

Walking with Jesus Through Sinai:
 Seeking Moral Clarity in an Age of Chaos with the 10 Commandments
 CPC Adult Sunday Studies Spring 2025
 19 - Fifth Commandment, part 5

On Individual Engagement with Politics, continued

Review - Last week, we focused on the institutional purposes of the church and the state, both set up by God; looked at the unbiblical framework of Christian nationalism; and, then turned to some of the duties individual Christians have in and toward the state.

Exodus 20:12 - "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Taking this commandment to apply to all authorities that God has placed in our life, we need to be clear about the nature of the state institution. For what purpose did God give it? What is it meant to accomplish (and not)? [On the nature of the institution of the church, see our "What We Believe" class #18-20]

Practical Tips on How to Engage Politically, cont.

1. *Christianity is not a tribe or a civilization to defend.* There are many non-Christian ways in which Christians now engage in tribalism and virtue-signaling that undermine Christian integrity. In our sound-bite culture, we often just shame and demonize the other side in order to show to those in our "tribe" that we're on their side.
 1. **Rhetoric** - "**Code words**" or "**sacred cows**" often reveal tribalism and cultural blindspots. Terms like "social justice" and "critical race theory" became this over the past several years - more often than not the people condemning or promoting them were less interested in the content of the argument and more interested in winning rhetorical points.
 2. **Character** - We don't promote **Christian virtues** like humility, love, justice, and peace simply because we think they're "effective" or "practical" and can change when the need arises; rather, we **follow our Crucified Savior**

in those virtues no matter what. An individual Christian acting in a political calling uses weapons that the Church would not use (for example, military weapons), but not in order to bring the kingdom of God, and certainly not in a way that justifies unChristian character.

3. **Christian party?** If you can't disagree with any parts of your political party or favorite candidate, you're not listening with biblical ears. **There shouldn't be a "Christian vote"!** Scripture speaks to all matters of life and faith, yes; but it does not speak to all the specifics that we need. Scripture is clear that we should care for the poor and the foreigner, but it doesn't tell us which economic or foreign policy will do that better than the other. What is more, to pretend to be a Christian in order to appeal to Christian voters is one of the more disgusting facets of American politics.
4. **Hopes Confused - If American society is in decline** (whatever one may mean by that, and we'd want to be specific!), we may certainly be losing certain common grace goods (i.e. religious freedom, just laws, etc.), but the kingdom of God is **not** in danger. Let us never confuse political hope for eternal hope, the latter of which is secure in Jesus. **Become less at home in the world!** A great danger of politics, especially in America, is that we expect heaven on earth, and heaven to come by political means.

2. *Christians are not to be driven by fear or self-indulgence*

1. Fear is a very powerful motivator, but it is not a Christian one. Especially when it comes to **immigration**, a Christian may have good reasons to protect the borders of a country (**common grace wisdom**, reasonable safety, etc.), but not out of malice, rage, fear, or lack of concern for persons in danger. We should weep with those who weep, regardless of nationality. We should also be **skeptical of political promises** that play to our sinful, selfish instincts of wanting **easier lives without any cost**.
 1. Note also that we should not expect the state to favor "Christian nations" over others, why? Because that would give the state the authority to decide who is a Christian (!), which is precisely the "power of the keys" that Jesus gave the church.
3. **Beware of false equivalence** - Simply because the Church can't say with certainty "thus says the Lord" does not mean that two issues or candidates are equal, or that simply listening to two sides equally is a way to arrive at an

“objectively neutral” stance. 10 minutes watching MSNBC, then 10 minutes watching Fox News does not provide balanced answers (though it may help toward understanding others’ positions). For example, in 1930’s Germany, it would not have been “neutral” or unbiased to treat a Nazi position with the same equanimity as an opposing party, regardless of its popularity. This is a difficult realization in a country with two dominant parties because it makes it appear as if there are two sides to every issue and that the “objective” or right approach is somewhere in the middle. Sometimes that’s true, and sometimes it’s not. As a Christian, we ought to be **more radical** than either party on some issues, **more moderate** on others, etc. . [Keep this warning in mind for the exercise below!]

4. *Beware of social media manipulation* - Christians need to be aware that social media is designed to attract the most extreme opinions and is monetized for click-bait. **That’s not how truth gets disseminated.** Try to learn what silo you are most susceptible to living in, and take steps to get out of it. In other words, don’t believe the hype you find on social media or other news sources, and have a **healthy skepticism** of what is popular or easily believed in our world! Zeal for the Lord will not match the hyped-up enthusiasm of our culture.

