide (Esther 8). Elsewhere, the prophet Jeremiah instructed the exiles in Babylon to seek the welfare of their new city. He also commanded them to pray for the city, "for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7). A thriving society would benefit God's people as well as the city's inhabitants.

In the New Testament, Jesus engaged in holistic ministry, caring for the physical and spiritual needs of people; feeding the hungry and caring for the sick were extensions of the message he preached. Paul also advocated a comprehensive approach to ministry: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone" (Gal. 6:10). Also: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

The exhortation to engage in "good works" has public significance and is, therefore, inescapably political. Decisions made by those serving in government positions have a substantial impact on people's lives. Consequently, a Christian worldview recognizes

THE BIBLICAL ADMONITION TO ENGAGE IN “GOOD WORKS” HAS PUBLIC SIGNIFICANCE AND IS THEREFORE INESCAPABLY POLITICAL.

that the “good works” of believers must include every area of life—including politics, an area with massive implications for Christian evangelism, missions, and the freedom to preach the gospel.

Facing charges of sedition, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10). Evidently, the apostle was comfortable working within the political and legal system of his day to pursue justice against false accusations.

Finally, Paul instructs Timothy: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Christians are to pray for their leaders whose decisions can advance or inhibit their ability to lead godly and dignified lives.

In summary, as the means by which we order our shared lives, politics occupies a significant place in society and is an unavoidable, central area of Christian concern. Because government and its laws are an inextricable part of our lives, there is no way to avoid some level of involvement. This is true for Christians, who, though “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11) in this world, are nevertheless citizens of the “City of Man” as well as the “City of God.” Christians ought to endeavor to be good citizens of both cities and leverage their influence for the advancement of laws, policies, and practices that contribute to the flourishing of our neighbors.

Thus, Christians have a biblical *obligation to engage* in politics and the political process. The question now is: What is the *right way to engage*?

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS ENGAGE IN POLITICS?

How should Bible-believing, gospel-loving Christians exercise their political responsibilities? This question has been raised by some prominent evangelical leaders in recent years. These leaders have expressed concern with the current divisive, coarse nature of American politics and have offered suggestions for engaging in the political process.

**AVOIDING POLITICS ALTOGETHER IS A TACIT
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Much of their advice is helpful. For example, one pastor stated, “to not be political is to be political,” thereby rebuking those who avoid political conversations for fear of being perceived as “too political.”⁷ As he rightly notes, avoiding politics altogether is a tacit endorsement of the status quo, which might include social conditions that perpetuate flagrant injustice. Historical examples include 19th-century churches that refused to denounce slavery and mid-20th-century churches that remained silent on Jim Crow laws. By refraining from becoming “too political,” these churches were de facto supporters of evil institutions and laws.

A second example is the Church of England in South Africa’s (CESA) response to apartheid (1948-1994). Although the Church sought to take an “apolitical” stance, this pretense of neutrality allowed the CESA to be misled into accepting a social, economic, and political system that was cruel and oppressive.⁸ By trying to be apolitical, the church effectively sanctioned a system that tolerated profound injustice. The German church’s

capitulation to the Nazis in the 1930s represents a similar failure. By not denouncing Hitler's explicitly anti-Christian ideology, pastors failed to shepherd their churches during a time when faithful Christian discipleship was sorely needed.

During a recent election cycle, a prominent Christian leader encouraged pastors to engage in the political process by praying for leaders and preaching on controversial issues as they arise in the course of preaching through the Bible. However, he claimed that it is unwise to provide voting guides to church members or host voting registration drives in the church lobby. He argued these measures have the effect of limiting the number of people who feel "comfortable at our church."⁹ This perspective acknowledges that politics is one of many ways to love our neighbors, but cautions that the political process comes with its own set of potential pitfalls and churches should, therefore, be wary of becoming too entangled with politics and elections. Those holding to this view believe that church leaders should address moral questions in sermons and lead their congregations in prayer for those in positions of authority—while leaving most political issues to the individual consciences of their members.

Despite helpfully framing some of the questions related to Christian civic responsibility, this advice has limited real-world application because it fails to carry ideas to their logical conclusion and to describe practical action steps. These recommendations fail to grapple with specific issues, the consequences of ideas, and the reality of our two-party system.¹⁰ We should never equate the church's mission with the platform of a political party. But should Christians, and especially pastors, do more than call for cordial discourse and preach on a few moral issues? Is there an ethical imperative for Christians to vote, and if so, what biblical principles should guide us when we vote?

SHOULD CHRISTIANS VOTE?

Should American Christians vote? To answer this question, we must first understand government's God-ordained authority, America's unique form of government, and how theology might inform our voting.

