

A Biblical Perspective on Politics

(in the context of the Christian response to unjust economics)

by [John Edmiston](#)

Introduction

Christian involvement in politics is a controversial area and is often avoided because we do not wish to be seen taking sides for one party or another or because we say that "politics is dirty and is not for Christians". The following is a summary of what I see Scripture saying about politics plus some observations from my own involvement in political life in Australia.

Jesus The Politician?

Jesus is the ultimate example of a servant leader who sacrifices Himself for His people and becomes the King of Kings ruling over the nations of the world.

Jesus got involved with the real world: He stepped out of the safety and glory of heaven to become involved with and to die for an imperfect and sinful world. He came to an oppressed, politically corrupt nation on the edges of the Roman Empire dominated by the world power of the day and "bent" local politicians. He did not enter a perfect society or just stay where it was clean and tidy and nice and comfortable and where He was honoured. He went where it was sinful and where He would be criticised and crucified because that was His calling and mission ..

Jesus was subject to temptation but He did not sin: Although He was "tempted in every way as we are" (Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 4:15) He did not sin. Part of this temptation was political temptation - for instance being offered "all the kingdoms of this world and their glory" if He would bow down to Satan. (Matthew 4:8,9) and again when people came by force to make Him King. (John 6:15). Thus it is not a sin to be subject to political temptation -as long as you do not bow down to Satan or to the pressure of mob rule.

Jesus commented vigorously on cultural issues: While Jesus did not run for public office He did take a prophetic stance against the social issues of the day to the point where He was regarded as a major threat to be done away with. He did not just "stick to religion and values" but talked about fair wages, unjust trade, oppression of widows and the economic injustices and corruption of his day even overturning the tables of the moneylenders.(Matthew 12:40 etc)

Jesus did have a "political agenda" but not one that this world understood: When Pilate asked if Jesus was a King it ended up with him scratching his head and saying "what is Truth?".(John 18:36-39) The rulers of this world completely misread Jesus. (1 Corinthians 2:8) . The political agenda of Jesus is a very interesting topic that would take far too long to discuss here. His proclamation "repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand" would have been interpreted by many people as "cleanse yourself for a holy war which will restore the Kingship to Israel." - as that was the current Messianic interpretation. The last question the disciples asked was "when will the Kingdom be restored to Israel" just before He ascended into Heaven. Only after Pentecost did the spiritual nature of the Kingdom become completely obvious.

Jesus will eventually govern the whole world: Jesus saw Himself as a King whose Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36,37). Revelation gives Him the title "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5) . His Kingdom would eventually crush all the kingdoms that are of this world (Daniel 2:44, Revelation 2:26,27)

which are passing away. (1 Corinthians 2:6-8, 7:31, 1 John 2:17). His Kingdom however will last forever. (Daniel 2:44). We will be co-rulers with Him in this Kingdom (Revelation 2:26,27, Romans 8;17) and will have "cities" to govern. (Luke 19:17-19). So ultimately some faithful Christians will be mayors and politicians in the Kingdom of God! Well the point is that its not wrong to rule. David ruled well as did Hezekiah and Josiah and of course Daniel and Joseph. Government is Ok for some now and eventually will be part of our ultimate destiny in Christ. The precise nature of our governing is however not revealed.

Is God Political?

While God is not political in the sense of being corrupt or unrighteous, He does govern and He does carry out political activities. He makes laws and covenants, has an immense administration of angels, has heavenly courts and books and dispenses justice. He is impartial and exalts some and demotes others. God also acts to ensure that He stays in power and that the kingdom of darkness will be defeated. He governs in wise and subtle ways as Psalm 18 indicates. *Psalms 18:25-30 NKJV) With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; {26} With the pure You will show Yourself pure; And with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd. {27} For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks. {28} For You will light my lamp; The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness. {29} For by You I can run against a troop, By my God I can leap over a wall. {30} As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.* Thus the skills of discerning people and situations and responding to them with justice and good government is one of God's main activities and a very fit activity for human beings. Another way of looking at this is that God's will is to be done on earth - as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10) For this to happen his standards must be enacted in laws and encoded deeply into the cultures of the earth. This means involvement by Christians in law, politics and culture. In fact John Calvin, the reformer saw government as the highest calling of the Christian. Politics can even affect evangelism. Generally countries that are "closed" with governments hostile to the gospel see few people saved while countries open to the gospel see many people saved. Thus the eternal destiny of nations to a large degree depends on their governments (1 Timothy 2:1-4) so Christians should pray for their governments and even, where wise, participate in them.

The Basics

(1 Timothy 2:1-4 NIV) I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- {2} for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. {3} This is good, and pleases God our Savior, {4} who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

(Micah 6:6-8 NIV) With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? {7} Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? {8} He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

The basic involvement of every Christian is to pray for good government and to act justly. This is not negotiable.

Further Involvement

How should you personally be involved/ And to what depth? And in what manner? These are complex questions and to greatly simplify matters I will say that it depends on two factors:

- A) **Your calling, gifting, ministry, abilities and passions - the good works God has assigned for you to do. (Ephesians 2:10).**
- B) **The nature of the government and how open it is to involvement. Also some governments have one response from God (e.g. judgment) while others get another (support or blessing). We need to discern how God is responding to that administration.**

Thus effective advocacy is not the explosive expression of raw passion but a calculated reasoning with the people who have the power to make decisions - according to your ability to do so. As such it requires deep research and real discernment. (Poor preparation can cause a good case to get a bad name.) In a way you are like a lawyer preparing a brief for an important client – the poor. Discerning the nature of the organization or government you are dealing with and knowing your place in dealing with it is critical. There are many, many people tackling the issues of globalization and human injustice. You do not have to solve it all – but you have to do your bit to the best of your ability in the place that God has put you in.