An Exercise in Humility: Imagining Christian Arguments for Both Sides

- *Goal - Promote humility in your own heart*, especially on issues that you know Christians differ on. Try to ask and genuinely explore how a Christian can be motivated by Christian convictions and yet end up with different political views. Our unity in Christ should VASTLY override our political differences.
- *On Degrees of Certainty and Passion - This doesn’t mean that political differences don’t matter*; it does mean that we ought to hold them with less certainty and passion than clear biblical commands. I am very convinced that who I vote for is a result of my thinking according to Christian convictions; I also recognize that Christians have the freedom to be more concerned about some issues than others, choose to vote with different priorities, or apply the same biblical truths in different ways. You may be very passionate about abortion or immigration or economic inequality, and you should feel

encouraged by God to pursue that passion in a godly way; but you cannot expect the Church to bind anyone's conscience in a way that says you must vote according to that one issue.

- *The point of this exercise is not to relativize* the issues or argue that truth is somewhere in the middle. It's an exercise in humility, enlarging our view of God and God's people beyond our blindspots. This should encourage conversation across differences because it shows that we can discuss hard issues without demonizing the other and shutting down the topic, especially among brothers and sisters in Christ.
- **This is also not implying that there is no right way; God is not double-minded;** there are right answers to each individual situation, God has simply not always made it clear what they are to the same degree that he has clarified essentials for salvation. Some of these arguments are better than others!
- *Which Topics Fit? A note on black, white, and grey issues:* there are some positions for which there is a clear Christian argument, which are deduced "by good and necessary inference" from God's Word. For example, **abortion** is indefensible from a Christian standpoint, and God clearly hates **economic inequality**; and yet we don't have a biblical basis for knowing how every Christian is bound to engage politically about them. Certainly, we should also be concerned with questions like "how can the church be welcoming and loving enough to those who have felt the need to have an abortion? What are the personal and structural reasons people feel compelled to choose an abortion, and can the church alleviate those reasons?"

Examples of Christian-based arguments:

1. *On the Size of Government (similarly, taxes)*

1. *For Small Government* - humans are inherently sinful, so the more power they exercise, the more sinful it will become. The government should simply get out of the way of what the church is called to, since the state is given limited scope in the New Testament.
2. *For Big Government* - humans are inherently sinful, so we need structures to help provide safety nets and systems that can contribute to fellow citizens' flourishing. There is no "invisible hand of capitalism" that will serve the poor, so the state should alleviate suffering as much as it can.

2. *On Unregulated Economic Freedom*

1. *For* - God wants to provide economic opportunity so people can fulfill their divine calling to work. The state should not get in the way of that. It should do everything it can to enable people to work without interference, and making good use of people's sinful desires of ambition and greed.
2. *Against* - original sin tells us that ambition unchecked will create great inequalities and will not be fixed by its own natural momentum. Capitalism is built on self-interest, so it appeals to sinful desires that will exaggerate inequality. Socialism is not a four-letter word! Many Christians throughout history and the world have been "socialists" modeled after Acts 2. "Usury" was a sin in the Middle Ages, and now our whole system is built on it.

3. *On the Death Penalty*

1. *For* - Gen. 9.6 - "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*" The state, acting on behalf of God's authority, has the responsibility to punish sin in a proportionate way, which includes the death penalty in extreme cases.
2. *Against* - though God has given the power of the sword to the state, the corruption of our criminal justice system is so deep, that we cannot enact the ultimate punishment, especially one that would end any opportunity for the person's conversion. Christians ought always to tend toward mercy.

4. *On Sanctioning Gay Marriage*

1. *For* - though the Church should not sanction it, the common grace purpose of the state should include civil rights for all people. Just as non-Christians who marry have civil rights, so should same-sex couples.
2. *Against* - God defined marriage as between a man and a woman, and therefore the state cannot define it in a way contrary to God's law. The state can't legislate against inward morality (like coveting) or even sexual morality (like adultery), but it always legislates morality of some kind, and this would legitimate immoral behavior.

5. *On Guns and the 2nd Amendment*

1. *For* - just as God has given the state the power of the sword and the right to fight just wars, so do individuals have the right to self-defense. Moreover, the 2nd amendment is the law, so Christians ought to obey it since it is not forcing us to sin.
2. *Against* - the state's power is different than the individual's, so a Christian can defend just wars, but not individual revolution. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and turn the other cheek, not to be ready to kill them. Moreover, Christian character leads us to weep with the huge numbers of gun violence victims, and encourage any common sense policies that would prevent them.