

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

1 Timothy 2:1-7

by Andy Manning

- The title of this sermon is “Christian Citizenship.”
 - Christians have a dual-citizenship. We are both citizens of heaven and of earth. We are citizens in the Kingdom of God, and citizens of the United States of America.
 - What does it mean to love Jesus, but at the same to be a patriot – to love your country?
 - Another way of putting it is what role should Christians play in government and politics?
- The reason this is important is because what happens in government and politics affects our everyday lives. We are impacted by the laws of this land. We are impacted by those who pass the laws of this land.
 - For example, if the government passes a law that says we can’t talk about my faith outside of home and church, then that affects us greatly.
 - If the government passes a law that business owners, regardless of their religion, must pay for the abortions of their employees, that affects us.
 - If the government passes a law and places a restriction on what we can eat, and what medical care we are allowed to have, then that affects us.
 - If the government passes a law that churches cannot meet on government property, such as parks, public schools, etc., then we are affected by that.
 - If the government passes a law that says you cannot seek professional counseling to help your child overcome unwanted homosexual attractions, then that affects us.

- If the government passes a law that forbids homeschooling, then that affects us.
 - If the government passes a law restricting family size, that affects us.
 - If the government passes laws that allow people to use dangerous drugs like marijuana, and if the government continues to raise taxes on the wealthy and on successful businesses, then that greatly affects all of us.
- Government issues touch our lives in a very real and powerful way. And that's why it is important to ask, What role should Christians play in government and politics?
- As well, this is an important question because the answer is not obvious. There isn't a consensus among Christians as to whether we should engage or be uninvolved.
 - There are many Christians who are uninvolved. Some are uninvolved in politics because they are apathetic. They aren't interested in politics, and they simply don't care what happens in Washington D.C.
 - Other Christians are uninvolved in politics because they are simply too busy with life – too busy trying to earn a living and raise a family.
 - But some Christians are uninvolved for theological reasons. They actually think it is unbiblical to engage in politics.
 - On the opposite end of the spectrum there are those Christians who are overzealous about politics – they are more passionate about politics than about the Great Commission. They are more passionate about political involvement than church involvement.
 - And there are those Christians who are rude and ugly and hateful to their political counterparts. Something needs to be said to that.

- So what does it mean to be a Christian citizen? What role should Christians play in politics? How can we be good Christians, but also good citizens of the United States?
- In **1 Timothy 2:1-7**, the apostle Paul gives us some clear and helpful instructions in this area.
- Paul is writing to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus (modern-day Turkey). Ephesus was a part of the Roman Empire; it was under Roman rule. And the emperor of Rome was a very wicked man – Nero. Nero hated and persecuted Christians. In A.D. 64, there was a great fire that destroyed much of the city of Rome. Nero needed someone to blame, so he accused the Christians. This caused Christians to be persecuted all over the Roman Empire. And when I say “persecuted,” I don’t mean they were told to be quiet. They were killed. It’s in this context that Paul writes about the role of Christians in government.

1 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. 2 Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. 5 For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. 6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.

This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. 7 And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I’m not exaggerating—just telling the truth.¹

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- Paul tells us the government’s responsibility and our responsibility in creating a prosperous country.
 - The government’s role is to enable us to live peaceful and quiet lives.
 - Our role is to pray, and to live with godliness and dignity. And then Paul tells us the purpose of a prosperous society. The ultimate purpose is that God can save or redeem as many as possible. Let’s put it in a concise statement, and then we’ll unpack it.

God calls us to be good citizens by praying for our government leaders to enable us to live peacefully and quietly, and by living with godliness and dignity, so that God can redeem as many as possible.

- There’s a lot in that one statement. It is jam-packed with truth. Let’s break it down into several bite-sized statements.

