



## What should be our overarching “why” to not only civic engagement but all of life?

- To glorify God - *“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”* (1 Corinthians 10:31, NLT)

## Should we engage in politics, protest, and advocacy?

### Politics:

Yes, engaging in politics is an opportunity to help our neighbors and to promote the righteousness and justice that are the foundation of God’s throne. (Psalm 89:14)

### Protest & Advocacy:

Yes. One of the most direct instructions we have in Scripture about relating to the government is found in Romans 13:1: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

This may first appear to be a theological challenge to the idea of engaging in protest with the goal of altering the opinions and actions of elected officials and other decision makers. However, a better understanding of our peculiar system of government turns that logic on its head. Our government is a representative democracy. It is government of the people, for the people, and by the people. Through the electoral process, we essentially hire officials to manage our own government. They are managers and servants, but the authority of the government rests ultimately with the people.

The health of our government depends on an informed and rigorously engaged citizenry. Advocacy and protest are the tools we use to manage our elected servants. Because we live in a democracy, Romans 13:1 is not an injunction against protest and advocacy, but a mandate for it. Here are some examples:

### Protest:

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (**Daniel 3**)
- Jesus Cleanses the Temple (**John 2:13-17**)
- Jesus Protects the Woman Caught in Sin (**John 8:1-11**)

### Advocacy:

- Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh (**Exodus 5-12**)
- Esther Speaks to the King (**Esther 4-5**)

### Why should we engage in politics, protest, and advocacy?

Christians should engage politics because doing so provides us with a robust opportunity to love our neighbor by acting justly, promoting human flourishing, and seeking the prosperity of our community. It gives us an opportunity to be salt and light in an area of our society that has a broad impact. What good are salt and light if they have no impact with society? (**Matthew 5:13-16**)

Loving others as we love ourselves means giving them the care and consideration that we'd provide for ourselves and our loved ones. If we were negatively impacted by injustice, we would advocate for ourselves; according to Scripture, we should also advocate and stand up for others (**Isaiah 1:17**).

Our ability to evangelize and promote morality is handicapped if we don't go out of our way to make sure people are treated fairly in the public square. For example, you can't credibly promote family values if you're not concerned about fathers being taken out of their homes for extended periods due to unjust prison sentences.

### What do we need to remember as we engage in politics, protest, and advocacy?

#### Our witness always comes before the win:

Christians must keep in mind that we aren't engaging in politics, protests, and advocacy primarily to win political battles or to serve our own interest (**1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:3-4**). We already have the ultimate victory, which is our salvation and the kingdom that God has promised (**Matthew 16:19; 25:34**).

Nothing in this world is comparable to our inheritance in the kingdom of God. No political ideology can replace the kingdom, nor does the kingdom of God rely on our political plans and priorities. Accordingly, we should participate in politics primarily to help others and to represent our Lord and Savior in the public square.

This doesn't mean we have to ignore our own interests, but we can't be consumed and misled by them. Adherence to Jesus' teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, will prevent us from approaching politics in a self-serving way.

When in conflict we should demonstrate that our public witness is more important than winning a political battle. This means that if our side has to do something unloving or corrupt to win, then it's better for us to lose in that situation.

### **Actions Through Maturity:**

We are allowed, as people - believers or not - to have convictions and opinions around politics, protest and advocacy. The problem develops when we hold these convictions and opinions up as idols. As we aggressively defend these idols, we start to cover up our true light - how we reflect Jesus Christ. A sign of maturity is this - to engage in politics, protest, and advocacy in a way that listens and speaks constructively. This engagement practices tolerance, humility, and patience as we pursue understanding others and their standpoints.

**Tolerance** – to endure something you don't agree with showing grace and kindness

**Humility** – freedom from pride, a willingness to listen

**Patience** – capacity to endure (have tolerance for) something you don't agree with without getting upset

Christians can be confident, studied up, and rooted in our standpoints. As believers, though, we should engage others just like Paul did in Acts 17. He wasn't trying to coerce people; he was trying to relate and persuade them. Speak with conviction but listen lovingly.

### **Moral Order:**

Let's also take a second to talk about moral order and how we have to be careful with how we, as believers, wield it. Christians should first, be inwardly reflective, and apply any and all standards to themselves. We then can start to consider how these standards affect those around us. Jesus made this pretty clear in Matthew 7:5. If you aren't fully understanding where we are coming from, let's look at a few examples:

- No-Fault divorce laws were passed nearly twenty years before there was any discussion about a same-sex marriage vote in any state
- Christians will go to great lengths to protest mosques and temples being built in their towns. However, in these same towns, there are strip clubs that have been there for years

Why does this matter and how does this happen? The issue is that those who base their moral objectivity on their Christianity are not remaining consistent and thus can be seen as a hypocrite. We can imagine getting divorced or wanting to visit a strip club

– these issues are a reality to the believer. When the issue affects OTHERS, that’s where we begin to concern ourselves i.e. same-sex marriage or the building of a mosque.

God’s moral order is pretty clear. He speaks to issues like greed, corruption, manipulation, and violence. We have to be careful that we maintain the moral high ground as we focus on the issues of others prior to seeing the issues we have within ourselves.

