

The Christian in Politics: The Biblical Case for Political Engagement.

By Dr. Marvin Jones

Introduction

I want to welcome you to the *Center for the Christ, Faith, and Culture* Inaugural presentation. The mission of this Center is to equip the believer and the church with a biblical worldview as we engage our culture.

This evening, we are going to review *The Christian in Politics: The Biblical Case for Political Engagement*. The rationale for this presentation is that Christians are becoming less involved in American politics and International politics than previous generations.

George Barna released a study in early August at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. This study reveals that only 1/3 of all Evangelicals are like to vote in the 2024 election.¹

Troy Miller is the President of the National Religious Broadcasters. In his article for the Daily Caller, entitled, *Its time to get Millions of Evangelical Voters to the Polls* states,

An estimated seven million evangelicals in swing states alone did not participate in the 2020 presidential election, numbers that might have overturned outcomes up and down the ballot. While evangelicals are more likely than their secular counterparts to vote in elections, an estimated one-third sit on the sidelines.²

Somehow Christians, have adopted the mindset that voting is not our responsibility or perhaps not even necessary. The issue becomes rather pointed; if Christians don't vote in government, then by default, their vote is relegated to someone else who speaks on the Christian's behalf.

So tonight, the purpose of this lecture is to demonstrate that voting in a democracy is not anti-Christian much less immoral. Richard Land, from Executive Director of the ERLC of the SBC, coined the term, *Christian Citizen*. The meaning of the term is that Christians have the responsibility to engage the culture through the democratic process of the vote or even serving in office.

I would like to define the purpose of Government so that we have a platform definition in our understanding of the purpose of Government no matter the form of government.

Purpose of Government: Government is designed by God to keep its citizen's safe, to promote the well-being of its society, to administer justice on behalf of its citizenship. Government derives its limited authority from God (Romans 13). There is more about Romans 13 later but this simply definition will suffice

Let's review...

- I. The Old Testament Case for Political Involvement: Joseph and Daniel. The OT is rife with examples of God's people being involved in the political process of their day. I only have time for a few examples and so I have chosen to review the spiritual and political life Joseph and Daniel. At

¹ American Worldview Inventory 2024 (Release #4), 8.

² <https://dailycaller.com/2024/08/18/opinion-time-to-get-evangelical-voters-polls-troy-a-miller/>

the end of this section though I will list a few more examples that you can consider for your own study.

A. Genesis 41, Joseph:

You know the story of Joseph. He was sold into slavery but elevated to a high-ranking position in the Egyptian Government. Joseph had the unique ability to interpret dreams. There are statements in the story that we often overlook that give insight into how a believer can function in adverse situations.

1. Genesis 41: 14-16 The ability to interpret the dream is credited to God (Elohim). The meaning here is the Spirit of God which has the Hebrew meaning of “creative activity” is the one who will interpret the dream. The political environment of Joseph’s Day was pagan. The Egyptian people were led by their leader to worship idols and false gods. Amid Pharaoh’s crisis none of their gods or their priest were able to interpret. Joseph, the believer in the true God, does interpret to the pagan leadership. This is a valuable lesson. This is Joseph being light in a dark place. Yet, in that dark place called Egypt, Joseph knows that God is at work in Joseph, to answer the needs of Egypt and Egyptian leadership.
2. Genesis 41:25 God has a plan he is going to enact in Egypt. Regardless of human leadership, regardless of human authority, and even regardless of human acknowledgment of God – God is at work in the life of a nation.
3. Genesis 41: 34-36 God revealed a plan to Joseph for the preservation of the Egyptian nation. The plan meant that Pharaoh had to be submissive to God or there would be no preservation of the Egyptian nation. Leadership will follow God’s plan or forfeit blessings.
4. Genesis 41:41-46 Joseph is promoted to a very powerful position in the Egyptian government. He is not only promoted in the realm of government, but the nation knows of this promotion. **You see this in vs 55** – Pharaoh tells the people to consult Joseph. This is the Egyptian government fulfilling its purpose to maintain the well-being of its society (remember our definition of government?).