As we previously noted, one Christian leader recently expressed his discomfort with hosting voter registration drives and providing voter guides to his congregation.¹¹ Although this leader believes that “voting is a good thing,” he nevertheless believes it is imprudent for the church as an institution to do anything beyond praying for candidates and preaching on moral issues. Despite this pastor's good intention to safeguard his church's mission and witness, this approach falls short of what fully realized Christian discipleship requires. If the gospel has implications for all areas of life, including politics, should not pastors strive to ensure their members are equipped (*i.e.*, registered to vote) and sufficiently informed to faithfully engage in the public square?



**CHRISTIANS ARE STEWARDS OF THE BALLOT BOX,
JUST LIKE WE ARE STEWARDS OF EVERYTHING
ELSE GOD HAS GIVEN US.**

In a constitutional republic like the United States, the locus of power is the citizenry; the government derives its authority from the people. As Alexander Hamilton explained in Federalist Paper 22, the consent of the people is the “pure original fountain of all legitimate authority.”¹² In the United States this principle is foundational to our government, and provides citizens with incredible opportunity and responsibility. Unlike billions of people around the world, Americans, through the ballot box, control their political future. Indeed, we are stewards of it, as we are stewards of everything else God has given us.

For Christian citizens, the implications of America’s form of government are even more significant when considered alongside Paul’s teaching on the purpose of government in Romans 13. According to Paul, government is ordained by God to promote good and restrain evil. God authorizes the government to wield the sword for the administration of justice. As one theologian recently explained, “The sword is God’s authorized gift to humanity for protecting life.”¹³

From these considerations, a truth with far-reaching implications for Christian political engagement emerges: Voting is an exercise in delegating God-ordained authority. Because power resides with the people in our republic, when Christians vote, they are delegating their ruling authority to others. In other words, by voting, Christians are entrusting their “sword-bearing” responsibility to officials who will govern on their behalf. Seen from this perspective, voting is a matter of stewardship; failure to vote is a failure to exercise God-given authority.

Therefore, if the act of voting is the act of delegating the exercise of the sword, pastors should communicate to their members: “This is what Christians should do.” Given the unavoidable role of politics and the direct, real-world impact that government decisions have on people’s lives, downplaying the responsibility to vote amounts to a failure in Christian discipleship and loving our neighbors comprehensively.



Now, some might push back and argue that this conception of voting and political engagement overly prioritizes the political arena. When reflecting on the Christian obligation to love our neighbors, they might argue that “political engagement is only one way of loving our neighbor and trying to be a faithful presence in the culture.”¹⁴ This is true, but we must not minimize the significance of government and the role it plays in people’s lives. Love of neighbor must be embodied in all aspects of life. Can Christians really care for their neighbors well if they are not engaging in politics, the arena where a society’s basic rights and freedoms are shaped?

Further, given the United States’ far-reaching influence in the world, how can American Christians love the people of the nations well without having a vested interest in how our government approaches the issue of religious liberty and human rights worldwide—issues which go to the heart of seeing people around the world as created in the image of God? By voting, Americans determine who will represent the United States abroad as well as the values our country will export around the world. Will America’s ambassadors be stalwart defenders of religious freedom overseas? Christians who support missionaries should care about the state of international religious freedom, an area of advocacy in which the United States exerts significant influence. Will abortion, under the euphemism of “family planning,” be funded overseas by American taxpayers, or will U.S. foreign policy value the life of the unborn? Again, American believers, by exercising their right to vote, have a direct say in these matters.

PASTORS SHOULD HELP EDUCATE AND EQUIP THEIR MEMBERS TO THINK BIBLICALLY ABOUT POLITICAL ISSUES, CANDIDATES, AND PARTY PLATFORMS.

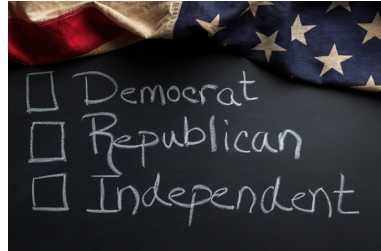
In light of these considerations, pastors should exhort their members to be involved in the political process and to vote. But voting is not enough. Pastors should also help educate and equip their members to think biblically about moral issues, candidates, and party platforms. Much of this equipping and educating should be accomplished through the regular rhythms and liturgies of the church (preaching the Word, corporate prayer, hymnody, etc.). However, for the sake of robust political discipleship, additional steps should be taken. For some congregations, this might mean providing access to voter guides and other educational material. In others, it might mean hosting workshops or Bible studies on political engagement.

