



# Civics 101 | Christians and Political Involvement

## Overview

Never before have biblical principles come under such heavy attack in the public square. Ironically, many Christians who have the greatest passion for the issues of life, marriage and family, and religious liberty have chosen to opt out of the political process, leaving the debate over our nation’s values to those who reject biblical truths.

In the absence of a societal consensus on the difference between right and wrong, and as the moral fabric of our society unravels, it is imperative for Christians to recommit to prayerful, informed, and active involvement in the political process.

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### What Does Scripture Say?

Perhaps the single most important Biblical reason for Christians to be involved in the political process stems from Jesus’ repeated command to “love your neighbor” (e.g., Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27-28). The Bible is clear that to “love your neighbor” requires **action** on the part of Christians to show involvement and compassion to both strangers and friends alike. We cannot ignore the weakening of public policy and societal decay any more than the Good Samaritan could ignore the robbery victim by the side of the road.

In addition to the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Bible contains several other mandates that touch on a Christian’s responsibility involving public policy:

- Luke 10:25-37** Love requires that we take action.
- Matt 25:31-46** We must take seriously man’s physical, emotional, and social needs.
- Mark 12:13-17** We have a duty to government, including participation.
- Romans 13:1-4** Government is ordained of God to reward good and to punish evil.
- 1 Timothy 2:1-4** Government maintains the social order so that the Gospel may go forth.
- Matthew 5:13-15** We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
- Ephesians 5:15** We are to be discerning of the times and make the most of every opportunity.



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**Deuteronomy 28** God provides a multitude of blessings to the nation that collectively follows his commands; vice versa to the disobedient nation.

In Romans 13:1-4 in particular, we see that civil government is established by God. **So what does it mean to us as believers that God established a representative democracy in America?** Given our form of government, how would the Lord have us steward our civic responsibilities?

In a representative democracy like the United States, we are literally asked to **participate**. In President Lincoln's memorable words, we have a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people."<sup>1</sup> Our form of government clearly requires our participation. **We have the privilege and responsibility to hold our government responsible through voting and civic engagement.**

World-renowned theologian Dr. Wayne Grudem's book *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* aids in addressing common misconceptions regarding the role of faith in influencing politics. Grudem describes Chapter 1 and 2 of his book as follows:

In this book I start out by explaining what seem to me to be five clearly wrong (and harmful) views about Christians and politics: (1) "government should compel religion," (2) "government should exclude religion," (3) "all government is evil and demonic," (4) "the church should do evangelism, not politics," and (5) "the church should do politics, not evangelism." As an alternative, I argue for what I think should be the correct view: (6) "significant Christian influence on government."<sup>2</sup>

Our faith in God should influence our values in **all** of life, **including the political arena**. We shouldn't shy away from injecting our perspective about right and wrong into public debates. The Bible contains many examples of believers in God seeking to influence the secular governments of their time. Consider Daniel's words to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:27, and John the Baptist's reproach of King Herod in Luke 3:18-20.

In Matthew 5:13-16, God calls us to be "salt" and "light" in the world. Salt is a preservative and light brings clarity into dark places. **The Lord intends for us to have a preservative, clear, and positive impact on the world around us.** When Christians are uninformed or uninvolved, a vacuum is created.

Dr. Grudem puts it this way:

*[I]f Christians do not speak publicly about moral and ethical issues facing a nation, who will? Where will people learn about ethics? Where will a nation learn how to tell right from wrong? Perhaps from Hollywood movies? From their friends at work or at the local bar? From their professional counselors? From their elementary school teachers? But where do these people learn about right and wrong?*

The simple fact is that if Christians do not speak publicly about what the Bible teaches regarding the issues of right and wrong, there aren't many other good sources for finding any transcendent source of ethics, any source outside of ourselves and our own subjective feelings and consciences.<sup>3</sup>

In his concluding remarks about "significant Christian influence on government," Dr. Grudem asserts that "... individual Christians have at least an obligation to be well-informed and to vote intelligently. And I believe that Christians should also seriously consider whether God is calling them to do more ..."<sup>4</sup>

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## What about the “Separation of Church and State”?

In today’s often confusing culture, many Christians question what their involvement in government should be. Misconceptions about the so-called “separation of Church and State” compound the issue. How involved should Christians be in government? Can church leaders speak out about political issues? What role should our personal faith play in making policy decisions? Aren’t I supposed to check my religion at the door? These are just a few of the dilemmas faced by Christians.