FIVE TRUTHS ABOUT CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

1. Christians are called to engage in government and politics.

- Paul begins with the command to pray for government leaders. He says in **verse 2**, “Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority.” In other words, when it comes to government leaders, don’t ignore them. Don’t be apathetic. Don’t be uninvolved and disengaged. Know what’s happening and pray about it.
- Many people get this wrong. Theologian **Wayne Grudem** lists several wrong views of Christian involvement in government.²

² Wane Grudem, *Voting as a Christian*.

- **Wrong view #1 is that government should compel religion.** No. God doesn't want that. We shouldn't strive for that either. The government should not force any religion on people. The government should not set up any national religion. We don't want to create laws that force people to be Christians. In many ways the USA is a Christian nation. Most people in our country are Christians. Most of the writers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were Christians, and the founding documents are based on Biblical principles. But we are not a Christian nation in the sense that you have to be a Christian to be a citizen or to have all the same rights and privileges that Christians have. We don't want the government to force people to be Christians because true faith cannot be forced. It has to be a choice.
- **Wrong view #2 is that government should exclude religion.** Some people think that religion should not have a place in government. There should be no religion in public schools, in court rooms, and religion should not motivate one's political views. This view is promoted by the ACLU today. They don't think religion should in any way impact politics. But this is a misinterpretation of the first amendment of the Bill of Rights, which says that government shall not make a law to establish a religion. What they meant by that was a state church, or a government-endorsed denomination or religion. In other words, freedom of religion doesn't mean freedom from religion. The very same amendment in the Bill of Rights makes it clear that government cannot prohibit the free exercise of religion. Where is it more important to be able to exercise my religion than in politics?
- **Wrong view #3 is to do evangelism, not politics.** Many Christians have come to the conclusion that our responsibility as Christians is not to change the laws but to change hearts; not to influence politics but to influence people for Jesus Christ; not to win elections but to win souls. That the only way to really change society is through changing people's hearts. And that if we get involved in politics we will only create political enemies instead of winning those people to Jesus.

- While evangelism is our primary task, and the most important mission of Christians and churches, we should not bow out of politics. We are also called to love our neighbor. And if there are laws in place that are unjust, that are cruel, that are harmful to our neighbors, then we have a moral obligation to try to change those laws.
- As well, politics can have a great impact on evangelism. Laws that are in alignment with the Bible will allow church to flourish, but laws that contradict the Bible will hinder evangelism. For example, all you have to do is look at the difference between North and South Korea. These two nations share the same piece of land; they are the same race; they speak the same language; but in the North Korea Christians must exercise their faith in secret. They are persecuted. And this is why there are very few Christians there today. There is no missionary activity, no public worship, no publication of Christian literature. Millions of people in North Korea live and die without ever hearing the Gospel because of the unjust laws in that land. But then look at South Korea, where the government allows freedom of religion. It has one of the highest percentages of evangelical Christians in the world (25%). It has some of the largest, fastest growing churches in the world. And it is sending missionaries around the world.
- **Wrong view #4 is to do politics and not evangelism.** This is the opposite extreme. There are many Christians who have gotten so caught up in politics that they have forgotten that our primary mission is evangelism. That we want to strive for laws that allow the church and the gospel to flourish, because ultimately what matters is not politics, but eternity. The most important endeavor for Christians to engage in is bringing as many people to heaven as possible.
- So what's right view? Wayne Grudem says **the right view, or the "better view" is significant Christian influence on government.** That we should "seek

to influence civil government according to God's moral standards and God's purposes for government as revealed in scripture." But we must also "simultaneously insist on the protection of freedom of religion for all citizens."

- I'm so thankful that Christians have gotten involved in politics throughout history. Let me just give you one example – the abolition of slavery. It was a devout Christian named William Wilberforce who decided to enter into politics and devote his life to the abolition of slavery, and he succeeded. In the United States, it was devout Christians who made up the abolitionist movement. In fact, in the 1830's, two-thirds of the abolitionists were Christian preachers who decided to engage in politics from the pulpit. What was their motive for abolishing slavery? It was religious. It was their Biblical, Christian convictions that all men are created equal, and that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves that drove them to give their lives to a political cause.

