

JESUS IS KING

Week 5: Navigating Political Differences with Other Believers

NCAC Sunday School: October 6, 2024

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

A Brief Review:

- The Bible presents Jesus as the King of Kings who will not only one day return to establish His Kingdom in full, but who even now reigns sovereignly over all.
- As we await the full establishment of Christ's Kingdom, God has provided human government to help hold back evil, promote what is good, and establish peace so that humanity may flourish.
- As believers, we are called to engage in earthly politics in a way that is consistent with the values of Christ, never with force or hatred, and always with love and thoughtfulness.
- In those times when obeying God requires us to disobey our government, Scripture still calls us to show our leaders respect and to willingly accept the legal consequences of our actions.

What are some reasons Christians might disagree on political issues? What are some ways believers have responded to other believers who held different political opinions?

CHRISTIANS HAVE NEVER AGREED ON EVERYTHING

When it comes to deciding how to best apply biblical principles in our lives today, we often have to use our own judgment and discretion. Thus, it's possible for two devoted followers of Christ to agree on certain biblical principles, but to still disagree on *how to apply these principles* in our current context. However, political disagreements among Christians are nothing new. In his book, *The Party Crasher*, Butler points out how some of Jesus' earliest followers would've likely had very different political views:

"First, **Simon** was a **Zealot**, part of a revolutionary party who stood against the establishment of Rome...The Zealots confronted injustice, calling out the empire's exploitation of vulnerable people...They also despised compromisers, those Jews who worked together with the Roman establishment...They were hardcore. Zealot extremists were known as *Sicarii* ('dagger men') because they used daggers to publicly assassinate Jewish leaders who collaborated with Rome."

"**Matthew**, meanwhile, was a **tax collector** who worked for the Roman establishment...They took money from fellow Jews...Tax collectors were wealthy, corrupt, and hated by the revolution-minded Zealots. We see this in the Gospels, where tax collectors are regularly equated with sinners, prostitutes, and pagans...Here's the point: Zealots and tax collectors hated each other!...Don't miss the impact of Jesus calling a Zealot and a tax collector to follow him—together!" (*Joshua Ryan Butler, The Party Crasher, pp. 59-60*)

It's likely that both Simon and Matthew ended up altering their political views after meeting Jesus, but how do you think Jesus expected these two men to treat each other? Why?

Differences of opinions between followers of Jesus didn't end with the first group of Jesus' disciples. In **Romans 14** Paul wrote to Christians who disagreed over issues like what type of foods believers were allowed to eat or whether or not believers ought to observe certain days as more holy:

14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (ESV)

In verse 1 Paul makes clear he is speaking here about “opinions” (“disputable matters,” NIV). How do we know whether or not an issue falls into this category?

“For a **straight-line issue**, there is a straight line from a biblical or theological principle to a political position. But for a **jagged-line issue**, there is a multistep process from a biblical or theological principle to a political position...Most political issues are not straight-line issues. Most are jagged-line issues. Think of everything from trade policy to healthcare reform to monetary policy to carbon dioxide emission caps. These issues are important, and Christians should bring biblical principles to bear when thinking about them. But the path from biblical text to policy application is not simple. It's complex. For such issues, none of us should presume to possess 'the' Christian position...Rather, we should recognize that such issues belong to the domain of Christian freedom.” (*J. Leeman and A. Naselli, “Politics, Conscience, and the Church”*)

In Romans 14 Paul instructs both groups to not only avoid passing judgment, but to welcome those in the other group. Why? How would this apply to believers with political differences?

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God...

When it comes to our convictions about what is right and wrong, what are the implications for us of the instruction, “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (v. 5b)?

10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Why do we pass judgment on other believers (v. 10a)? How should these verses in Romans free us from feeling the need to pass judgment?

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

What does Paul tell us are the primary values that should shape how we view and treat each other? How do we do this when we have political differences?

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. ²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

Applied to political opinions, what would be another way of saying, “Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God” (v. 20a)?

Given the context, what do you think Paul means when he says, “The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God” (v. 22a)?

What do the following verses add to our understanding of how to respond when other believers have different political views than we do?

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14)

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5-6)

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (James 3:17)

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)

THERE'S GREAT VALUE IN LISTENING TO THOSE WHO HOLD A DIFFERENT OPINION

Think of some people in your life who see things in a different way than you do. What do you gain from your relationships with them?

In 1 Kings 12, when Solomon's son Rehoboam became king of Israel, the people came to Rehoboam and asked him to lighten their labor and taxation. Solomon's former advisors encouraged Rehoboam to listen to the people. But Rehoboam instead chose to listen only to the opinion of his "tribe"—of his friends those who thought like he did. Rehoboam's friends even wrote a speech for him to deliver:

And young men who had grown up with [Rehoboam] said to him, "Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,' thus shall you say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke..." (1 Kings 12:10-11)

Because Rehoboam refused to consider the perspective of those outside his bubble of friends, ten of the tribes of Israel broke away from Rehoboam and formed the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:16-20).

How do we often act like Rehoboam with regard to political issues today? How do we overcome this?

What do the following proverbs add to our understanding of how to respond when other believers have different political views than we do?

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with the humble is wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2)*

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man listens to advice. (Proverbs 12:15)*

*Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment. (Proverbs 18:1)*

*A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion. (Proverbs 18:2)*

*If one gives an answer before he hears,
it is his folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:13)*

*The one who states his case first seems right,
until the other comes and examines him. (Proverbs 18:17)*

How would you summarize what the Bible teaches regarding how we're supposed to respond to other believers (especially those in our church) who have a different opinion on political issues than we do?

"No Christian came to know the truth about God by their own intellectual prowess. Jesus rescued you from your stupidity *by grace*. This reality should keep you humble. If you can get God wrong, you can get vaccines wrong. You can get racial justice wrong. You can get educational policy wrong.

"But this reality should also give you freedom to listen and change without fear. From the start, Jesus' love for you was not contingent on your correctness—it was in spite of your incorrectness. He is not a heavenly SAT proctor, withholding his love from those who answer questions imperfectly. He is a gracious teacher, forgiving your errors and guiding you into the truth. And one way Jesus loves to guide you into truth is through the voices of others." (*Patrick Miller and Keith Simon, Truth Over Tribe, p. 176*)