

When Jesus Meets Uncle Sam: 5 Myths about Christians and Politics

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Myth #1: *Christians and Politics Don't Mix*

Is politics a waste of time and energy? Is it a distraction from the church's mission? No. While it's true that only God can transform lives, and that we cannot please God through mere civic virtue, political involvement is thoroughly Christian.

The Origin, Nature, and Purpose of Government

God instituted human government (Genesis 9:6) for a divine purpose: justice (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:14). Good government, then, requires the participation of the just.

It's true that laws change behavior, not hearts. But this not a deficiency in the law, or a reason to forego political participation. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "It may be true that the law cannot change the heart but it can restrain the heartless." Or as Scott Klusendorf wrote, "The purpose of government is not to save people eternally, but to promote justice for the weak and vulnerable."

But laws do affect our hearts. They either confirm or confuse our sense of right and wrong. Good laws preserve and reinforce moral intuitions. Likewise, immoral laws can corrupt our hearts. People often confuse that which is legal with that which is moral. That's why the church's influence is so important. If the church does not influence how government defines good and evil, others may pervert the concepts and injustice will follow.

Politics and Religion are Wed Together

There is no divide between the private and public spheres of our lives. Truth is truth in every sphere. Religious convictions are statements about the way we think the world really is. It would be irrational to believe certain moral principles are actually true, but then abandon them when it comes to politics. Politics is theology applies. If we take religious values seriously, we cannot divorce our religious persuasions from the political issues that touch on those persuasions.

Myth #2: *Christians Should not Force Their Morality on Others*

Liberals have tried to co-opt many moral issues by labeling them "political," and demanding that we keep our religious hands off of them. We are told that we cannot force our morality on others, or that morality cannot be legislated. This notion misses three important points.

First, Judeo-Christian morality has long been the basis of our laws, as is reflected in our laws regarding the dignity of women, spousal abuse, and murder. Should we legalize murder on the basis that its prohibition is rooted in a religious moral conviction?

Second, no one is forcing their morality on anyone. We are *proposing* our view for public consideration, not *imposing* it. Morality cannot be imposed in a democracy.

Third, law is a moral enterprise, so everyone involved in political discourse is attempting to legislate his/her morality. The question is not Should we legislate morality? but Whose morality is going to be legislated?

Must the Church be Neutral?

There is no law demanding that our politics be secular. People can vote however they want, for whatever reason they want. People vote for what they believe is right. If religion cannot inform their view of right, what can? What is the alternative? Do we need to vote in a way that violates our religious beliefs? If transcendent moral truths do not exist as a foundation for law, then law itself becomes merely a system of raw political power accountable to no one.

It is totally appropriate for one's religious convictions to inform their moral views, which in turn inform their political activity.

Myth #3: *It is Wrong to Vote for Imperfect Candidates*

Some reason that to be worthy of our vote, a proposed law or candidate must be perfect: the law must go "all the way" in banning some evil, and the candidate must fully represent our ideology. While such an approach is driven by good intentions, it is not wise, and may result in the increase of injustice.

[We are not obligated to vote for the best candidate, but the best candidate available.](#)

If we do not vote for the better of the two candidates, it is possible that the more unjust candidate will be elected, resulting in an increase of injustice. [When we have the ability to reduce evil in the world, and our inaction has the effect of increasing evil, we are morally culpable.](#)

Not voting may make a moral *statement*, but it will not make a moral *difference*.

Myth #4: *We should not be single-issue voters*

Some people think it's foolish to vote for a particular candidate based on a single issue. That may be true if the issue is morally insignificant, but not if it is morally significant.

The purpose of government is to promote justice. Certain issues hold such significance when it comes to justice that they deserve to be singled out as the defining criterion by which a candidate's fitness for public office is measured. Abortion and same-sex marriage come to mind.

If abortion really does kill innocent and defenseless human beings, any politician who wants to keep abortion legal is not fit for public office. A vote for him/her is a vote for injustice.

It's not a sin to vote for a particular person or party, but it can be a sin to vote for or against certain issues.

Myth #5: *God Doesn't Take Sides*

Is God a Republican or a Democrat? No, but that does not mean He does not take sides on many of the issues that divide Republicans and Democrats.

Political parties are centered on particular platforms: shared philosophical and moral beliefs that translate into public policy. When a political party represents views that reflect God's own standard of goodness, it is legitimate to say God is on the side of that political party insofar as those issues are concerned.

It is often the case that some of God's views are represented in one party, and some of His views in another. That is why it is important that we establish a taxonomy of values. We must determine which issues are the weightiest *from God's perspective*, and then support the party/candidate that reflects those positions accordingly.

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