

Biblical Citizenship: God's People and Civic Engagement

What is the Christian's duty to participate in culture, especially in a time of dramatic upheaval, a time when evil is called good and good is called evil? R.J. Rushdoony reminds us, "We cannot use our thoughts and feelings as a standard: only God's Word is the test." **We must look to the Holy Scriptures which teach...**

- Along with the institutions of family and church, God ordains the institution of government. *"For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God"* (Romans 13:1). Indeed, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" Abraham Kuyper
- Just as fathers lead their family and elders shepherd the church, God entrusts roles of leadership and responsibility to government officials for the good of citizens. *"Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad... For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer... the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing"* (Romans 13:3-6).
- The held values of a leader affect the well-being of those under their authority, for good or bad. *"When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan"* (Proverbs 29:2). *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people"* (Proverbs 14:34).
- Ignoring the ruin of a nation (or, city/county/state) is specifically warned against. ***"Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria... Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!"*** (Amos 6:1-6).
- God-followers are called to positively impact the world around them. God instructs His people to actively pursue the good of Babylon, an albeit, God-defying culture with the words, ***"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare"*** (Jeremiah 29:7) Their righteous involvement was obviously tied to the well-being of the community at large.
- Jesus declares His followers are salt and light. *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:13,16). As salt, Christians act as a preservative in a rotting culture. As light, their good works reflect the Light of the World, shining His light into the darkness.
- Engagement with the culture is faith's response to God's requirement and command.
 - *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord REQUIRE of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8). God loves justice; He loves mercy, and He requires His followers do likewise. We see Jesus modeling both justice and mercy when He called out **governing officials** for their unjust, unmerciful laws preventing the provision of help on the Sabbath (John 7:23-24).
 - Next to loving God, the greatest and most important commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-38). The aim of a Christian's cultural engagement is not to create some sort of utopia; rather, our engagement is a reflection of God's nature and a practical expression of faith and obedience to the command to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In summary, Scripture teaches that government has been ordained by God; He entrusts roles of leadership and responsibility to government officials for the good of citizens; when the righteous rule, a nation flourishes; wicked leadership results in groaning; God-followers are called to LOVE others, be salt and light, and actively seek the welfare of the land as doers of justice and mercy.

Social Evils: Yesterday and Today

When it comes to the importance of God's people being practically and faithfully engaged in culture, two particular dark chapters in history come to mind: The English/American slave trade and the German Holocaust. We look back upon the atrocities committed and wonder at both the cowardice of German Christians and indifference of English/American churchgoers. We applaud the brave Christians who rose in opposition to the evil policies of their governments: Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer foremost amongst them.

Today we face new brands of evil that include the unprecedented targeting of children. We KNOW the thoughts of Jesus on this: *"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea"* (Matthew 18:6). YET often the American church remains silent while the sexualization of children, for just one example, is rampant. Who but the Church should be opposing/exposing present evil and leading the righteous outcry for justice and mercy?

A few of the current mindsets undermining the Christian's call to engage:

1. **"Let go and let God."** The disposition to "leave it to God and stay out of it" has diverted believers from being God's instruments of justice and mercy. The result is the yielding of ground and a void of much needed wisdom and action. "Where organized society (i.e., the church) surrenders power (i.e., godly influence), the mob gains it proportionate to the surrender." R.J. Rushdoony. The "let go and let God" mentality rightly acknowledges the glorious truth that God is in control, yet it wrongly dispenses with the reality that God uses people to carry out His purposes. Just one of countless examples found in Scripture: God, without any help from us, can instantly turn a heart of stone into flesh, but He also ordains that words of exhortation can be the softening agent. *"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hebrews 3:13).
2. **"Politics is a dirty word."** It is not uncommon to hear, "I don't want to get involved. That's too political." Sadly, when an issue is labeled "political" it essentially gives Christians a "pass," permission to retreat and disengage. Yet politics is part and parcel of the God-ordained institution of government. It's about how we order our shared life together: how we promote the good, protect the weak, expose and oppose evil, administer justice and mercy. Pastor Chris LeDuc explains: "The political world is where Christians have the greatest opportunity to advocate for our neighbors being treated justly and righteously."
3. **"I can't vote for a guy like that."** Nobody is perfect and never will be. *"There is none righteous, no not one"* (Romans 3:10). Fallible characters fill the pages of both the Old and New Testaments, and YET God uses both believers and nonbelievers to accomplish His purposes. As we consider candidates, Christian voters must remember: "A vote is not a valentine. You aren't confessing your love for the candidate. It's a chess move for the world you want your children to live in." We sow what we reap. Vacuums will always be filled, and radical candidates are anxious to fill the seats that Christians yield up.

WHO.SEATS.IN.THOSE.SEATS.REALLY.MATTERS.

