

Chapter 2 -- A Better Solution: Significant Christian Influence on Government

Does the Bible justify Christian involvement in government?

What are the obligations of Christian citizens?

1. It is possible to understand the Bible rightly
 - Among responsible evangelical interpreters of the Bible, there are vastly more areas of widespread agreement than disagreement, both today and throughout history.
 - There is widespread agreement that it is wrong to murder, to commit adultery, and to bear false witness; there is also agreement that God established civil government for our benefit and that there should be a distinction between the spheres of authority for the church and the civil government
 - There are also disagreements; these can be healthy when pursued openly, respectfully & in light of Scripture
2. Theologically liberal critics present simplistic distortions of the Bible's teachings
 - Theologically liberal critics of the Bible are not a good guide to right interpretation of the Bible
 - It is always possible for a hostile reader to lift biblical statements unfairly out of context and announce "this is what the Bible teaches"
 - It is possible to understand and obey what the Bible teaches, and this applies to the Bible's teachings on civil government as well
3. A biblical justification for "significant Christian influence" on government
 - a. Old Testament examples

Da 4:27: 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."

Je 29:7: But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Ne 1:11: Now I was cupbearer to the king.

See also: Isaiah 13-23; Ezekiel 25-32; Amos 1-2; Obadiah; Jonah; Nahum; Habakkuk 2; Zephaniah 2; Genesis 41:37-45; 42:6; 45:8-9, 26; Exodus 8:1
 - b. New Testament examples

Mt 14:3-4: For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

Lk 3:18-20: So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

Ac 24:24-25: After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."
 - c. Why did God include Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14?

Ro 13:1-7: 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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 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, 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. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

1 Pe 2:13-14: Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

d. The responsibility of citizens in a democracy to understand the Bible's teaching

4. History shows a pattern of Christian influence on secular governments

- When the church forgot Jesus' teaching about the distinction between "the things that are Caesar's" and "the things that are God's," it made harmful mistakes
- In spite of these mistakes, there are many examples of the positive results of significant Christian influence on governments (i.e., a greater value on human rights; freedom of religion; equality before the law; the abolition of abortion, infanticide, human sacrifice, polygamy, and slavery; granting protections, property rights, and voting rights to women)
- The Christian beliefs of Martin Luther King impacted the outlawing of racial segregation and discrimination
- Today, tens of thousands of Christians form the backbone of the pro-life movement, which continues to work for the prohibition of abortion (except to save the life of the mother) in the US

5. Without Christian influence, governments will have no clear moral compass

- What would happen in the following areas if all Christian influence on government were suddenly removed?

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| - War | - Care for the environment |
| - Same-sex marriage | - Capital punishment |
| - Abortion | - Education |
| - Pornography | - Moral standards |
| - Poverty | |

- If Christians do not speak publicly about moral and ethical issues facing a nation, then who will?
- It is healthy for Christians to have a dialogue about what the Bible teaches about moral standards for human conduct
- Eventually, significant Christian influence on government will result in many positive changes

6. The responsibility of pastors to teach on these issues

- God calls people to different tasks in the overall work of his kingdom; God calls some to be involved heavily in the political process, and others to sing in a church choir; He calls some to run for office, and others to teach a Sunday School class
- Pastors have a special responsibility to preach and teach from God's Word on at least some issues affecting law, government, and politics, even though some of these topics are "controversial"
- Paul thought he was accountable to God to preach on everything the Bible taught

Ac 20:26-27: Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

7. The obligations of all Christian citizens

- a. The obligation to be informed and to vote
- b. Is there an obligation to do more than to vote?

8. Churches and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines

- The IRS prohibit pastors or churches from explicitly saying they support or oppose any candidate by name, though they are still allowed to take positions on moral issues that are a part of an election campaign
- To this point, the IRS has never revoked the tax-exempt status of any church for preaching such a sermon and actually naming and endorsing or opposing specific candidates

9. Conclusion

- Pastors have some responsibility to teach about significant moral issues at stake in each election
- Individual Christians have an obligation to be well-informed and to vote intelligently
- Christians should also consider whether God is calling them to do more

All of the class lessons and outlines are posted on the class website www.christianessentialsbc.com.

To order CDs, e-mail Jason Van Haselen jvanhaselen@yahoo.com or JT Collins jcollins@veritycp.com. Jason and JT are also available in the sound booth before and after the class.