Many Christians might get squeamish at these suggestions; if so, we must recall a proper understanding of “politics,” as discussed previously—that of deciding how best to organize the affairs of the community and love one another. When we realize politics is, at its core, about how we love our neighbor as we live and order our lives together, we understand there is no reason to shy away from becoming informed about how to vote. Rather, we must embrace the question. We must make room for thoughtful discussion and respectful disagreement on certain issues within the body of Christ, but we must not avoid talking about them altogether. It is not enough to espouse concern for human dignity but not support policies and candidates who will fight to overturn profound moral wrongs. In a Genesis 3 world plagued by sin, Christians are called to reverse the corroding effects of the fall wherever they exist. Our decision to cast an informed vote is an attempt to do just that.

REALITY OF OUR TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

As we seek how best to engage in politics, specifically electoral politics, we must grapple with the reality of voting in the current context of our two-party system.

When it comes to faithfully navigating the two-party system, there are many competing perspectives. Some contend that Christians ought to participate in the political process without identifying the church with either party.



Political parties typically insist on total allegiance and want their members to embrace every position in the party platform. Such allegiance can lead to an acceptance of unbiblical policies and an inability to speak prophetically to society. In order to avoid such a contingency (so the argument goes), Christians should be issue-oriented, and seek to address pressing moral concerns regardless of what parties or party platforms dictate. In other words, Christians should persuade party leaders and policymakers of the merits of their ideas, rather than accepting an entire party platform and any morally problematic aspects it may contain.

Many evangelical organizations and leaders have adopted this approach, and rightfully so, because Christians should never conflate the message of the church with that of a political party. We must evaluate political positions in light of the Bible, not the other way around.

However, while the church should never tie itself to a specific political party or movement, this fact should not be used as an excuse to not speak truthfully about where the two major parties stand on the most fundamental moral issues. Withdrawal from the political process and full assimilation into a party are equally

unacceptable positions. So, Christians must adopt an issue-based approach that is clear and honest about where the major parties and candidates stand. This approach allows for prophetic distance but does not pretend the two major parties (or their platforms) are morally equivalent on every issue.

Historically, the last president not affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican parties was Millard Fillmore, a member of the now-dissolved Whig party who served as the 13th President of the United States (1850-1853).¹⁵ For better or worse, America has a two-party system, and Christians must acknowledge and operate within this system. While the goal of Christians engaging in politics should be to persuade members of both parties to approach issues from a biblical worldview, we must decide at election time who to support. So, what biblical principles and political issues should Christians consider when deciding how to vote? Answering this question will help us decide who to support come election time.

WHAT ISSUES ARE MOST CLEAR FROM SCRIPTURE?

Christians convinced of their responsibility to vote and engage politically need to be aware of the issues at stake and know where the political parties stand. But more importantly, Christians must be grounded in what God's Word teaches. Thus, what follows is a survey of biblical teaching on a few pertinent moral issues that are currently being debated by Christians who want to navigate the political process faithfully. Some issues with moral implications include abortion, marriage, race, and poverty alleviation. Because the Republican party is commonly perceived as holding a more biblical view on the first two issues and the Democratic party on the latter two, we will pair abortion and marriage together and race and poverty alleviation together in our discussion.

Abortion and Marriage/Sexuality

On abortion and the personhood of the unborn, the Bible is clear—life begins at conception and abortion is murder (see Ex. 21:22; Ps. 139:13-16, 22:10, 51:5-6; Job 3:3; Jer. 1:4-5; Isa. 49:1; Luke 1:39-45; Gal. 1:15).¹⁶ Likewise, on marriage, the Bible is straightforward and defines marriage as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24, Mat. 19:5, Mark 10:6-9, Eph. 5:22-23). Scripture is also unambiguous regarding the moral status of homosexual conduct (Gen. 19:1-5; Lev. 18:22, 20:13, Rom. 1:24-28; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:10-11).¹⁷ Thus, on both life and sexuality, the Bible is unequivocal.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE ISSUES OF ABORTION AND MARRIAGE/SEXUALITY TODAY, THE DIVIDE BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES COULD NOT BE STARKER.

When it comes to the issues of abortion and marriage/sexuality today, the Republican and Democratic national party positions fundamentally disagree. Concerning marriage, the 2016 Republican Party platform states, “Traditional marriage and family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is the foundation for a free society and has for millennia been entrusted with rearing children and instilling cultural values.”¹⁸ The 2016 Democratic Party platform states that Democrats “applaud... [the] decision by the Supreme Court that recognized that LGBT people—like other Americans—have the right to marry the person they love.”¹⁹