Your Calling

Each of us is called to a life of good works - in fact we are designed for them! (Ephesians 2:10 NKJV) For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand* that we should walk in them.

- **Has God called you to be a prophet and to speak out about social conditions like Amos?**
- **Has God called you to be an administrator like Joseph or Daniel? (Daniel 1 and 2)**
 - **Has God called you to be a "king" - like David ?**
- **Has He called you to be a priest to the powerful - giving guidance and ministering grace like Abiathar did for David? (1 Samuel 23:9)**
 - **Has God called you to be a "witness before Caesar" like Paul?**

Each of us has different personalities and gifts and belong to different "worlds". Some of you may be naturally "prophetic" while others are much more comfortable ministering grace. Each has its place.

Nature of The Government

We find in Scripture a wide range of responses to different kinds of government. God says different things to different kinds of administration and calls His Church to react in a wide variety of ways to the prevailing political climate.:

- **Is the government generally seeking righteousness like that of Solomon so you can BLESS it like God did? (1 Kings 3:5-15)**
- **Has it committed a wrong act so that it needs to be REBUKED like Nathan did to David? (2 Samuel 12:1-14)**

- Is it idolatrous and wicked like that of Ahab and Jezebel so you can **OVERTHROW** it like Elisha did? (2 Kings 9:1-37)
- Is it stubborn and cruel so that you must **LIBERATE** people from it like Moses did? (Exodus chapters 1-15)
 - Is it a "good pagan" government like that of Nebuchadnezzar so that like Daniel you **PARTICIPATE** in the government and **DEMONSTRATE** the power of God to the ruler so he is converted (Daniel 4)?
- Is it an efficient but unrighteous pagan government like Rome - with good law and order but hostile to God so you **RESPECT** the government but **SEPARATE** yourself from its wicked ways? (Romans 13:1-8)
- If a government is corrupt we must never ally ourselves with it but rather **EXPOSE** it.. (Psalms 94:20, Ephesians 5:11)
- Is it crafty and dangerous like the government of Herod so that you **SAY NOTHING AT ALL** and keep your distance like Jesus did? (Luke 23:8-9)

To sum up this section: There is no "one right way" to respond to all types of government. We have to discern the nature of the government and then react appropriately. The way to do this is to find a parallel situation in Scripture and how God spoke to it.

Issue By Issue VS Party Politics

There are two main approaches to politics by Christians in open democratic countries:

The first is the "prophetic" stance where the Christian stands outside of political life and independent of party politics and comments on an issue by issue basis say tackling abortion or economic injustices. The focus is on what God says to that nation and its government about one particular issue. The advantage is that it is "clean" and rarely corrupt, that it is focussed, and that many Christians will line up behind and issue that will not line up behind a political party. The disadvantage is that the prophetic stance is often easily dismissed by those in power - except perhaps during a very close election or in a marginal seat.

Secondly there is the "princely" stance of actually running and participating in party politics. The Christian must chose a party where his or her Christian beliefs are at least allowed some room for expression and which is large enough and influential enough to have some impact on government. It is my experience that small idealistic Christian political parties are unsuccessful in influencing policy. When a significant number of Christians form a bible study groups within a major political party and work together then this method can have a lot of impact on public policy. However its weakness is that it is hard to be fully prophetic and outspoken on issues when a member of a party. A certain amount of compromise is needed.

My personal method combines both. Basically my personality is outspoken and uncompromising thus I am much more happy being a "prophet" on the outside and leading marches and rallies however I have belonged to and run as a candidate for political parties. The result is that now I am a "prophet" who understands the world of politicians and can relate to them and thus influence them better that I could before.

Responding Appropriately In Politics

1. **The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (James 1:20) Involvement in politics should be wise, intelligent and from deep conviction not from anger or hostility. Inappropriate political responses from Christians are a poor witness.**
2. **Where possible find the appropriate person and procedure for the matter. (Ecclesiastes 8:5,6)**
3. **Be discreet in all you say, even in private -especially regarding powerful people. (Eccl 10:20, many verses in Proverbs).**
4. **Expect opposition but let God deal with it. See how David responds to opposition in the Psalms - not by taking personal revenge but by taking his case to God for action. Never take revenge (Romans 12:19).**
5. **Build unity through demonstrating love for your enemies. Make them friends. This was David's tactic - see 1 & 2 Samuel.**
6. **Do not give into fear and especially to conspiracy theories. The Lord alone shall be your fear and your dread. (Isaiah 8:11-13)**
7. **"Kings" are supposed to be wise and to seek counsel. Have many advisors and take their advice. (Proverbs 15:22)**
8. **Neither be surprised and upset at corruption (Eccl 5:8,9) or so comfortable with it that you take bribes. (Ex 23:8).**
9. **Settle your priorities before you go into the battle. Know what you truly stand for. "Set your face like flint.." Ezekiel 3:9**
10. **Pursue peace with all people but always remember that holiness is the top priority. (Hebrews 12:14)**

Conclusion

Combating the injustices of globalization and advocating for the poor and for fair trade will mean Christian political involvement of one sort or the other. Not every Christian will take the same approach or be called to the same political stance or even the same political conclusions. Some will write letters to politicians, while others might teach business ethics at Harvard, others will chain themselves to a tree in prophetic protest while yet others may sit on the board of a multi-national and try to "be a Daniel".

Others will march around the city in spiritual warfare and intercession for the sins of the city while yet others may run for mayor. However all are called to seek justice and mercy and truth, all are called to be wise, and discreet and professional in their approach so no disgrace is brought to God's name. All are called to carry a cross and to suffer shame and persecution for the cause of Christ and of His rule in the world. All are called to holiness and purity of life and not to engage in dishonesty or overly pragmatic practices even for a noble cause.