4. **“Civic engagement is a calling for the individual, not for the church or pastors.”** Of all the worthwhile ministries churches offer, whether it's financial stewardship classes, grief care, marriage counseling, or addiction recovery, the case can be made that none has more of an impact on individuals both inside and outside the church as well as future generations than civic engagement. As in the days of Nehemiah, God's people endeavored to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem **TOGETHER**. What Nehemiah did we also must do: *“So **WE** built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for **THE PEOPLE** had a mind to work...and **WE PRAYED** to our God and set a guard as a protection...Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and **(TOGETHER) FIGHT** for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”* Nehemiah 4:6-9
5. **“The Gospel is the sole mission of the church.”** Certainly the glorious Gospel, the good news of Christ's all-sufficient, saving work IS the central and preeminent herald of the church. YET the whole counsel of Scripture indicates that the Gospel message is **not** the only mission of the church. In the Great Commission Jesus gives His final instructions: **to make disciples, teaching them to obey everything He commanded**. This includes honoring Him in every sphere of life including “temporal” matters. Accordingly, churches serve the Lord with a variety of ministries. Even extraneous activities like harvest parties, game nights, fantasy football leagues, and even home decorating seminars can have certain value building community.

What is apparent is that although the Gospel is the preeminent message of the church, the mission has many expressions. In fact, it would seem the only neglected “expression” would be that of civic engagement...how to obey the Lord's command to be salt and light, seekers of the welfare of the city, opposers and expositors of evil, doing good in the land, acting justly and loving mercy.

In the book, What is the Mission of the Church?, authors Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert write, “We absolutely want to make sure the gospel is of first importance in our churches; we want the utterly unique task of the church—making disciples—front and center; and we want to always remember there is something worse than death and something better than human flourishing.” Yes indeed! That said, being Gospel-centered and being culturally engaged is NOT an either/or proposition. They clarify, “We do not want Christians to be indifferent toward the suffering around them; to think evangelism is the only thing in life that really counts; to retreat into holy huddles, blissfully unconcerned to work hard and make an impact within their sphere of influence; or for that matter, to even stop dreaming of courageous ways to love their neighbors and impact their cities. It must be understood that desperately needed civic engagement by lovers and doers of truth does not negate or dilute the truth or the preeminence of the Gospel. Rather, it is a practical outcome of being a disciple who is fulfilling God's command to be salt and light, loving their neighbor as themselves.”

In short, believers CAN walk and chew gum at the same time. Being Gospel-centered and civically engaged are NOT either/or propositions.

What are some ways believers can engage for the glory of God and the good of others?

FIRST THINGS FIRST: Pray!

- **Seek God's face.** Pray for a pure and humble heart that grieves for our country and longs (prays!) for its healing. Repent of the evil we have tolerated. *"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."* 2 Chronicles 7:14
- **Ask God for a heart of compassion.** *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"* (Colossians 3:12). "The other side" is NOT the enemy; they are captives of The Enemy. *"He must gently reprove those who oppose him, in the hope that God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, who has taken them captive to his will"* (2 Timothy 2:25-26).
- **Ask God to show you the "where," "when," and "how."** Engagement will look different based on giftings, experience, and even seasons of life. The Lord faithfully leads His sheep. *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- **Ask God to remove wicked leaders and raise up righteous leaders.** We can pray to the Father, that all willful workers of wickedness be removed from positions of power, that He would graciously open the eyes of those being deceived, and that He would place people who stand for God's righteous cause in the high places of government and influence.
- **Ask God to give wisdom to pastors** to shepherd well during these days of growing darkness. Ask God to give them like what wisdom and courage, to be spurred by God's Word to lead his congregation in purposeful civic engagement as a holy endeavor done in God's power for His glory and the good of others. Pray for an iron-sharpening-iron conversation where you can discuss important questions in light of Scripture.
- **Join others in prayer.** In 2024, a prayer movement called Pray4TN was launched in Tennessee with House Joint Resolution (HJR) 803, a "call to prayer, fasting and repentance."

VOTE! Voting is a God-given privilege and significant means to oppose evil. American Christians have the unique ability to elect candidates who will stand strong when it comes to representing values based on the things God hates and loves.

Sadly, the blessing of voting is largely ignored by most Christians, and the result has been increasing vulnerability to egregious, God-defying policies. Across the nation more than 45 million Christians registered to vote do not vote in Presidential elections, and more than 65 million Christians do not vote in their local elections. To our shame, "Areas with the highest percentage of Christians have the lowest voter turnout" according to historian Bill Federer. The state of Tennessee has an abysmal showing, the fifth lowest voting turnout in the nation (2024). Locally, Knoxville's 2025 city election had a **12% voter turnout**. In the last couple of years two conservative Christian candidates have lost their election by **single digits**. Engaged churches in each district of our counties could make the difference in every election.

When Christians connect the dots that voting is a means to seek the welfare of the city, they learn how to vote Biblically and shrewdly.

Voting Biblically looks like voting for...