On abortion, Democrats have moved away from their former position that abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare.”²⁰ The party now considers abortion to be a fundamental right that should be funded by the government. Whereas, their platform in 1992 included the language: “The goal of our nation must be to make abortion less necessary,”²¹ the 2016 platform stated: “We will continue to oppose—and seek to overturn—federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman’s access to abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment.”²² The Hyde Amendment, first passed in 1976, prohibits the use of federal funds to pay for abortion. The 2016 Democratic platform included the first explicit appeal from a major political party to repeal this provision. Four years later, every Democrat who ran for president, including the eventual nominee, publicly backed repealing the Hyde Amendment.²³

The issue of infanticide has also become part of the recent political conversation. Infanticide, the killing of infants born alive, first entered the political discussion in 2019 when New York repealed a section of the state’s public health law that had protected children born alive during failed abortions. The updated law also allows for abortion even after 24 weeks of pregnancy if the mother’s health is in jeopardy. However, the “exception to health” provision is not restricted to a physical definition and can include psychological and emotional health (subject to the medical judgment of the abortion provider). Thus, the new law is so broad that abortion is now legal until the moment of birth in New York.²⁴

Democrats have been outspoken on this issue. Following the passage of New York’s abortion law in 2019, Delegate Kathy Tran (D) introduced a similar bill in Virginia to legalize abortion through the third trimester. When asked if her bill would allow for an abortion even after a woman showed “physical signs she is about to give birth,” Tran responded, “My bill would allow that, yes.”²⁵ Responding to these comments and the public outrage that ensued, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam (D), a former

pediatric neurologist, was asked what would happen to a baby who survived a late-term abortion under the proposed legislation. His response was shocking: “The infant would be delivered. The infant would be kept comfortable. The infant would be resuscitated, if that’s what the mother and family desired. And then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother.”²⁶

Republicans likewise have addressed the emerging issue of infanticide. In response to the developments in New York, Virginia, and other states, Senator Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) introduced the *Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act* in January 2019.²⁷ The proposed legislation would require doctors present during a failed abortion—an abortion that results in the birth of a living infant—to provide the same level of care that would be offered to any other baby at the same stage of development. Doctors who did not provide proper care would be subject to criminal prosecution. Unfortunately, Senate Democrats showed no willingness to support the bill, and on February 25, 2019, denied cloture (i.e., end debate and move to vote on the bill) on the motion to proceed. Only three Senate Democrats voted to advance the bill to a final vote.²⁸ Democrats in the House refused even to consider the bill, despite Republicans asking House Speaker Nancy Pelosi 80 times to schedule a vote.²⁹ The refusal by House Democrats to acknowledge the issue of infants surviving abortions extended even further when House Republicans requested a hearing to bring in witnesses to investigate the depth of this issue. Since none of the Democrat-led committees were willing to hold a hearing on the topic, congressional Republicans were forced to hold their own hearing in the basement of the Capitol on September 10, 2019.³⁰

In February 2020, the United States Senate considered two bills to protect unborn children: the *Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act* and, once again, the *Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act*. Although a majority of senators supported the bills, both fell short of the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture and



overcome a Democrat-led filibuster.³¹ If passed, the *Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act* would have protected the unborn from abortion procedures after the point that they can feel pain (20 weeks). And as mentioned, the *Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act* would have required health care practitioners to exercise the same degree of professional skill, care, and diligence to an infant who survives an abortion as they would for any other baby born at the same gestational age. In other words, children who have already been born were the focus of this bill. However, despite the need for both pieces of legislation, only two Democrats voted for the *Pain-Capable* bill, and only three voted for the *Born-Alive* bill. Tragically, both bills would have become law had Democrats not filibustered them; the Trump administration supported them and had pledged to sign them into law.³²

Another issue that the Bible addresses is marriage and human sexuality. Similar to abortion, there is a very clear worldview divide between Republicans and Democrats on human sexuality. As reflected in their party platform, Republicans believe marriage is the union between a man and a woman and think that every child deserves both a mom and a dad.³³ Republicans are also willing to argue that biological sex is not fluid and that adopting the aggressive social agenda of LGBT activists puts women and girls in danger. Virtually all Democrats, on the other hand,

embrace the 2015 *Obergefell* Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage, believe American foreign policy should advance LGBT rights around the world, and insist on expanding SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) laws to fight discrimination.³⁴

Democrats also support the *Equality Act*, which would codify sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in U.S. civil rights law, thereby granting them the same status as race and national origin. This perpetuates the lie that one's sexual inclinations are equal to one's skin color, something we as Christians know will cause much harm to our neighbors if left unchecked. The *Equality Act* also undermines religious protections currently in place by stripping individuals of a *Religious Freedom and Restoration Act* (RFRA) claim or defense. If the *Equality Act* were to become law, the government could compel Christians and members of any faith with objections to same-sex marriage and homosexuality to violate their religious beliefs in a variety of ways. In May 2019, the House of Representatives passed the *Equality Act* by a 236-173 vote; 228 Democrats voted for the bill compared to only eight Republicans who supported it.³⁵

In terms of biblical clarity and priority, Christians have rightly recognized abortion and human sexuality as primary moral concerns. Unfortunately, as evidenced by recent votes and party platforms, one of the two major political parties has adopted positions at odds with the Bible's teaching on these issues. We will evaluate this worldview divide later, but for now, it is worth underlining this point: the implications of a person's worldview are far-reaching. As reflected in recent congressional votes, the worldview of a political party can have serious, even deadly, consequences.

