

JESUS IS KING

Week 1: King of Kings and Lord of Lords

NCAC Sunday School: September 8, 2024



SHOULD WE EVEN HAVE THIS CLASS?

What is politics?

According to Merriam-Webster, one definition of politics is “the total complex of relations between people living in society.” Thus, on a broad level we might say that politics is simply an attempt to answer the question, “How do we live together?”

But more specifically, when we think of politics, we’re often referring to things like “actions or activities concerned with achieving and using power in a country or society” (*Collins Dictionary*) or “activities that relate to influencing the actions and policies of a government or getting and keeping power in a government” (*Britannica Dictionary*).

It’s often said that “two things you should never talk about are religion or politics.” In this class we’re going to talk about *both*.

Why is politics such a divisive issue that is often difficult to discuss with others?

If politics is so divisive, why should we have a Sunday School class on this topic?

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

Basic Principles for our Course:

- We want to keep the Bible as our guide, so let’s keep our discussions rooted in biblical principles and use Scripture to support our points.
- It’s impossible that any one of us is 100% correct on everything related to this topic, so let’s be humble and open to learning from others.
- Much disagreement is the result of not fully understanding each other, so let’s aim to be good listeners who ask clarifying questions and who avoid making assumptions.
- Understand that it *is* possible to agree on biblical principles while disagreeing on how to *apply* those principles, so let’s aim to show each other grace even if we don’t agree on everything.
- Our goal is to discuss broad, lasting biblical principles for political engagement, so let’s avoid talking about specific candidates or making a case for how we should vote this November.

A few resources (besides the Bible!) which might be helpful:

- *Politics According to the Bible* by Wayne Grudem (Zondervan, 2010)
- *Subjects and Citizens* by Michael P. Jensen (Matthias Media, 2024)
- TheGospelCoalition.org/topics/Government

JESUS IS KING

One of the greatest political statements of all times can be found in Revelation 19 where John describes his vision of Jesus' upcoming return to earth:

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war...¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Rev 19:11, 14-16)

What stands out to you regarding this image of Jesus? How is the scene depicted in Revelation 19 different from what we encounter in modern politics and all the issues that surround it?

How should the truths revealed in Revelation 19 shape our perspective regarding political issues in our day?

As we await the return of Jesus the King, we must remember that even now Jesus rules over all and remains sovereign over all the kingdoms of this world:

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

What do these verses tell us about Jesus with regard to His reign?

What are the implications of those truths for us as we think about and engage in political processes today?

POLITICS 1.0 AND POLITICS 2.0

Consider the opening of Paul's letter to the Romans:

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations... (Rom 1:1-15)

What do Paul's words tell us about Jesus and Jesus' desire for His Church as we await His return?

Drawing on the "Two Kingdoms" doctrine, which was heavily influenced by Augustine in *The City of God*, Michael Jensen encourages us to think of politics in terms of Politics 1.0 and Politics 2.0:

"If there is a 'Politics 1.0', represented by Caesar and the Roman Empire, then Paul sees the church living out a 'Politics 2.0', with Jesus Christ reigning in the kingdom of God. Paul shares with the Roman Christians three driving and unforgettable principles—a **three-point manifesto**, if you will—for his Politics 2.0." (*Subjects and Citizens*, pp. 19-20)

First, Jesus is Lord of Lords. (Rom 10:9; Rev 19:16)

"The Christian faith begins with an overtly political announcement: 'Jesus is Lord'. This is the apostle Paul's own summary of the Christian gospel. It's a message about who rules. *Who is in charge of the world?* The claim of Christianity is quite simple: Jesus is. Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah of Israel, is Lord. *Who has ultimate power?* Jesus Christ. *Who governs human affairs?* Jesus, the Lord." (*Subjects and Citizens*, p. 20)

Second, when we worship Jesus as Lord, we're making a political statement. (Rom 12:1; Phil 2:9-11)

"...whenever Christians gather together, we declare our citizenship of the heavenly kingdom. With our lips and in our lives, we seek to express this deepest of allegiances. When we worship Jesus as Lord, we are making a thoroughly 'political' statement, because we are making a claim about who is in power. We cannot be apolitical as Christians; we are thoroughly political from the beginning. Christian faith is *not* adherence to a philosophy or a lifestyle; *it is loyalty to a King.*" (*Subjects and Citizens*, pp. 21-22)

Third, Jesus is a different kind of Ruler who modeled a different way to live. (Mk 10:45; Rom 12:14-16)

"...we know power in human life mostly in its distorted forms: as self-assertion, exploitation, abuse, and even tyranny....In his letter to the Romans, however, Paul explains at great length how Jesus Christ was an entirely *different* kind of ruler....The story of Jesus the Lord is the story

not of a crushing rule but of a freely given grace, despite everything that human beings are.... [Jesus] rules not by the exercise of sheer power, but by the humble service of those he is given to rule. Even though he is humble enough to be crucified for the sake of others, all of human history *will* run his way. All things *will* be put under his feet.” (*Subjects and Citizens*, pp. 22-23)

WISE AND LOVING NON-CONFORMISTS

Note how Paul begins Romans chapters 12-15, a large passage of Scripture that some have called a “constitution” for Christian living:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1-2)

In Roman culture, being a good citizen meant worshipping Roman gods and swearing allegiance to Caesar. In light of that, how might obeying verse 1 be seen as making a political statement?

What might these early believers have anticipated after swearing ultimate allegiance to Jesus?

In what ways are Christians to be non-conformists (v. 2)? How do we accomplish this effectively?

So, what does all that mean for us? Jensen points out three tendencies of Christians regarding politics that each have some truth but that are also all deficient in some ways:

- Concerned about the advancing de-Christianization of our nation’s culture and political scene, some Christians want to fight to maintain or restore Christian values (possibly even a Christian identity) within the political scene.
- Knowing God’s concern for the oppressed, the poor, and the outcast, some Christians believe we should be primarily committed to issues of “social justice,” without much concern for whether or not people come to know and love Jesus.
- Frustrated by the current state of politics, some Christians choose to opt out of Politics 1.0 altogether and instead focus exclusively on sharing the Gospel, while just watching our world go whichever way it wants to go.

In light of what we see in Scripture, for each tendency where do you find at least some biblical agreement? Where is each view lacking in biblical support?