### **Popular Opinion:**

What is true will not always be what is popular. Historically, there have been plenty of instances where the majority of American society thought something that was not true and not reflective of Jesus. For example, there was a time when the majority thought black people were inherently inferior. That assertion was false but speaking against it was not popular.

What would it have looked like if more people had interpreted the Bible with clean hearts and clear eyes? We shouldn’t be persuaded by whatever side of the argument has greater numbers. As Christians we should always be learning and identifying societal issues that need to be fixed for the sake of our neighbors. The truth of God’s word must frame our civic engagement.

### **Partnering:**

Partnering with nonbelievers does not necessarily mean affirming their beliefs. Esther and Mordecai had to partner with the King of Persia to stop Haman’s plan to exterminate the Jewish people (**Esther 4–9**).

Like us, Esther and Mordecai were far from perfect, but God used them to protect his people by engaging the Persian political system and associating with nonbelievers. Esther, in particular, used her influence as queen to nullify the decree that ordered the extermination—at great risk to her own safety (**Esther 5:1-7**). She put her personal interests aside to follow God’s will, courageously saying, “And if I die then I die” (**Esther 4:16**).

### **Political Policy Doctrine:**

The Bible does not provide a political platform, and we should be careful to not confuse our personal policy preferences with religious doctrine. Two Christians can disagree on an important policy without one or the other necessarily being unfaithful.

For instance, the Bible doesn't tell us exactly how much in taxes the government should collect or what the minimum wage should be. Even when the Bible does directly speak to an issue, Christians might disagree on how to apply the principle in the public square.

So, let me say it again. There is no single Christian policy or political plan. To act like there is one, or to wish that there was one, would be to make the old mistake of thinking that the kingdom of God is like human kingdoms. Therefore, it's a mistake to suggest that Christians should always come to the same political conclusions. However, all Christians should make our political decisions from a biblical framework. The goal is not to have all Christians share the same exact politics but to have all Christians think Christianly about politics.

**Don't take the sucker's choice:**

We must assess the issues within a framework that emphasizes love and truth, compassion and conviction, social justice and moral order. Our political decisions must demonstrate love for our neighbors while observing the timeless truths God has revealed to us through Scripture.

**Here's how these competing narratives usually play out:**

- Those on the right side of the political spectrum say they stand for individual freedom, patriotism, and moral order;
- the left, on the other hand, claims to stand for justice, equality, and inclusion.
- Conservatives say progressives are immoral because of their positions on abortion, religious liberty, and the like.
- Progressives say conservatives are bigoted and lack compassion when it comes to poverty, race, and gender.

Both sides have become less tolerant of differing viewpoints and often stamp out candidates and advocates who hold a more nuanced or moderate perspective.

Many Christians are conflicted because they believe in freedom, moral order, justice, equality, and inclusion. We want to protect the unborn and treat the poor and racial minorities with love and compassion. We also see merit in the criticisms of each side. Yet because of how the issues are presented, Christians are told to either surrender their biblical convictions or neglect their Christlike compassion.

There's nothing wrong with being conflicted about how both options are right in part and wrong in part. The bigger problem is when Christians are unaware or unbothered by the faults on the side they prefer. This isn't to suggest a false equivalency between the two parties. One party might be more wrong on more issues at a given time, but we must realize that both fall well short of the biblical standard. Christians can choose a political party, but we can't choose between love and truth. We can't fully embrace movements that dismiss justice or undermine moral order.

Christians must be critical thinkers and question the assumptions and conclusions presented to us. We shouldn't simply accept the issues as they've been framed by political parties, ideological tribes, or the media—because these sources usually aren't analyzing the issues from the standard of the gospel. Instead, these groups often frame the issue in a way that leads us to the conclusions they desire. But Christians must make sure biblical doctrine is the framework from which we base our answers to political and cultural questions.

Once we frame an issue properly, we're able not only to respond in a more accurate and faithful manner but also to disarm the false choices that can entangle us. Instead of taking the sucker's choice, Christians should be able to say:

- "I support social justice, morality, and family values. I don't affirm ungodly behavior, nor do I hate the individual; I affirm the human dignity of all people. I love and care for the poor, and I believe in personal responsibility."

In other words, proper framing allows us to embrace the love and truth of the gospel. Christians can reject false choices in politics without walking away from civic engagement altogether.

### **Increase our civic literacy:**

If we are to be effective citizens who steward our citizenship well, we must increase our civic literacy. Failing to understand the civic process and our relationship with government can result in a lot of wasted time and resources—or worse, we might hurt our cause, hurt others, or both.

## How should Christians function in political parties?

### **Be confident in your identity in Christ:**

If you're unsure about what you believe or are weak in your convictions, it's important to be honest about that. As Christians mature, we grow stronger in our convictions (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Before we step into the public square and partner with others, we must know where we stand on moral issues and be confident enough to defend those stances even if everyone else around us disagrees. If we're not there yet, it doesn't necessarily mean we can't participate in the political process, but we might refrain from joining nonbelievers without guidance from a more mature believer.

