



MBC White Paper: *“The Church and Politics”*

Introduction

Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), yet we are also citizens of the world. And as citizens of the world, we have God-given responsibilities (Matt 22:15-22; Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17) to earthly governments. We also have responsibilities to love others and seek God-honoring relationships (Matt 5:13, Matt 5:14-15, Mark 12:31, Luke 6:31-38). Government is instituted by God for our good. Christians should support our government and hold it to legal and moral account. We do this by speaking out and using our political process and our instituted system of justice. For example, Paul used his citizenship to defend his right to preach the gospel (Acts 16:35-40, 22:13-29, 25:9-12). We have callings as believers and callings as Americans. But our loyalty to our King should come before any other allegiance, and part of our duty to Him involves conducting ourselves in a worthy manner while we're away from our true home. We must live in a manner worthy of our calling as followers of Christ (Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:11-12) and good Americans. Our loyalty to Christ compels us to speak the gospel freely, and our rights as Americans enshrine our freedom of speech which we should use and defend as a right (Acts 16:35-40, 22:13-29, 25:9-12).

The Need for This Paper

Political tension in America is not new and at times can be personally contentious. These matters can cause great strife among church constituents, friends, and family alike. At MBC, we strive to create and maintain a Christlike approach to political engagement and at the same time hold to our values and Christ's imperatives to us as believers. This is for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ (Eph 4:2-6).

This paper will not tell anyone how to vote. Rather it will suggest principles on how individual believers should live in the world, relate to their neighbors, and be involved in the political arena. It will also look at how the Christian church in America, and specifically MBC, should engage—or not engage—with that political arena. As you will see, there are separate imperatives for the individual believer and the institutional church.

At MBC, we strive to find a Spirit-directed position for both the individual believer and the institutional church. We try to show a Christlike political engagement in the public square and to learn how we are called to speak to political issues. As a Bible-teaching church, we want to provide guidance on how to be Christlike in a polarized world. We should always focus on the truth of scripture as our basis of engagement.

The rest of this paper will flesh out the principles outlined above.

Purpose and Role of Government

Scripture teaches that government was instituted by God and is generally for our good (Rom 13:1-3, Dan 2:21). For purposes of this paper we define government as a group of people who officially control a country or state [Wikipedia, Merriam Webster, annotated]. We believe government is for and by the people, not the inverse. Politics is the activity of the government and people who try to influence the way a country is governed [Wikipedia, Merriam Webster, annotated].

The Biblical purpose of a governing structure is to restrain evil (Gen 9:6), keep the peace in society (1 Tim 2:1-3, 1 Pet 2:13-14), provide justice (Dan 4:17), punish the wicked (Rom 13:4-5), and protect the vulnerable. A well-functioning government allows people to flourish, giving them freedom to work and live a fruitful life, exercising their talents.

Individual Believers: How should we relate to government and politics?

- 1) **We should remember that our primary citizenship is in heaven.** Our first mission as believers is heavenly (Phil 3:20); we should seek God's kingdom before all else, trusting Him to provide for our needs regardless of the instability of the kingdoms of this world (Matt 6:33). In all things, we strive to please our heavenly Father, loving him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt 22:36-38). We must obey God rather than man. If a corrupt government seeks to make us sin, we follow our Lord (Acts 5:29). As citizens of a heavenly kingdom, we should avoid a nationalistic attitude toward America, remembering that we serve God, not a particular country, political party, or political leader. To put any of these things above the Lord amounts to idolatry. Our true identity is Christ alone (Col 2:8-10). No political party has a corner on God's righteousness or blessing.
- 2) **As citizens of an earthly country, we should obey its laws.** We should support our institutions, respect our founding documents, and respect our leaders even when we disagree with them (Rom 13:1-7). (However, there are times to disobey governments when unjust laws are present, or when the magistrate abuses its authority. This point is discussed in a section below.)
- 3) **We should engage at a system level, blessing and supporting our communities.** Beyond just obedience to authorities, we are called to be salt and light (Matt 5:13-26), seeking the welfare of our nation and local communities (Jer 29:7, 11). Christians can and should vote, and if so led,

run for political office in order to accomplish good; they also can and should advocate for political positions.

- 4) **We should maintain a Christ-like attitude in the political arena.** Christians should be noticeably different from those who are of this world. We should be marked by humility, gentleness and charity (Gal 5:22-23). We should be quick to listen (Jas 1:19-20); we should not be quarrelsome (Jas 3:15-18) but instead prioritize readiness to share the Gospel of God's love with outsiders (Col 4:4-6); we should avoid futile arguments. We should never hate, denigrate or threaten our political opponents, remembering that Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for them. In a political landscape too often scarred by rancor, we should be peaceable and respectful, avoiding hateful rhetoric that only serves to push nonbelievers further from the kingdom.
- 5) **We should fight against injustice while recognizing that God is the ultimate Judge.** We will inevitably encounter injustice in this fallen world. As believers we are called to advocate for the downtrodden and the suffering, acting as their advocates (Jas, 1:27, Isa 1:7). We must take care that we advocate for God's justice and seek to have an impact by our witness to the watching world. Prayerful discernment is needed in determining which social issues should be addressed. We find rest and assurance in knowing that the Lord is in control and will judge the earth, and the schemes of the unjust will ultimately be defeated. (Prov 22:8)
- 6) **We should seek to be the aroma of Christ.** (2 Cor 2:15, 4:1-6) Our attitude should be that of Christ Jesus. We want to demonstrate grace and compassion to our fellow citizens by word and deed. It should not be our aim to drive wedges between groups or individuals. (John 13:34-35)

The Institutional Church: How should MBC relate to government and politics?