Conclusion of Joseph:

He is a national administrator for Egypt. He administrates and plans the food cultivation, conservation, and storage of the national supplies. He keeps the country focused upon agriculture so that the coming famine will not starve out the nation. Basically, he is Egypt’s FDA (Food and Drug Administration).

Please keep in mind that Joseph was given responsibility in a political environment that did not serve much less recognize God. Yet, the opportunity to be a witness in a dark world was exactly what God had in mind. Joseph was a blessing to the people of the nation and to Pharaoh. This is government serving the needs of the people even though the Egyptian government only recognized the true God through Joseph.

B. Daniel 2, Daniel’s Ministry.

You cannot read Daniel without recognizing the geo-political features and prophecy of the worldly kingdoms. The book opens with one aspect of those features and that is the Jewish

people have been deported to Babylon. The book starts with that event and moves to the world's numerous kingdoms throughout time.

Starting with the Jewish deportation and from a Jewish perspective it seems that God has abandoned his chosen people. The Temple was in ruins, Jerusalem was ransacked the people lived in a foreign land with a foreign king, and a foreign government. The book is about God's control over the affairs of humanity, kings, and governments. Daniel chapter 2 brings Daniel to the attention of King Nebuchadnezzar.

In Chapter 1:3-7 Nebuchadnezzar's policy was to seek out and train the best minds for government service regardless of their national or ethnic origin. They had a three-year program for government service: 1) they studied the literature and language of the Chaldeans (vs 4), 2) science, math, history, 3) most likely the previous cultures of the Akkadians and Sumerian.

An interesting word is used in verse 4. The word *Chaldean* can mean people of Southern Babylon, or it can refer to a class of astrologers and priest that emerged from the Chaldeans. I think that is the way the word is used in chapters 2-6. They were the Sages of the Middle East (you know them as *the Wise Men*). According to John Goldingay, in his book *Daniel*, "They were the guardians of the sacred traditional lore developed and preserved in Mesopotamia over centuries, covering natural history, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, interpretation of dreams..." These guys were good. These are the teachers that Daniel and many others learned from.

So let me show you this before we go further. **Daniel 2:2, Daniel 5:11** – take the word magician and shorten it to the first four letters. What do you have? MAGI!

1. The King has a dream: In Chapter 2:2 the King has a dream that no one can interpret. The King brings in the *Magicians, astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans*. For the record, the Chaldeans (who were the astrologers) were very accurate.

The problem is that King wanted the Chaldeans to tell him the dream he had. In other words, they were somewhat set up as they did not know the specific dream. Now I want to stop here and take in the big picture. The Chaldeans are talking to the King of the entire Middle East. This is not some lower governmental agency. This is a King who not only controlled government but was the government. This tells us that government does not know everything!

The Chaldeans know their lives are in danger. If they cannot tell the dream and then interpret it - they would be killed. They told the King that his request in humanly *impossible*. Now here is where it gets really interesting. Whenever you tell a government official "No" things are not going to go well. The King wants answers what no human being can possibly know **(2:10-11 READ)** and he is told "no way we can do this."

Please know that there is not one human government that can solve all the problems of its citizens much less its officials! This passage alone shows the weakness of the best of human endeavor to solve its problems. The real problem is that government does not know that it cannot solve all the problems! Sometimes government thinks its citizens are to serve the government. These men are the best minds available in the Babylonian Kingdom, but they cannot serve the King. For that matter, serving the official is not the purpose of government (more about this later).

Back to the story, the King wants their heads to roll because of their failure to serve the King which means their failure to serve their government. This is governmental abuse at its most harsh application. In verse 12 he wants to kill all the wise men (magi) and all the rest including Daniel who was trained by them.

This is not just a king in crisis! This is a government in crisis. The lesson to be learned here is that all governments will have societal crisis that must be addressed. That is the reason Paul command us to pray for our governmental leaders (I Tim 2:2).