2. Christians are called to engage by praying for government leaders.

- How are we to engage? First of all by praying for our government leaders. Paul says in **verse 2**, "Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority." Prayer is powerful, and it's the first and best thing we can do to influence politics. We should be praying at church and in private for our government leaders and for the direction of our nation.
- But how? What are we to pray for? Paul tells us. And this tells us the true purpose of government. **We are to pray for our government leaders to enable us to live peaceful and quiet lives.** What does that mean?
- Peace means protection from harm. The government's job is to protect us from other nations that might want to harm us, and from neighbors who might want to harm us. In other words, the purpose of government is to protect our right to life. The government's job is to organize a military and a police force to protect people from murder, and rape, and theft, and other forms of harm.

- As well, we are to pray for our government leaders to enable us to live quiet lives. Quietness is the absence of intrusion and interference. Leaving us to ourselves. Enabling us to write the script of our own lives, as Dinesh D'souza so often says. The government's job is to enable us to raise our kids the way we want, and create and spend wealth however we want, and enjoy recreation however we want, and most importantly, to exercise our religion however we want. In other words, the purpose of government is to protect our rights to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The government's job is to enable us to be left alone so we can live our lives as we want.
- Does this remind you of anything? The Declaration of Independence. Our Founding Fathers got it right when it comes to the purpose of government. They wrote that governments are instituted among men to secure the God-given rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. So that must be our prayer.

3. Christians are called to engage by influencing politics however they can.

- In 1 Timothy Paul only mentions engagement by prayer. But that doesn't mean that our involvement should stop there.
- In Paul's day, they lived under a dictatorship. They didn't vote. They couldn't write or call their representatives and senators. They weren't allowed to protest. Prayer was all they could do.
- But in the United States of America, our situation is different. We are a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, as Abraham Lincoln said. We are a democracy. We are the government. We choose representatives who will make laws that are in alignment with our values. We have the ability and the responsibility to shape the laws and the direction of our country. And so we don't just pray. We engage however we can.

- Let me give you an example. If you need food, should you pray? Of course! Jesus said to in the Lord's prayer: Give us our daily bread. But that's not all you should do, right? If you need food, you should go to work and earn some money so you can buy food. That's why the Bible says that he who doesn't work shouldn't eat (2 Thess. 3:10). In other words, it is foolish and sinful to pray for food and not work for it if you have the ability. It would be foolish and sinful to ask God to help you on your math test but refuse to study for it. And it would be foolish and sinful to ask God to bless America and neglect political involvement.

- We live in the greatest nation in the history of the world. We have the most freedom. The most religious freedom. The most protection of life and property. The most prosperity. The most equality. And we don't have these blessings by luck. In the first 100 years of our history, over 600,000 soldiers gave their lives for our freedoms – mostly in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. And then in the second 100 years, another 600,000 died, mostly in the two world wars.³ So many have given so much for the benefits we enjoy today. Is it right for us to not engage in politics? **Wayne Grudem** writes, "The question is whether someone thinks it is morally right to receive great benefits from a nation but to give almost nothing in return."

- How do we engage?
 - Some of us need to be politicians like William Wilberforce.
 - We can also volunteer for political parties.
 - We can work to get people to vote.
 - We can educate ourselves on candidates and issues, and we can educate others.
 - We can vote.
 - We can write and call our politicians.

³ www.militaryfactory.com

- We can sign petitions.
- We can march and protest.
- And what is our aim? Our aim is that government would enable us to live peaceful and quiet lives. That government would fulfill its purpose of protecting our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- To be even more specific, that our representatives would pass laws that protect life – all life, especially the lives of the unborn – liberty – especially religious liberty – and the pursuit of happiness. Laws that are in alignment with God’s word. Any laws that endanger life, and any laws that restrict religious freedom, and any laws that contradict God’s word, we must resist as Christian citizens.