But what does the Bible teach concerning some of the other moral issues currently being debated? Where do the two major parties stand on them?

Poverty and Race

Two other issues with great moral significance are race and poverty. Scripture reveals that God cares about both, which means Christians must seek to apply biblical wisdom in appraising how the political parties address them.

God's concern for the poor is a pervasive theme throughout the Bible. Exhortations to care for the poor abound (Prov. 3:27- 28, 22:22-23, 31:8-9; Isa. 1:17, 10:1-3; Zech. 7:8-10), and Jesus himself displayed remarkable concern and compassion for the poor in his healing and teaching ministry (Mat. 11:4-6, 25:45; Luke 6:20-21, 14:14). Jesus' half-brother, James, wrote that "pure and undefiled religion" includes care for orphans and widows (James 1:27). A Christian cannot open their Bible and ignore God's call to care for the poor.

Concerning racial equality, the Bible clearly states that all people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Additionally, the good news of the gospel is for everyone; Christ died for everyone, and in him, believers from every tongue, nation, and tribe are reconciled to God and each other in "one new man" (Eph. 2:14-16). In terms of access to God, the Bible is clear: the new covenant abolished distinctions based on race (Gal. 3:28-29, Col. 3:11). In heaven, people from "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" will praise God (Rev. 7:9). Consequently, reviving these worldly distinctions of treating people, and acting adversely to people based on their skin color (or background or ethnicity) is sinful and must be strongly repudiated by the church.



Clearly, the Bible speaks to poverty and race. Committed Christians are obligated to care about these issues; faithfulness to God’s Word requires nothing less. However, the two main political parties’ positions on race and economic issues are less straightforward than their positions on abortion and human sexuality. Neither party is claiming to advocate for more poverty or racism. On the contrary, both parties say both poverty and racism are important matters to address—they just differ on how they should be addressed. How, then, do we evaluate whose policies on race and poverty are more faithful to Scripture?

FOR CHRISTIANS SEEKING TO APPLY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO THESE ISSUES, DISCERNMENT, PRAYER, AND WISDOM—AND ROOM FOR DISAGREEMENT—IS NEEDED.

There is no easy answer to this question. On these issues, like many others, tension arises when it comes to application. As Jonathan Leeman has noted, “The movement from core Christian principles to public policies is seldom a straight line but often a ‘complex and jagged’ path through layers of conditioning factors and prudential considerations over which Christians of good conscience might disagree.”³⁶ While some policy prescriptions are obvious—policies or laws that discriminate based on race, national origin, or sex are wrong—there is room to debate policies such as affirmative action, prison reform, and other issues that predominantly affect minority communities. For Christians seeking to apply biblical principles to these issues, discernment, prayer, and wisdom—and room for disagreement—is needed.

It is fashionable to think the Republican party is “anti-poor” and opposed to minority rights, and think the Democratic party is supportive of the poor and minorities. However, this simplified conception lacks adequate factual support. Let us consider the issue of race relations and legislation that disproportionately affects minority communities.

Some may note that Democrats appear more focused on the plight of minorities and the poor. The Democratic party typically gives more support to affirmative action programs and other efforts designed to help minority communities, so the argument goes. A full examination of the merits of these efforts—and whether they truly help minorities and the poor—is beyond the scope of this discussion. For our purposes, it will suffice to note that the need to care for the poor and marginalized is evident in the Bible. However, the Bible does not outline a specific remedy. Likewise, the Bible is clear that we must not discriminate based on race, but disagreements over if and when this is occurring will naturally arise. We must be prepared to be challenged, admit shortcomings, and examine our policy positions in light of the Bible (not the other way around). But at the same time, Christians are not biblically obligated to support Democratic proposals for the poor or minorities (indeed, some might argue such proposals harm rather than help them), just as they are not obligated to support Republican proposals. Unlike abortion and marriage, neither party’s policy proposals are endorsed by the Bible. Applying biblical principles to issues related to race often requires situational awareness and discernment.