2. Daniel intervenes in the King's Government. In verse 17-23 Daniel ask his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to pray with him that God would reveal the dream to Daniel. This is Daniel working with the King in the perimeters that the King wanted.

The lesson for us is the sometimes the government does not create the idea circumstances for anyone – there were people going to die because of failure to serve the government – both believers and non-believers. Yet, Daniel knew, what we have sometimes forgotten, God can work through the perimeters of any government to accomplish his purpose.

3. Daniel Before the King. Daniel request to appear before the King as God gave him the interpretation of the King's dream. **Let's read Daniel 1: 27-28.** Daniel also admits his inability to serve the King. In and of himself he cannot serve this ungodly king. Yet, he can interpret the King's dream because God answered his prayer. Daniel, rightfully, credits God with the interpretation.

One of the reasons that God promotes believers in governmental work is for their godly influence upon the process of government. I know that government claims the *separation of church state clause*, but the clause is nowhere found in the US Constitution. In fact, just the opposite. Government cannot establish a national religion (First Amendment in the Bill of Rights) but that does not preclude Christians from serving government. That is the exact approach of Daniel, and it should be an example to modern Christianity.

Daniel is successful even in the guidelines that are not favorable to him or anyone else who is serving the King. The only reason for his success is God wants to bless the ungodly people with the benefit of a godly leaders in the King's cabinet.

There is a prophecy given in **verse 44 (Read)**. All governments will end, and a final government will emerge on earth that shall stand forever. It is the reign of Jesus Christ. Isaiah informs us that the government shall be upon his shoulders in this kingdom – this subject is for a later time.

4. Daniel's Promotion in Government. **Let's read Daniel 2:48; 5:11.** Daniel's promotion includes the educational system of the elite men of the Kingdom. The lesson here is that Daniel is not the primary leader, but he is a leader of influence in Babylon.

His responsibility is to train the wise men who had a long history within the Babylonian and Persian kingdoms. They were known for the multifaceted knowledge, yet their knowledge was deficient. They did not know about God in heaven. Daniel supplemented the curriculum of the wise men by teaching them about God. This impacted the rest of the Kingdom as the Book of Daniel reveals. Think of it this way, when Jesus is born, the wise men coming from the east, had by NT times, a thorough knowledge of the OT prophecies

about the coming Kingdom. Daniel prophesied this in the interpretation of the dream in Daniel 2.

Conclusion of Daniel

Daniel's ministry as a prophet is in the realm of government. He is not a preaching prophet like Jonah but a diplomatic prophet that seeks the benefit of the government for its citizens. When Daniel works with the King the who empire is better. We don't know if any government official ever came a believer. We do know that because of Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego the King was influenced to promote their God (Daniel 3:29-30). One of the reason's we want Christian's in government is so that the laws are favorable and conducive to Christians living peaceful lives in its communities.

If you study the book of Daniel (which we did not) there emerges another pertinent consideration for us. When the leadership changed the situation of the believers' lives were often changed. Those changes meant that three young leaders under King Neb was placed in a fire. Another King and another law about praying and Daniel winds up in the Lion's Den.

The lesson here is that ungodly rulers will make ungodly laws, and we do not need to be unaware of that fact. On the other hand, godly leaders (who are on a scale of tolerate and friendly to Christians) will make laws that allow Christianity to flourish. Our Baptist, Faith, and Message states *that a free church in a free state is the Christian idea (BFM 2000, Article on 17 on Religious Liberty)*.

Summary of the OT

There were many forms of government in the OT. The Judges governed the people until they wanted a King to rule them. The theocracy of the King was that the King also served God. Thus, God in heaven reigned through the godly King on earth (David and Solomon).

When Israel was in exiles, God raised up people like Esther *for a time such as this* to help her people avoid the genocide of a tyrant. The clue in that episode is that Esther had to be the person to stand up for God's people. When the last Queen tried that she was deposed.