### **Get to know your partners and understand their endgame:**

At no point in your Christian walk are you required to be ignorant. The Bible doesn't command you to be ignorant. We have the freedom, and the requirement really, to love someone enough to research and understand their ideology and motivations. We can't stop there, though, because we also have to understand other people's stories and how those stories intertwine with their ideology. We get the opportunity to ask questions like:

- Why do they believe what they believe?
- How does this belief affect their lives?
- Who is influencing the beliefs of this person?
- What is their end-goal and how do their beliefs help this person get there?

Our goal is to love and to understand the other person and their perspective. However, we can't be blind to their faults and bad traits. These things, too, affect what they believe.

### **Identify the objective and shared values:**

As believers become part of a group of people, specifically a political party, it's important to ask questions so that we can be clear to ourselves and others as to WHY we are part of this group of people. As you identify Republican, Democrat, Independent, Green Etc., ask yourself these questions:

- What are you trying to achieve by being a part of this group?
- What values do you share with others in the group?
- What is your objective and what does success look like?

- What values do I share with the peoples of this group?
- Am I clear on the objective of this group or leader and why it's important?
- Is the rhetoric of this group or leader based on exaggerated claims and baseless accusations against others or on a solid, proactive rationale?
- Am I allowed to ask questions?
- Is the group acting out of love for our neighbors?
- Do we listen and respond to people who disagree?

### **Identify differences and conflicting views:**

As Christians become a part of a group, we have to make sure we identify and understand the issues where our convictions differ from that group. We endanger our own stance if we don't take the time to do this. It's important to recognize that just because we identify as part of a specific group, that doesn't mean we endorse their entire agenda.

No matter where you stand, what group you become a part of, you'll never believe EVERYTHING that group stands on. Here is an example of how this plays out - You might both say you support religious freedom, but your group only supports religious freedom for Christians and not others. You should identify those differences of opinion early within the group. -

### **Don't isolate the issue:**

No issue is an island. Every issue affects others, and there can be unintended consequences. You might be called to focus on one issue, while someone else is called to focus on another. Instead of seeing other issues as competition, recognize that there is much work to be done and support the labor of others when you can. *Here's an example:*

Education is tied to the criminal justice system, which is tied to poverty, and so on. We can't focus on every issue, but when we isolate an issue and ignore all others, we can lose perspective and end up damaging our Christian witness.

## **What are some principles that should guide my communication when it comes to politics, protest, and advocacy?**

### **Study and be confident:**

To persuade others in the public square, as Christians we first have to be confident in our convictions, and confidence comes from knowing what we believe and why we

believe it. Study Scripture and read the thoughts of orthodox writers on pressing topics in society.

**Show love and concern:**

We as Christians must genuinely love the people we're addressing. Why should others listen to us if we're talking down to them or failing to show them compassion? If we're not demonstrating humility and sincere social concern, our words will fall flat.

**Be informed. Do research:**

To be effective we must understand the subject matter and understand the mood of our audience. We must thoroughly understand our own point of view and our interlocutor's.

**Have a plan:**

We should anticipate how those receiving our message will engage and the questions they'll have. It's helpful to plot our points of interaction and our responses ahead of time.

**Maintain a hopeful, positive tone:**

We shouldn't walk into a conversation with people with different beliefs and assume they'll automatically agree with us. Instead, Christians should anticipate their disagreements and keep our composure as we speak in a way that glorifies God.

**Relate to the audience:**

We should speak in terms our audience understands and use sources they respect whenever possible. It's possible to communicate biblical principles without actually quoting the Bible.

- Define your terms even if you think that everyone knows what they mean.
- Not all politicians are dishonest, but too often they play on words or use misdirection instead of telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It's happened in presidential administrations that each party holds in high esteem.

**Be persuasive:**

It's important to take the time to think through the logic of our argument—its premises and conclusions. We should be prepared to walk our audience toward our conclusion

without assuming too much and without insulting their intelligence, using illustrations and symbols they can relate to.

**Don't hide your convictions:**

Sometimes we're so self-conscious about not sounding harsh or judgmental that no one knows what we actually believe. That's ineffective and often demonstrates a lack of courage. It's possible to "speak the truth in love" and to be winsome without hiding Christian convictions. Remember, the Holy Spirit ultimately brings people to Christ, not our charm or persuasive arguments.

**How can I continue to see someone who stands on the opposite side of an issue from me as someone made in the image of God?**

**Have words and thoughts that bless:**

We ought to ascribe the best motives possible to our political opponents, given the information at hand, and do our best to separate intent from impact. Where there is reasonable room to offer the benefit of the doubt, we should offer it.

Even when we vehemently disagree with what someone is arguing, try to affirm what is worthy of affirmation. This can help establish common ground, and it explicitly limits the scope of disagreement, which is a buffer against contempt.

**Avoid deception and manipulation:**

Our beliefs should never lead us to cheat, deceive, manipulate, or lie. All of these things are sins and do not reflect Jesus.

**Ground political engagement in service:**

If our political involvement is motivated by service rather than self-promotion, the pursuit of power, or antagonism, civility will be much more likely. Remember that we enter the public square not to win but to serve. Civility makes the politics of service more habitual.