Concerning poverty, there is no doubt many individual Republicans and Democrats care for the poor. It is simply misleading to conflate the parties’ different economic philosophies with moral indifference—a conflation that contributes to the popular conception of all Republicans being “against the poor.” The fact that conservatives believe in the efficacy of limited government and free markets in addressing

poverty does not indicate apathy toward marginalized communities. On the contrary, conservatives believe that the best conditions for economic flourishing are created when the government's authority is decentralized. The Bible does not endorse a specific economic system—though it does favor some while disfavoring others (the commandment against stealing shows respect for private property, as does the Old Testament's regard for inheritances). At any rate, there is room for disagreement on how to address such issues biblically—unlike the questions of abortion and human sexuality, discussed previously.

Regarding important laws designed to ensure racial equality in America, the historical record shows that Republicans and Democrats have often worked together to advance equal rights. When Congress passed the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 80 percent of House Republicans and 82 percent of Senate Republicans joined 63 percent of House Democrats and 69 percent of Senate Democrats in voting in favor of legislation that outlawed discrimination based on race, ended segregation in public places such as public schools, and prohibited the unequal application of voter registration requirements.³⁷ The bipartisan work on the *Civil Rights Act* represented a historic legislative accomplishment that helped move the country closer to realizing its founding ideal that all men and women are created equal.

In 2018, Republican and Democrat lawmakers again worked together to pass the *First Step Act* designed to reduce recidivism through vocational training and education courses. House Republicans (226 of them)³⁸ joined 134 Democrats in advancing this bill. According to the NAACP, African Americans and Hispanics make up 32 percent of the general population, but 56 percent of those incarcerated.³⁹ Thus, efforts to reform the criminal justice system represent steps in addressing problems that disproportionately affect minority communities.⁴⁰

Further, the African American unemployment rate plummeted under Republican leadership, hitting an all-time low of 5.9 percent in May 2018 when Republicans controlled the executive and legislative branches of government.⁴¹ During this time, black teen unemployment fell to 19.3 percent, another all-time low.⁴² While the factors contributing to this picture are many, and correlation does not automatically mean causation, the fact remains that recently, under Republican national leadership, more minorities are getting jobs.

On contested issues related to race relations and poverty alleviation, Christians should extend charity to one another. It is important to remember that there are Christians, particularly African American believers, who are uniquely affected by the legacy and lingering effects of racism in many parts of the country. As a result, these believers have historically approached the political process with a set of priorities influenced by concerns often unfamiliar to believers of other backgrounds. This reality underscores our need for grace as we discuss these issues and the importance of leaving room for disagreement where the Bible allows.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Neither political party is a Christian party in the sense that every policy position they advocate for lines up perfectly with the Bible. In fact, there are numerous policy issues on which the Bible does not speak. On issues such as these, Christians should debate charitably and extend liberty toward one another on points where they disagree. There are a number of issues not mentioned in this publication on which we can draw biblical application, and Christians may consider how those issues impact their engagement and voting.

IN RECENT YEARS, THE TWO MAJOR U.S. POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE CLEARLY ADOPTED POSITIONS ON MORAL ISSUES WHICH THE BIBLE DOES SPEAK TO.

However, it is also true in recent years that the two major political parties have adopted clear positions on moral issues on which the Bible does speak. For example, on the issues of abortion and human sexuality, the parties are now on opposite ends of the spectrum. For Christians who privilege the authority of Scripture over that of any political party, it is tragic that any candidate for public office would hold (and in some cases even champion) positions on issues that disregard and flaunt God's unchanging moral law. For the sake of intellectual honesty, it is important to recognize that the Republican party has generally embraced policy positions on abortion and human sexuality that are consistent with Scripture, while the Democratic party has embraced positions on these issues that are at odds with Scripture.

Again, consider the topic of unborn life. On this issue, not only is the Bible's teaching clear, the application for public policy is also clear. For example, the Bible teaches that every human being is a unique image-bearer of God and possesses inherent dignity. Thus, human life is supremely valuable, and there is a duty to preserve life. From the perspective of the Bible, it is right and just to support laws and policies that preserve life. The Bible's moral appraisal of abortion and its implications for public policy are obvious: killing unborn children is morally wrong and ought to be opposed. Mapped out onto the political realities of a two-party system, the outworking of this moral calculus is clear.

Moreover, Christians should employ a method of moral triage as they consider their political engagement. As Christian ethicist Andrew Walker points out, with abortion, there is a "greater

moral urgency to repeal morally unjust and codified laws than there is the priority to ameliorate social evils that exist because of social wickedness and criminal behavior.”⁴³ In other words, the existence of a positive right to terminate the life of unborn children calls for immediate action. Christians concerned about the unborn—the most vulnerable class of people in our country—must leverage their influence, resources, and time to correct this wrong as soon as possible. As part of a holistic effort to create a culture of life, Christians must engage the political process to pass laws that protect life.

