

JESUS IS KING

Week 3: What is the Purpose of Human Government?

NCAC Sunday School: September 22, 2024

What are some ways you have personally benefited from the government?

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 Brief Review:

- The Bible presents Jesus as the King of Kings, who will one day return to establish His Kingdom in full (Rev. 19:11-16). Because of this, Christians can live with hope for the *future*.
- The Bible also tells us Jesus is even now ruling sovereignly over all the kingdoms of the world (Col. 1:15-20). Because of this, Christians can live with hope for the *present*.
- When we embrace Jesus as Lord and then worship Jesus as King we are making a political statement because we are declaring our conviction about who holds true and ultimate power.
- Although Jesus will one day return in full glory, He is a different kind of king from what we typically see: Jesus rules by the humble and loving service of those He is given to rule.
- To help us keep politics in perspective, it may be helpful to distinguish between Politics 1.0 (the City of Man or human government) and Politics 2.0 (the City of God or Jesus' Kingdom).
- Our engagement in Politics 1.0 must be shaped by our commitment to Politics 2.0, which must always hold our highest loyalty, our greatest concern, and our deepest passion.

TODAY: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT?

Why is there value in knowing what the Bible has to say about God's purpose for human government?

HOW DID HUMAN GOVERNMENT BEGIN?

The first indication of God's endorsement of some form of civil government in human society is found in Genesis, just after Noah and his family came out of the Ark:

⁵ *And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.*

⁶ *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:5-6, ESV)*

What does this tell us about what God holds to be good and right regarding how human beings are to live together?

"No further details are given here regarding civil government. But in speaking these words to Noah, God establishes the obligation to carry out the most severe punishment (the taking of human life) in retribution for the most horrible crime (the murder of another human being). Once this principle is established, then the imposition of lesser penalties for lesser crimes is also validated, since if a government has the right to carry out the most severe form of punishment, then it certainly has the right to carry out lesser punishments for lesser crimes as well...

"The command given to Noah is significant for our purposes in the twenty-first century because that event took place long before the establishment of the people of Israel...The commands to Noah in Genesis 9 were given at the beginning of the reestablishment of human society after God destroyed all but Noah's family...Therefore careful biblical interpretation would not limit the principles of Genesis 9:5-6 to the time of the Old Testament only or to the nation of Israel only, for neither limitation is supported by the context in which these statements are found." (*Grudem, Politics According to the Bible, p. 78*)

The first mention in Scripture of an official kingdom comes in Genesis 10, when we're told the origin of the kingdom that would one day attempt to build the Tower of Babel:

⁸ *Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord."* ¹⁰ *The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and ¹² Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. (Genesis 10:8-12, ESV)*

¹ *Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:1-4, ESV)*

Although we need to be careful about ascribing promises that were uniquely given to Israel to our own country, the Bible does speak of God both blessing and judging nations based on their deeds:

⁷ If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸ and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. ⁹ And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it. (Jer. 18:7-10, spoken to Israel, but expressing a broader principle.)

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE?

Despite mankind's tendency to corrupt power and use it for personal gain, the Bible *does* indicate that human government is generally a good thing and that it is meant to serve humanity by executing justice and defending the weak, all while acting to promote social welfare:

*² "How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?"*

*³ Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.*

*⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psalm 82:2-4, condemning certain earthly rulers)*

What does this teach us about what God expects of human rulers?

What might it look like for a human government to fulfill these expectations today?

We see similar ideas expressed elsewhere in Scripture:

*"By justice a king gives a country stability,
but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down." (Proverbs 29:4, promoting fair governance)*

*"Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing
righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a
lengthening of your prosperity." (Daniel 4:27, Daniel speaking to King Nebuchadnezzar)*

"Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow." (Isaiah 1:17, expressing God's desire for the kings of Judah)

The Bible also speaks to the fact that civil laws and their enforcement have a role in shaping the moral compass of a populace:

*"Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is
fully set to do evil." (Ecclesiastes 8:11, on the value of civil punishment)*

The New Testament reinforces the idea that human government is meant to serve God by punishing evil and promoting what is good:

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13-17)

Peter says that earthly rulers are “sent by [God].” What are some of the implications of this?

In a secular society, what are some of the challenges of “punishing those who do evil”?

What might it look like for the government to “praise those who do good”?

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-4)

What does it mean that a ruler is “the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer” (v. 4)? What does this reveal about God's intention for government?

Again we see the idea that government is intended for our good (v. 4). What are some ways that the government can support the common good?

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² 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 Timothy 2:1-2)

What does this passage say about how God intends for human government to impact our lives?

This passage calls us to pray that our government will do what's necessary to allow us to live a certain way. Would Timothy tell us to wait until the government does this before we strive to live this way? Why or why not?