Moses is the great Lawgiver who governed both politically and spiritually. He is a type of Christ in that Jesus will reign as literal King over a political and spiritual Kingdom (Isaiah 9:6-7 READ). Isaiah served in the King's court which meant he had access to the King's judicial government.

One of the most important lessons of the OT is that God wants his people treated fairly and with dignity by the rulers of the people. This is true in physical matters as the King governs the lives of the people. It is also true in spiritual matters with spiritual leaders who are to shepherd and encourage spiritual growth. When these two forces work in conjunction with one another then the gospel can go forth without hinderance. Please know the gospel will go forth but the idea is for a society to create laws that do not restrict the growth of Christianity.

Let's review...

- II. The New Testament Case for Political Involvement: Jesus and Paul. The NT is also rife with governmental involvement in the daily affairs of the citizens. We are coming upon the Christmas season and no doubt some of you will read the Christmas story of Luke 2.

Please don't miss the stated fact that the story starts with a governmental decree, from Ceasar, to tax his Kingdom. This decree meant the return to the ancient homeland of the tribal people of Isreal. The journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem from Nazareth is dramatic.

Caesar's laws so impacted the culture of Palestine that Jesus's teaching ministry often reflected the Laws of the Roman Empire. For example, Jesus taught us that if anyone asked for your coat give him the undergarments also. *If anyone bids you to go a mile then go two miles.*

The Roman Centurions were allowed, by law, to confiscate your clothing if they needed it. They were also allowed to conscript you to carry their equipment for a mile. Jesus' teaching on those two items alone means that we, as his followers, supersede the requirements of the laws—even if we don't like them.

U.S. laws impact our culture in numerous areas just like Rome did in their day. Taxes, governmental regulation of our bathroom commodes (yes there are specific regulations to water containment in your commode). Government regulates your speeding (or tries to). There are laws that govern the building of our homes (how high are the electrical receptacle's???). There are laws that govern how many fish you can catch or how many deer you can shoot. The list goes on and on. We are not going to escape the Laws that govern our lives nor did Jesus.

A. Jesus and Supporting Government

The New Testament can basically divided into two primary areas: 1) the witness of Jesus Christ, 2) the witness of the rest of the New Testament (Paul will be our dialogue partner). To be forthright Jesus did not have many encounters with the Roman political leaders of his day. Yet he did comment on how the people of Israel should relate to the Roman political system.

1. Matthew 17: 24-27 (**Read**) Jesus led the apostles to Capernaum. The tax collector was waiting for them with a potent question; does your teacher pay his taxes? Peter brought the question to Jesus and they reasoned through the conclusion that one should pay taxes which means that believers are supporting a government that has not embraced the concept of a one and only God. The Romans had many gods!

Now the story is only found in Matthew and not the other gospels but please remember that Matthew was a tax collector. The issue here is not taxes but obedience to a government that may not like Believers or their gatherings within their churches.

2. In Matthew 22:17 (also Luke 20:24-30) the Pharisees also asked the question about Jesus and taxes: is it right to pay taxes to Caesar? Basically, the question is this: should we support a pagan government? The Pharisees know and Jesus knows that they will take Believers money and use it for expenditures that we would not fund. So the question is forward; should we fund a pagan government that does not have our values?

As you know the story, Jesus asked about the impression of the coin and of course it had a picture of Caesar. Jesus statement then was to support the pagan government by giving to Caesar that which actually belonged to Caesar.

Jesus' answer established the legitimate authority of the Roman government over the lives of the Believers of God. Taxes are used for items we do not like but they are also used for items we do like. They are used to support our military, our police, our national parks, our conservation efforts of this great country. They support air traffic controller, the highway

system, our local and state government, even our school system. There is much about taxes that we do not like but there is much that we do like. Our government is a legitimate government that was established under the authority of God as our civil authority. Therefore, we support our government.

And that brings us to Paul...