On human sexuality, the Bible is clear that God ordained marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Marriage is the institutional means by which God’s image-bearers fulfill the divine command to fill and subdue the earth. The Bible holds marriage in extremely high regard, and changing its definition, like the Supreme Court tried to do in 2015, is a direct affront to God’s authority. While supporters of same-sex marriage claim to be on the “right side of history,” they are on the wrong side of the Bible—not to mention biology, anthropology, and sociology—on this important issue. Republicans and Democrats differ greatly on this topic, with most Republicans rejecting the sexual revolution represented by the push for LGBT rights and most Democrats embracing and promoting it.

Thus, concerning the moral issues of life and human sexuality, one of the major parties has tragically embraced positions manifestly at odds with biblical morality. The result has been increased moral confusion in the culture, the undermining of human dignity, and the increased loss of innocent human life in the womb.

While poverty is also an important moral issue in the Bible, the specific action commanded is to concern oneself with care for the poor. The Bible does not command us to support affirmative action admissions quotas or to oppose them. Neither does

it command us to implement government-run anti-poverty programs or oppose them in favor of private ones. The biblical position being prescribed (concern for the poor) simply doesn't break down along party lines, like it does with abortion and sexuality. Like many other issues, policies concerning poverty alleviation or race relations require serious and careful analysis before making a determination on them—an analysis that starts with Scripture and biblical principles but which also requires us to use our God-given analytical abilities to draw upon other fields of knowledge that are necessary for thoroughly understanding the issue.

ALTHOUGH NEITHER POLITICAL PARTY PERFECTLY REPRESENTS CHRISTIANS, PARTY PLATFORMS DO ALLOW US TO MAKE THOUGHTFUL JUDGMENTS REGARDING WHO WE WILL SUPPORT AT ELECTION TIME.

Thus, although neither political party perfectly represents Christians, party platforms do allow us to make thoughtful judgments regarding who we will support at election time. These platforms, which serve as proposed governing philosophies, allow Christians to see how the political parties prioritize (or not) issues on which the Bible clearly speaks.



Studies show that politicians are increasingly voting in line with their party's platform—80 percent of the time over the last 30 years.⁴⁴ Consequently, a party's platform is a good indicator of how politicians from that party will vote. Thus, for Christians, in so far as a platform recommends policies informed by biblical morality, it is easier to make an informed decision about which party to support based on their platform.

The significance of the party platforms was recently noted by Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary. Discussing how Christians should think about politics, Mohler highlighted the importance of various issues such as religious liberty, abortion, appointments to the federal judiciary, sexuality, marriage, and hermeneutics (i.e., how one interprets the Constitution). Underscoring the importance of the official party platforms and the role they play in choosing who to support, Mohler explained, "It comes down to the position articulated by the party. That's going to be most important."⁴⁵ Looking forward to the summer conventions, he added, "By the time that the political platforms of the two parties are released, I think there are going to be very few Americans who are going to say, 'I really don't know which way I'm going to vote,' if they have any consistent worldview whatsoever." For Mohler, as for many Christians, the worldview schism reflected in the platforms of the political parties should be a major consideration for Christians seeking to faithfully steward their vote.

In short, if theologically conservative Christians appear increasingly aligned with one party, it is because the other party has taken positions on moral issues that oppose the Bible's explicit teaching. Thus, while it is true that Christians should not feel perfectly at "home" in either political party,⁴⁶ is it fair to suggest that they should feel equally comfortable in both?

The answer would seem to be "no."

CONCLUSION

Christians are called to honor God in every area of their lives. Therefore, we should seek to submit everything to the Lord, including our political engagement. As Christians, we have many reasons to care about our government and the political process. Engaging in politics is not only unavoidable, it is also an opportunity to honor God and show love to our neighbors.

American Christians, with our right to vote, have a unique opportunity and duty to affect the political process. Christians should, therefore, prayerfully approach the issue of political engagement and seek godly counsel. We must filter all issues, candidates, and party platforms through a Christian worldview and submit them to God's Word. What political or moral issues does the Bible address? Are there policies that are explicitly condemned by the Bible? Are there areas where well-meaning Christians can disagree? These are important questions, and Christians must be able to think through them with biblical clarity and wisdom.

For pastors, there is additional responsibility. As those charged with discipling their flocks, it is not enough to acknowledge that various policy positions are profoundly evil and yet not encourage action. Voting is a matter of stewardship, and Christians should be encouraged and equipped to steward their vote in a way that honors God and loves their neighbors. The gospel applies to all areas of life, including politics and public policy, and pastors must help their people make the connection between biblical principles

**AS CHRISTIANS, WE MUST FOLLOW OUR CONVICTIONS
TO THEIR LOGICAL END BY VOTING FOR CANDIDATES
AND PARTIES THAT SUPPORT CLEAR BIBLICAL VALUES.**

and political responsibilities. In other words, it is not enough to pray for candidates and speak on a handful of issues when there is the ability to do more. While pastors should never pronounce a “Thus saith the Lord” where there is no warrant, for the sake of robust discipleship, they should make sure their congregations are equipped with the resources necessary to honor God in the voting booth.

