

Church Unity in an Age of Political Division

Church and Politics Seminar – Venture Church Network – 27 February 2024

Todd L. Miles (tmiles@westernseminary.edu)

1. Introduction

2. The Bible

a. Creation and the Cultural Mandate

b. The Fall

c. The Covenant with Noah

d. Theocracy

e. The Kingdom of God Inaugurated

f. The Kingdom Announced

g. The Consummated State

3. A Look at Romans 13

a. The source of all governmental authority is God - John 19:10-11

i. Government is legitimate, but provisional.

ii. Government is common, but accountable.

- b. God has purposes for government – Justice
 - i. Andrew Walker says “Justice first begins with giving God what is owed to him and giving to humans what is rightly owed to them.”ⁱ
- c. Government holds us accountable for laws concerning human relationships, not our relationship with God
- d. Government is to promote peace, prosperity, and virtue (where possible)
- e. Ultimately government serves the goal of authority
- f. The Kingdom of this world does not bring in or bring about the Kingdom of God.

4. Mark 12:13-17

- a. We are citizens of two kingdoms.
- b. The state does not have to be Christian to be legitimate. (See Luke 4:5-8)
- c. We note also that Jesus does not de-obligate God’s people from the kingdom of the world.
- d. We must clearly delineate the rights, laws, and obligations of each of the kingdoms.
- e. We cannot avoid obligations to one Kingdom by simply evoking membership in another.
- f. The two Kingdoms are not equal (Acts 4:19)

5. Five wrong views on Christians and Governmentⁱⁱ

- a. Government should compel religion
- b. Government should exclude religion
- c. All government is evil and demonic
- d. Do politics, not evangelism
- e. Do evangelism, not politics

6. The Church is to hold some things firmly and others looselyⁱⁱⁱ

- a. The Bible is the book by which all our political activity is to be judged.
 - i. Rev 6:15-17

- b. We must differentiate between biblical wisdom and biblical law or commandment.
- c. The foundation of the biblical covenants, commissions, and commands is to be held firmly.
- d. The roof of the biblical concept of justice is to be held firmly. Such things are ordained by God.
 - i. **Deut 27:19; 24:17; Isa 9:7; 11:3-4**
 - ii. In between the foundation and the roof (the walls) is where most activity of good government takes place. This is where wisdom is to prevail.
 - iii. Because wisdom dictates, the church must hold loosely ideologies, constitutions, parties, candidates, and policies. Such things are to be treated, evaluated, and constructed with wisdom.
- e. How straight a line can I draw from Bible to policy?^{iv}
 - i. The first step is distilling biblical principles that are relevant to politics.
 - 1. Humans are *imago Dei*
 - 2. Humans are fallen and finite

7. The Christian is to honor the king

- a. **Rom 13:1-7.**
- b. A call for interested and constrained influence (particularly in our current climate)

8. The Church plays an ambassadorial role (2 Cor 5:11-21)

- a. We have a different motivation - fear of the Lord (11)
- b. We have a different tool - persuasion (11)
- c. We have a different priority - the heart (12)
- d. We have a different bond - controlled by the love of Christ. (14)
- e. We have a different message – the gospel. (14-15)
- f. We have a different perspective – we have no enemies “in the flesh.” (16)

- g. We have a different identity – a new creation. (17)
- h. We have a different mission – the Great Commission. (18)

9. Government and Freedom of Religion

a. The American Experiment – What is Freedom of Religion?

- i. *First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*
- ii. The Church and Taxes: See *Walz v. Tax Commission of the City of New York* (1970)
- iii. The state cannot directly support the church, but it can give the church free space to do its good work.
- iv. Above all, the state should not confuse separation of church and state with the separation of religion and politics.
- v. A church, as a tax-exempt organization under Internal Revenue Code (“IRC”) § 501(c)(3), is absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating or intervening in any political campaign in support or opposition to any candidate for elective public office. See Treasury Regulation §1.501(c)(3)–1(c)(3)(iii).^v
- vi. We should strive to promote religious liberty around the world.

10. A Case Study – Immigration and Refugees

- a. God has heart for immigrants and refugees – the disempowered.
- b. Christians are on mission – we are to pour out our lives.
- c. Christians are to be good neighbors.
- d. Government is ordained and empowered to maintain law and order
- e. Citizenship is a contract – conversion to America?
 - i. There should be no religious requirement for citizenship.
 - ii. There can and should be conceptual and legal requirements. But that is government’s responsibility, not the church’s responsibility.

- iii. Church response is to love neighbor/refugee and preach. The Church is not to vet for citizenship in America.

11. Do Christians have a responsibility to vote? If so, how?

- a. Voting in a constitutional republic founded on democratic principles and practices is one way we “honor the king.”
- b. There are no perfect candidates.
- c. We are to take every election seriously.
- d. We ought to vote for the candidate that we believe will lead to the most flourishing.
- e. The church is not a special interest group.
- f. We are nowhere told to work to bring about Bible’s eschatological vision other than to seek the Kingdom of God.
- g. We are instructed to pray for our leaders. So avoid ad hominem attacks on one candidate.
- h. Whom or what one votes for is a wisdom issue. In our broken world, it is not a sin issue.

12. A Plea for Unity

ⁱ Andrew Walker, *The Nations Belong to God: A Christian Guide for Political Engagement* (ERLC: Nashville, 2024), 22.

ⁱⁱ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Zondervan, 2010), 23-54.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Thomas Nelson, 2018), 88. See also his *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ’s Rule* (IVP, 2016).

^{iv} See Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think About Religion and Politics* (Eerdmans, 2010).

^v See IRS Revenue Ruling 2007-41 (available at www.irs.gov). It provides summaries of the law as well as examples of what is and is not allowed. http://www.christian-attorney.net/church_political_campaign_activity.html for a very good summary.