4. Christians are called to godliness and dignity.

- What have we said so far?
 - Christian citizens need to engage rather than disengage.
 - We engage by praying, first of all,
 - and then by seeking laws that protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- But that’s not all we’re called to do. We are called to a life of godliness and dignity. Notice Paul’s words in **verse 2**, “Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.” Our lives should be marked by godliness and dignity.
- What is godliness? Godliness is devotion to God which results in a life that is pleasing to Him. It is devotion in action.⁴ It is a love for God, a desire for God, and a fear of God that results in Christian character – love for neighbor,

⁴ <https://bible.org/article/what-godliness>

kindness, honesty, gentleness, generosity, diligence, faithfulness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness. That's the kind of citizen God wants you to be.

- What is dignity? Dignity means worthy of respect. It is living in a way that inspires respect without demanding it. When I think of dignity I think of someone who is a hard worker; someone who responsible; someone who is self-reliant. Not lazy. Not someone living off the government who should be working. Not someone always looking for a handout. Not somebody who is always talking about what the government and what everybody owes him. Not somebody who is complaining about problems and disadvantages and blaming others. I think of someone who works hard to achieve success and then uses their success as an opportunity to help others. That's how God has called us to live as Christian citizens. Lives marked by godliness and dignity.
- Now let me ask you a question. What would happen if everyone in our country lived with godliness and dignity? Our country would be even more wonderful. Isn't this the kind of neighbor that you want? The kind of politicians you want? The kind of spouse you want? The kind of teachers we want in our schools?
- Let me explain to you an important principle that our founding fathers believed to be true. **Os Guinness** refers to this as **the Golden Triangle of Freedom**.⁵ He writes that our founding fathers knew that in order for us to remain a free country, three things are required. **Freedom requires virtue (moral excellence), and virtue requires faith, and faith requires freedom.** Freedom, virtue, faith. For us to maintain the freedom and the prosperity that we have as a nation, we must be a nation of virtuous people. And for us to be a virtuous people, we need faith, or religion, because religion is the biggest producer of virtuous people. In other words, the only way to live with very little government interference and intrusion is if people are godly and

⁵ Os Guinness, *A Free People's Suicide*.

dignified. But as godliness and dignity decrease, government must increase to prevent chaos.

- **John Adams**, our second president, wrote these words in an address to military leaders. “We have no government armed with the power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and true religion. Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”
- Do you understand the weight of his words. He said that our constitution, our form of government, will not work if people are not highly religious and godly. They will abuse their freedoms and become selfish and harmful to one another. The government in turn will create more agencies to care for the needy since we aren’t taking care of ourselves or caring for one another. And the government will have to create more and more laws to protect us from one another since we refuse to love our neighbor. Taxes increase. Freedoms decrease. And our nation, once free, will no longer be what our founders intended it to be.

5. God’s ultimate goal for politics are laws that enable the redemption of as many as possible.

- That statement may be controversial. I don’t mean to say that goal of the government is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. No, that’s the goal of the church. And it doesn’t glorify God or do us any good to create a government that forces religion on people. However, God’s ultimate goal for politics is that laws are passed that enable the redemption of as many as possible.
- Listen to Paul’s words in 1 Timothy. He has just told us how to pray for government leaders; and in so doing he made clear the purpose of government – the protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And

he told us how citizens should conduct themselves – with godliness and dignity. But why?

3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. 5 For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. 6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. 7 And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth.

- The ultimate goal of government is to pass laws that enable the gospel, and the church to flourish so that as many people as possible are redeemed – set free from the power of sin, Satan, and death through Jesus Christ. God wants as many to be saved as possible. He wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. Therefore God wants the government to have laws that protect the preaching of the gospel, the church, the and free exercise of religion in every sector of society – public and the private.
- Therefore that's how we should pray for and influence politics. We must protect freedom of religion, because we need to be free to be able to preach and talk about our faith to unbelievers. And faith cannot be forced; it must be a personal choice. Therefore we must seek laws that enable the gospel to ring out loud and clear.