

Special Focus:

How Should I Respond to Politics?



QUESTION 1:

*What do you recall about
your initial experiences
with an election or government?*

THE POINT

Reflect Christ in how you interact with politics and government.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Politics can be a real minefield—especially for Christians. I learned this when I served on my local school board. While politicians are often only concerned with the outcome, Christians must also be concerned about the process.

In one contentious moment, some of my political colleagues wanted to accomplish a goal that would have been good, but they wanted to get there in a way that violated Christian principles. I could not support something good if I had to agree to an unbiblical path to get there.

The phrase, “The end justifies the means,” is often associated with Niccolò Machiavelli. He wrote in one of his works: “For although the act condemns the doer, the end may justify him.”¹ Machiavelli apparently believed that, if our goal is good, then we are free to use whatever means needed to achieve it.

Many Christians seem to embrace that philosophy, but you won’t find that in Scripture. In fact, God calls us to a wholly different standard: a standard of obedience and love to Him that will be seen in how we respond to politics and government.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ROMANS 13:1-4

¹ Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. ² So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. ⁴ For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

If you imagine life in the Roman Empire was relatively peaceful, pleasant, and prosperous, think again. The truth is that:

- ▶ The horrors of King Herod killing all the boys two years old and younger (see Matthew 2:16) were not unique.
- ▶ The story of the man beaten and left half dead on the Jericho road (see Luke 10:30) was a common scenario.
- ▶ Tax collectors like Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:2) commonly cheated people to gain resources for the government and themselves.

Slavery, sexual exploitation, violence, cruelty, graft, and corruption were common in first-century Roman life. It was in the midst of all this and more that Paul wrote to admonish the Roman believers: "Let everyone submit to the governing authorities."

One thing we know about God is that He is a God of order, and order is held together under His authority. God institutes governments to maintain order. As we live in submission to, and under the authority of, the government, we learn what it means to live in subjection to God Himself.

QUESTION 2:

How have you seen government benefit you or your community?

Unfortunately, governments are run by imperfect people who do imperfect things. At times, these imperfect things will go against God's expressed will for His creation. So, what do we do then? Should we ever disobey God to stay aligned with the government?

A challenge like this confronted the apostles. The authorities arrested the apostles and instructed them to stop preaching (see Acts 5:18-28), but the apostles told the authorities: "We must obey God rather than people" (v. 29). The apostles' example is a reminder that we are to live in obedience to the government as long as that obedience does not cause us to sin against the expressed word and will of God.

QUESTION 3:

What would it look like to obey Paul's commands in these verses in today's world?

ROMANS 13:5-7

⁵ Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. ⁶ And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God’s servants, continually attending to these tasks. ⁷ Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

Our testimony shows up everywhere, so as much as possible, Christians should be model citizens. We are instructed to “submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience.” Verse 7 reminds us that this submission covers everything.

QUESTION 4:

What responsibilities do Christ-followers have in relation to our government?

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus added an element of servanthood to our obedience: “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:41). Jesus also said: “Give, then, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). Many things may belong to the government, but everything belongs to God—including government authorities.

Let me suggest three reasons behind our obedience and God’s work.

1. God uses the government to build us up.

Road building and maintenance, water and sewage, police and emergency services, and provisions for the poor, the sick, and the elderly are just a few of the myriad ways the government helps us. The government’s

ultimate role is to look after the nation as a whole and make provisions that support the well-being and prosperity of its citizens.

2. God uses our lives as a testimony of His faithful love and unselfish grace. The world is watching how we live. While nonbelievers may have used this title in derision at first, it is apparent these believers were people whose lives and character declared they were living like Jesus Christ! Some people may never read a Bible, so that all they know about the character of God they learn by watching the lives of those who call themselves Christians. When we live as good citizens, people learn of the faithful love and unselfish grace of the God we love.

3. God uses the government for His purposes.

God is working out His providential plan. We are sometimes so focused on our own lives and personal concerns that we forget God is working all around us—even within the government. When I was young, the old saints would say, “Kings, presidents and potentates rule, but God super-rules!” It was their way of talking about the sovereignty of God. They were teaching us that He is King of kings and Lord of lords, or as Colossians 1:17 says, “He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.”



*“Every human government is accountable to God
and is accountable to maintain its affairs
with justice and with righteousness.”*

R. C. SPROUL



ROMANS 13:8-10

⁸ Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

It might seem that, with verse 8, Paul changed subjects from our response to governing authorities to loving one another, but we should read verses 8-10 in the context of how we respond to governing authorities. Every system is made better when fueled by love, and no one has a greater obligation to love than us.

God's law could not save us. "What the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did" (Romans 8:3). The apostle Paul was referring to the Old Testament Law, but the principle applies to our local and federal laws as well. In our fallen nature, we're drawn to sin; we're enslaved to it. We can create all sorts of laws to "legislate righteousness," but those laws will never make us righteous. Laws make us aware of our sin, but they can't stop us from sinning. The love of God moves us to focus on transformation and not just legislation. Politics and legislation can never bring our country closer to God. It is in the work of Jesus Christ and the Word of God that is preached from our pulpits and taught in our Bible study groups.

As Christians, we should never compromise our witness for a political agenda. It is right to support politicians and issues when we believe they support God's plan, but at the same time we must be willing to call out those politicians when they are wrong. We can never just serve a political party or ideology; we must always serve God first.

QUESTION 5:

What steps can you take to love even those whose politics you disagree with?

- ▶ **Politics must be practiced in the context of love.** Most of us are likely not politicians, but we have political views—and we need to practice and express those views with love. The apostle Paul commanded the Romans—and us—to owe nothing to anyone except the debt of loving others. Love proves whose we really are. When people know we are Christians, our actions and attitudes put God's name on the line.
- ▶ **Politics can't solve our greatest problems.** Politics may be able to accomplish the goals of our community or country, but not the goals of Christ's church. The church is not focused on making better citizens but on helping sinners to become radically transformed believers saved by grace.

THE LAW OF LOVE

*We don't often think of the word "love" when discussing the government.
Write down how Christ's love helps us not only fulfill God's law, but the law of man.
Then, based on your answer, write down how you would respond to the objections below.*

How does Christ's love help us not only fulfill God's law, but the law of government?

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We should not have to pay taxes that support ungodly activities like abortion.

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We should obey the law of government only when it benefits the church.

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