B. Paul and Civil Obedience to Government

Paul's infamous Romans 13 chapter is the hallmark concerning the Christians relationship to government. Let me be clear about this chapter: the form of government is not in view. Paul penned this letter between the Nero – Caligula dynasties. Suffice it to say both men persecuted Christians. As John MacArthur states, *This recurring theme of submission to society's controlling power is nowhere more forcefully dealt with than here.*

The Book of Romans persuades us that salvation not only changes the relationship with God but changes our external relationships. Now a word needs to be said the about government and civil service. Government is *established* as an authority in our lives. For example, Jesus healed the centurion's daughter but never commanded him to leave the army. Cornelius, in Acts 10, was saved and he was never advised to leave the army. No civil leader such as Sergius Paulus (Acts 13) left his high office in politics.

A government may act tyrannical with a murderous dictator at the helm. Political corruption may be the norm of the day that the Christian must contend with. The laws of the government may not be applied fairly. *Yet none of these issues changes the wording of Romans 13 and the challenge to be civil obedient to a government that may abuse its own citizens.*

Romans 13:1-7 READ Not only are we to be submissive to government, but the Bible also states that no government exists without the permission of God. This would include cruel dictators or the opposite end of benevolent democracies.

The idea of submission is interesting. We are called to *submit* but the word *obey* is not used. The focus is upon recognizing that government exist for the good of its citizens. We are called to submit by recognizing that government is useful for our lives.

The word obey would imply obedience to a government that seeks to harm its citizens. This passage teaches a hierarchy in the Christians relationship to the government. So let's think of it this way...*Perhaps our submission to government is compatible with disobedience to government in certain exceptional circumstances* (Doug Moo-NICNT).

The meaning becomes that we recognize the authority of government for the well-being of its citizens. If that government should abuse its citizens, then civil disobedience is possible. Here are some examples: Women's Suffrage movement (non-violent but still civil disobedient to existing laws, Revolutionary War, Civil War, Civil Rights Movement).

Please keep in mind the punitive actions (vs 4). The government has the obligation to protect the citizens within its realm. This would include, fines, trial by jury, border patrol, possibly even the death penalty (I do think that is the meaning of the "sword" in verse 4). These actions are against those people who seek to harm its own citizens.

So, Dr. J, when is Civil Disobedience justified? When the **government** ceases to fulfill it's purpose of serving its own society. Government does not have the right to forcefully harm its own people by silencing them with prison sentences and/or death sentences. Of course I am referring to Communism, Fascism, and other forms of evil governments.

Conclusion

By submitting to governments and involving in ourselves in the political system, God allows for us to be *salt and light in a dark world*. So here is what we learned from the OT and NT study:

1. Working for Pagan governments is not prohibited (Joseph, Daniel, Esther, Isaiah, etc.). There is no Biblical prohibition against holding a political office. There is no encouragement to withdraw from office or military found in the Scriptures. As Christians, the only way to be *Light to the World* is to engage the world with the gospel and holy living.
2. Voting for a less than ideal candidates is to be expected. We must use caution in that any candidate should reflect godly values. The challenge is that a candidate may not be a believer but incorporates values that agree with Christianity. I call this the *Christian Consensus*.

A Christian Consensus means that a candidate or a society may have Christian values that they promote. There are many people who are against abortion but may not be Christians – they adhere to a Christian Consensus.

3. Christians are to support the government through our taxes. We recognize the benefits of taxation. In the American society taxation allows for representation in and to our government.
4. As Christian we submit to our government. The US government is not perfect by any means. Yet traditionally our government has been friendly toward faith-based communities. As such we recognize *a nation under God* so that we have the freedom to support our government and the freedom to critique our government.
5. As Christians we should pray for our government leaders on every level of our government. Political leaders make decisions that impact our lives and the lives of non-believers. They have a heavy responsibility that can become burdensome. Our responsibility to government is to beseech the Lord in heaven that He would guide their decision making process.