- the most pro-life candidate because God hates the shedding of innocent blood. (Proverbs 6:17)
- the most pro one-man-one-woman-marriage candidate because God is for marriage. (Genesis 2:24)
- the candidate who most closely aligns with God's view of gender: "Male and female He created them." (Genesis. 1:27)
- the candidate who most strongly protects the right of parents to be the authority over their children. (Ephesians 6:1-4)
- the candidate who most strongly believes the government's purpose is to reward the good and punish evil. (Romans 13:3-4)
- the candidate who most respects the right of a nation to have borders. (Deuteronomy 32:8-9; Acts 17:26)
- the candidate who most strongly supports religious liberty. (Exodus 20:3)
- the candidate whose selection of federal judges will most closely align with these Biblical principles. (Isaiah 1:26)

Voting shrewdly means voting as an informed and discerning citizen. When Jesus sent his disciples out as sheep among wolves, he instructed them to be as shrewd as serpents, that is, wise and strategic. A shrewd-voter **understands** how local elections work (i.e., often the primary election **IS** the election) and discovers which candidates will stand strong when it comes to representing values based on what God hates and loves.

A significant way to vote shrewdly is to **join local and state-wide conservative grassroots organizations**. Regular meetings provide camaraderie, but most significantly the opportunity to learn about issues, candidates **and** discover specific actions that can make a difference. Some of the local groups serving our community in that way:

- **Knox for Liberty** <https://www.knoxforliberty.org>
- **Knox County Conservative Republicans** <https://kccrtn.org/>
- **Knox Watch**. Contact Becky Hofseth at 865 765-9915 to receive email alerts when it would be helpful to make our presence and voices known at local board and city council meetings. [KNOX WATCH INTRODUCTION](#)
- **Tennessee Conservative** <https://tennesseeconservativenews.com>
- **Tennessee Stands** <https://tennesseestands.org>
- **Tennessee Constitutional Grassroots Coalition (TCGC)**
<https://tcgc1776.org>
- **Loudon County: Conservative Club of Tellico (CCT)**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1865177030570071>

Note: Some of these organizations produce **voter guides** which can provide invaluable candidate information.

Support God-fearing candidates. Running for office is not for the faint-hearted. It is a demanding, difficult calling. They need our prayers and as much tangible support as we can offer. Groups like

the Knox County Conservative Republicans have taken on the task of vetting local candidates and assisting with practical campaign help.

Attend local board meetings. There are times when the presence of believers can make a real difference as issues come up before our local school, library, and commissioner boards. Every citizen has the right to petition and reason with their elected officials. A citizen's few minutes at the podium can bring needed light and truth to a topic. When a large group of conservatives show up, sitting officials take notice, and those speaking truth at the mic are supported. Unfortunately, when there is a hot-topic agenda item the chambers are typically filled with leftists advocating for things like child-targeted pornographic books.

Hold representatives accountable. Never underestimate the ability of ordinary citizens to influence the decisions that shape their lives by **calling and emailing your legislators and officials**. Tennessee "watchmen on the wall" are ready to provide updates and means to communicate with your representatives.

Spur on local church leadership. If your pastor is already shepherding your church well regarding civic engagement, do all you can to come alongside and support him in that effort. If not...

- Begin a conversation with your pastor, perhaps starting with just a couple of questions: What does civic engagement look like at our church? How can our church effectively apply Scriptures, like "seeking the welfare of the city," "acting justly and loving mercy," and "opposing and exposing evil"?
- Ask if prior to an election cycle a table could be made available where church members could register to vote and get information on voting Biblically.
- Ask if the church could host a Biblical Citizenship Ministry where believers can be better equipped to engage locally. Suggest readily available resources and curriculum from organizations like Focus on the Family, Family Research Council, and The Patriot Academy.
- Consider sharing several examples of pastoral instruction on the topic of civic engagement:
 - [Election 2024: How to Vote Like Jesus // Christians & Government // Pastor Jo...](#)
 - [Church, Unite for the Soul of America! | Ezekiel 33:1-5 | Gary Hamrick](#)
 - [When Christians Fail to Vote \(Psalm 33:12\) by Jack Hibbs](#)
 - [Link: Neutrality is Not an Option. Voddie Baucham.](#)
 - [The most controversial *TRUTH* about Christianity and Politics - YouTube](#)
 - [The TRUTH about the church getting too "political" - YouTube](#)

In Closing

As we seek to shine through the shadows and seek the welfare of our city, may we remember that none of our efforts are the determiners of outcomes; results are God's. Even as we mount up, we are ever mindful the battle is His. *"Some trust in chariots and others in horses, but **we trust in the name of the LORD our God**"* (Psalm 33:16-18).

May we be happy warriors, not shrieking sirens. May we speak up thoughtfully, respectfully, and winsomely, letting our reasonableness be made known to all. May we turn inevitable anxious thoughts into gratefulness, **knowing full well the Lord is at hand and in control**. May God's peace which surpasses all understanding guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as we bring our requests for undeserved mercy on our land, strength and wisdom for the work ahead, and for a

church that awakens to its duty of seeking the welfare of their city, rising to its rightful place of influence for God's glory and the good of our community.

This was written with the hope and prayer that pastors and their congregations would be encouraged by God's Word to step into the fray of civic engagement as a holy work done in God's power for His glory and the good of others. Please feel free to reach out to us with comments, questions, or if you have an interest in hosting a presentation on this consequential topic.

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