

Series: Politics and Christianity
Title: Should Christians be politically involved?
Text: Matthew 5:13-16
Key Word: Reasons
Proposition: Everyone Christian should be politically involved for the following reasons.

I remember when I was growing up that there were two things that people did not talk about in fear of harmful conversation, politics and religion. There is much public debate about the separation of church and state. Our nation moans with suffering and injustice. Immigration, our economic crisis, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the future of Social Security, state issues regarding Casino gambling and payday lending institutions and local issues confront our lives.

Most would agree that our faith and world view affects how we approach politics. Certainly the Church has a significant role in our society. Exercising this voice has stimulated public discourse about the phrase, “separation of church and state.” Some get upset with secularists who want to remove all religious symbols, images, and language from the public square, ignoring any reference to Judeo-Christian beliefs and thought. Amish, Mennonites, German Baptists, and Brethern christians typically separate themselves from any “state” involvement. Others believe that their religious world view should be intergrated with all realms of life, including government.

This morning we hope to first explore these different perspectives of Politics and Christianity. We will see how each perspective derives its conviction from the Scriptures. Each, I believe, contains nuggets of truth worthy of consideration and

acceptance. We will also explore the perspective of the Methodist movement. Hopefully, this will help us see that our relationship with Christ impacts all of life.

Some faithful Christ-followers believe that Christians should be fully disengaged from politics. They reject the mixing of patriotism with the worship of God. They sadly note that some churches celebrate July 4th as if it was a religious festival, singing patriotic songs, and displaying the cross and flag together. Some even arranged jet fighters to fly in formation over three crosses.

They say, “Remember the incident when the Scribes and Pharisees came to arrest Jesus. One of His followers said, *“Lord should we strike with our swords?”* Then another pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of a servant. Then Jesus commanded, *“No more of this!”* He touched the servant’s ear and healed it. Don’t you think this paints a different picture?” For them the kingdom of God is not the kingdom of this earth. The Kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of peace, healing, and mercy. They explain that the church is not to rally around America or any other nation for that matter. Christ-followers rally around the Kingdom of God. Good, honest, and Bible believing people can translate their values in different ways. They contend that the primary focus of the Church is that of living out the Kingdom and letting politics take care of itself. For them transforming the world requires a Kingdom perspective. Christ-followers replicate a cross-lifestyle. For them the mandate of Christ requires seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then everything else will take care of itself.

They point to Romans 12 and 13. Chapter 12 calls Christians to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. Paul urges them to love with sincerity, hate evil...patient in affliction...He calls the Church to bless those who persecute you...and never to take revenge. He tells us to feed our enemy, give him something to drink when he is thirsty, thus overcoming evil with good. Then he explains in chapter 13 that God calls us to obey the laws of the land and that He uses nations to administer his justice, while in chapter 12 he forbids Christ- followers from taking vengeance. They see Paul making a clear separation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. They hear Christians being called solely to the kingdom of heaven.

Other sincere Christians are convinced that Christians must be somewhat engaged. They acknowledge that Jesus had a very peculiar way in which he was political. He could have fled society and gone into the hills or he could have fought with the zealots who wanted to overthrow the current political system. He chose though a different method to be culturally relevant while maintaining His distinctive view of the Kingdom of God. His political engagement was more by example than by direct political intervention.

Cautiously involved Christians raise this question, “What would it look like if people were asking Christians why they were driving bio-fueled, electric or natural gas powered cars? Would they not be testifying to their love for the Creator by their

care for God's resources? Would they not be facilitating change by their example instead of by legislation?

This person does not see or hear Jesus offering a political platform or agenda. Jesus simply embodied a different, unique, peculiar set of values. He was born a baby refugee in the middle of genocide. He was a homeless man struggling with the basics of life, trusting in His Father's provision. For them, Mother Teresa was a political hero. She did much toward decreasing abortions and honoring life from the cradle to the grave, but it wasn't because she went around wearing a pro-life t-shirt or lobbying congress. She lived it. For her being pro-life is being against abortion, against war, and against capital punishment. For these Christ-followers, it also means that Christians have a holy responsibility to find ways to care for that 14 year girl who gets pregnant out of wedlock. They find peaceful ways to settle conflicts. They find ways to respect the rights of crime victims as well as honoring the life of the convicted. One can certainly talk the talk but what really matters is walking the talk. What the world needs and deserves is a talk with substance, a talk that embodies and replicates Christ.

They are concerned when political leaders identify this nation or any earthly kingdom as the hope of the world. For them and for me, the only hope and true light of this world is not an institution or a nation, but only Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

Other sincere Christ-followers are fully engaged in the political world.

They acknowledge that from its very beginning, our nation has been influenced by

the Christian faith. Prayer was offered by leaders of the Constitutional Convention for wisdom and guidance. They integrated Judeo-Christian values into our system of government. They ensured a separation of the institutional church from government allowing individual religious liberty. They simply intended to create a democracy with Judeo-Christian principles. And any religion is prohibited from formal integration into our government.

For politically engaged Christians, Christianity with its world-view, can and does play a role in the political process. The Evangelical vote significantly influenced the 1976 presidential election of Jimmy Carter. Christ-followers had been in a far-away land through most of the twentieth century. Many did not want to be politically involved because they focused upon introducing people to Christ. 1976 though brought a change of mind and heart to many Christians as they realized that they could not leave their moral convictions out of the voting booth. They came to the conclusion that Christ-followers, with their world view, must politically engage the culture and government in order to influence the world in the best interest of all humanity. Politically engaged Christ-followers must bring positive change within all humanity, not just individual life transformation. They contend that any free and democratic society must be based on the strong, active involvement of individual citizens. They fear that disengagement with our democracy erodes our society into superiority or chaos.

They affirm Jesus' statement, "*You are the salt of the earth, if the salt loses its saltiness it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*" (Matthew 5:13, 14)

Salt and light changes everything it touches. As salt and light, Christ-followers must penetrate and permeate all of life including political systems.

Historically, the Methodist movement has urged Christ-followers to be fully engaged. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement firmly believed in and taught that one's personal faith in Christ impacts all of society. His motto was holiness of heart and life, personal piety and social holiness.

William Wilberforce, a convert under John Wesley's ministry, stood up on the floor of Parliament against the slave trade in England and fought a twenty-year battle. He was fighting a moral issue at the same time he was writing books about spiritual renewal and holiness. Wesley wrote a letter to Wilberforce explaining his opposition to slavery and encouraging him to fight the good fight. He wrote, "I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that heinous villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it."

According to the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, we acknowledge our primary allegiance to God over any allegiance to any state. Government is the

principle vehicle for the ordering of society. We see ourselves, as Christ-followers, responsible to God for social and political life. We do support the separation of church and state, which allows interaction. The state should not try to control the church, nor the church seek to dominate the state.

Our Social Principles state: “We affirm that the strength of our political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.” So in the words of Wesley, Friends, “be not weary in well doing!”

So how can we be fully engaged? Here are a few ideas. First, become fully informed of the issues in relation to the Scriptures. An informed citizen is an influential citizen. **Second,** pray. Ask God for understanding and insight into what is good, right, and just for all. Pray for our political servant-leaders. Pray that we might by strengthen to persevere in times requiring great change. **Third,** with the power of almighty God, be the eyes, heart, and hands of Christ in everything you do, in every arena, no matter what it may cost, no matter what would be required.

Finally, I offer this word of encouragement. Whether we choose to work directly in the political process or to support it with our votes and prayers, the political process in our democratic society gives us a wonderful opportunity to be the eyes, the heart, and the hands of Christ.