Compelled by love for our neighbors and a desire to steward our God-given responsibilities, we must, as Christians, engage in the political process. But we must engage biblically. This requires that we be prepared to grapple with the moral issues of our day, the reality of our two-party system, and follow our Christian convictions to their logical end by voting for candidates and parties that support clear biblical values.



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- 1 Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 23–53. Grudem highlights five predominant views about Christians and government that he argues are misguided: government should compel religion, government should exclude religion, all government is evil and demonic, “do evangelism, not politics,” and “do politics, not evangelism.” He proposes a model he describes as “Significant Christian Influence on Government,” pp. 55–76. A classic categorization of how Christians have related to culture and politics is H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1951). Niebuhr’s five options are: “Christian Against Culture,” “Christ of Culture,” “Christ Above Culture,” “Christ and Culture in Paradox,” and “Christ Transforming Culture.”
- 2 Carl Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1947), 65.
- 3 In fact, the view that Christians are violating a version of the idea of “separation of church and state” by bringing their beliefs into the public square is a common critique raised by progressive secular elites. However, this criticism is unfair because it misses the intention of the Founders who did not intend to erect a “wall of separation” between all expressions of faith in God and all aspects of public life. The idea that Christian theology is somehow antithetical to law or politics is rooted in the idea that the public square must be thoroughly desacralized and that only secular worldviews are permissible.

But the evacuation of God and biblical values from the public square is an unnecessary concession to secularists who demand a “value neutral” public square. As Richard John Neuhaus argued years ago, the notion that religiously informed beliefs must be kept out of public discourse is false

and based on the erroneous belief that secular values are non-religious. Everyone enters the public square with a worldview grounded in fundamental beliefs about what is true; everyone has commitments formed by an overarching metanarrative.

Then-Senator Barack Obama articulated the importance of having a moral basis for politics in 2006. Understanding that the solution to certain problems required moral transformation, Obama knew it was a mistake to argue that religious convictions play no part when it comes to formulating policy. He said: “Secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square. Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, William Jennings Bryan, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King—indeed, the majority of great reformers in American history—were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause. So to say that men and women should not inject their ‘personal morality’ into public policy debates is a practical absurdity. Our law is by definition a codification of morality, much of it grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.” Source of Obama quote: Michael Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 246.

- 4 Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ’s Rule* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2016), 83. Leeman, quoting Judith Squires, argues that “politics,” properly conceived, is a much broader conception than the institutions of state.
- 5 Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*, 44.
- 6 Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ’s Rule*, 186. Leeman argues that the institutional question to ask pertaining to Genesis 9 is whom does God give authority to do what? He argues that “God gives human

beings the authority to wield the sword... the inevitable and unavoidable implication of these two verses is that groups of people living in society must form or support a government—an orderly set of publicly recognized institutional processes—in order to employ this God-given justice mechanism justly.” See Leeman, pp. 186-188.

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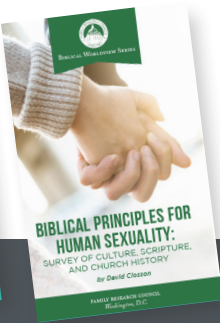
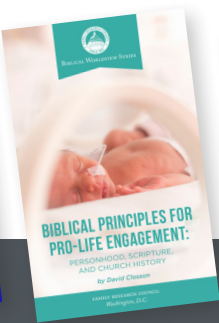
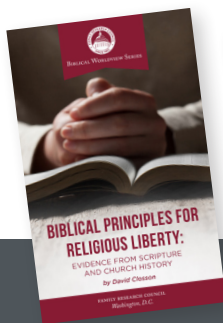
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- 46 Note that the challenges facing American Christians regarding politics are not unique; our brothers and sisters in other nations face the same tensions. That is because there is no “Christian” political party; no party aligns perfectly with the Bible, even in countries where dozens of political parties participate in any one election. On this side of heaven, faithful Christians will always be choosing from less than perfect options. Wisdom, prayer, and counsel are indispensable for Christian political engagement. Christians living in countries that allow their citizens to participate in the electoral process should be grateful for their freedoms and remember that many Christians around the world do not have these privileges. Thus, while no political system is perfect, Christians who can participate in choosing their government ought to do so with gratitude and seek to make decisions informed by the biblical principles outlined in this publication.

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