**The words “separation of Church and State” are not found anywhere in the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or the Declaration of Independence.** Yet, every day, you hear that Christian values have no place in political debate because of the “separation of Church and State.” The truth is that the phrase “separation of Church and State” came from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1802 to a group of Christians from the Baptist denomination. These Christians were concerned that accepting the Constitution could ultimately allow the federal government to restrict religious freedom. Jefferson reassured them in this letter that the Constitution “build[s] a wall of separation between Church and State,”<sup>5</sup> which would protect them from interference by the government with their religious beliefs.

Thus the phrase was designed to explain that the **government could not cross over to interfere in the Church’s affairs**. But, in 1947, the U.S. Supreme Court took that phrase and turned it backwards to mean that religion must not be allowed to influence the State’s affairs. The Court said:

The “establishment of religion” clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another ... No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa.<sup>6</sup>

This case drew new lines to keep the Church out of government that had never before been considered part of the Constitution. The language intended to keep the government out of the Church’s operations was interpreted to mean the Church must stay out of the government’s operations. Courts have been applying this interpretation ever since to strike down public prayer, religious monuments, and even Christmas displays.

Since 1947, anti-religious groups have used the term “separation of Church and State” to silence people of faith from speaking about their religious beliefs in the public square. But, in many cases, this is an intimidation tactic and is not legally accurate.

## The Importance of Christian Involvement

Without Christians actively involved in public policy decisions, people are harmed and consequences ripple throughout society. Consider the following major public policy harms that have occurred during the last three decades while many Christians sat in silence:

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- **Abortion** – When the Supreme Court found a constitutional fundamental right in 1973 for a woman to have an abortion, the national abortion rate increased by more than 1,000%.
- **Divorce** – When “no-fault” divorce laws were enacted and spouses were empowered to divorce their partners for no reason at all, the national divorce rate skyrocketed.
- **Pornography** – When county prosecutors stopped enforcing obscenity laws, hard-core pornography proliferated.
- **Homosexuality** – When laws granting special rights based on homosexual behavior were adopted, the way was cleared for public schools to teach that homosexuality is normal and that same-sex relationships are the moral equivalent of marriage between a man and a woman.
- **Lottery Gambling** – When states began allowing state-run lotteries, it provided false hopes for the poor while continuing to worsen their financial situation.
- **Casino Gambling** – After the acceptance of state-run lotteries, the road was paved for the expansion of riverboat and tribal casino gambling, bringing more gambling addictions, bankruptcies, crime, child abuse, divorces, and suicides.

When considering the modern political questions of our day, we would do well to refer to Dr. Grudem’s *Politics According to the Bible*. The second part of the text is a comprehensive examination of about sixty political topics, presenting direct biblical teachings alongside broader biblical principles, as well as legal arguments, alternative positions, and observations of facts from the world around us. Grudem himself encourages readers to “skip around” in the book and go to the topics they find most interesting.<sup>7</sup>

## Talking Points

- **The Holy Bible provides a clear directive for believers to engage in public policy.** Participating in the democratic process is an act of worship in accordance with Scripture like Romans 13:1-4.
- **If Christians do not speak publicly about moral and ethical issues facing a nation, who will?** If we do not vote our values, we are exposed to the attacks of those that oppose us.
- **The First Amendment does not ban religious people from influencing government.** In fact, nowhere in the Constitution does it mention the “separation of Church and State.”

## Resources

Center for Arizona Policy (CAP), [www.azpolicy.org](http://www.azpolicy.org)

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*Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* by Dr. Wayne Grudem

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln. *The Gettysburg Address: Nicolay Copy* (November 1863); Series 3, General Correspondence, 1837-1897; The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (Washington, D. C.: American Memory Project, [2000-02]), [www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html) (last visited Sept. 26, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* 18 (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Grudem, *supra* note 2, at 69 (emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup> Grudem, *supra* note 2, at 76.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists*, Jan. 1, 1802, [www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html](http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html) (last viewed Sept. 26, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> *Everson v. Bd. of Ed. of Ewing Twp.*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947).

<sup>7</sup> Grudem, *supra* note 2, at 16.