- 1) **We respect and obey the laws of our country.** We obey local ordinances and comply with applicable laws, unless contrary to God's laws (Mic 6:8; Dan 3:16-18). We seek to be good members of our community, recognizing that God has put us in a particular place for his purposes. As an example, we allow our facilities to be a blessing to our community by being used as a polling location.
- 2) **We recognize that the church is separate from the state.** The first amendment of the constitution prohibits the government from establishing religion; we recognize that the political sphere is not explicitly Christian, and we do not seek to establish a religious state. Jesus himself made this point in Luke 20:20-26. The first amendment also guarantees free exercise of religion, and we would oppose any attempts by the government to abridge those rights.¹

¹ Religious liberty a core Baptist distinctive and is central to the Baptist tradition. From the movement's inception, Baptists have vigorously defended the importance of separating church and state. Starting in England in the early 17th century, our predecessors opposed the concept of a state church and denied the validity of any official connections between civil and ecclesiastical affairs. Figures such as English Baptists John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, along with American Baptists Roger Williams and John Clarke, were trailblazers in championing religious freedom in their respective nations. "Baptists had been involved in various degrees and forms over many generations, advocating for religious freedom, because we see it as central—not only to our Baptist faith, but really to the Christian faith—that faith cannot be coerced. Faith cannot be forced upon someone. There's a freedom of conscience. There's a freedom of will—and that salvation comes through personal belief." (Jason

- 3) **Our mandate is spiritual, not political.** According to our mission statement, “*our church exists to bring glory to God through lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ*” (Matt 28:19-20). Our mission focuses on soul care. Our purpose and identity are caught up in this mission; therefore, we will not become a social or political institution. We as a church will not serve any political party or candidate. Specifically, we will not solicit money for any political candidate, will not endorse a political candidate or party, will not allow political candidates to seek donations or campaign on our campus, and will not display political materials on our campus. We may encourage congregants to vote, but we will not tell them how to vote. We will pray for political leaders or national situations, but without advocating a political position (1 Tim 2:1-2).
- 4) **We allow the scriptures to help us be good citizens.** Even though the primary mandate of the church is spiritual, we avoid an escapist mentality that says that nothing here on earth is important. As integrated human beings who live in society, we should care about the issues that affect society. As our own lives are transformed by the Gospel and as we bear the fruit of the Spirit (Col 2:7-9), we will impact our families, neighborhoods and nation for the good. We will seek justice and renewal, bringing hope to the hopeless and light to those in darkness (Isa 1:17). We encourage our church members as individuals to get involved in government and politics and applaud them for doing so.
- 5) **We take official positions only when the scriptures are very clear.** When an issue is clearly addressed in the scriptures, we must speak the truth. Christian Ethicist Andrew Walker frames it this way, “*The gathered Church should speak on all issues that are unambiguously clear from Scripture, relevant to the Church's mission, and vital to creation order and the common good*” (*The Nations Belong to God*, pg. 65). As such, the church may speak to the following categories: (1) Issues of Human Dignity (Ex. Abortion, Infanticide, Euthanasia, Poverty, etc.). (2) Issues surrounding the Natural Family (Ex. Marriage, Sexuality, Parent/Child Relationships, etc.).² Conversely, we avoid fruitless controversies and do not feel compelled to weigh in on every battle in the culture wars.³

Civil Disobedience

- 1) **God’s law is higher than man’s law.** When man’s law is in conflict with God’s law or character, disobedience is called for (Exod 1:17, Dan 6:6-10, Acts 4:19-20, 5:29). At least three categories call for disobedience: (1) If the government requests our worship. (2) If the government restricts our preaching. (3) If the government requires a moral wrong. In each instance, we look prayerfully to God for wisdom to make these judgements. Additionally, we seek examples from

Thacker, Professor at Boyce College, quoted in “Baptists historically stand for religious liberty,” Baptist Standard, April 25, 2022.)

² A helpful way to think about these categories is straight lines vs. jagged lines. The categories noted above are straight lines and have been well documented by Christian theologians through the centuries. There are other important issues such as immigration policies and issues of justice. However, discerning the underlying problems and possible solutions are complicated and stridently debated.

³ Recently, we have set up “Underground Sessions” as a venue for exploring complex and sometimes controversial topics in our culture. While the speakers reflect a Christian worldview, they do not speak from an official MBC position. We welcome believers and non-believers to these sessions, hoping to maintain a loving atmosphere and a non-threatening place to ask questions.

scripture and look to history to men and women of faith who stood against slavery, genocide, racism and the taking of innocent life. Martin Luther King Jr. said, *“One has not only a legal, but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”*⁴

- 2) **Examples of when we are called to civil disobedience.** When the bedrock truths of the Bible are abrogated, we as Christians need to stand for truth. There are times civil disobedience may be required - when the freedom to worship and the dignity of mankind are jeopardized. As mentioned above, examples are sanctity of life (abortion, infanticide, euthanasia), religious liberty, racism and the freedom of speech.

The Attributes We Should Look for in a Leader

We pray for leaders who have integrity and are aligned with Biblical values. We look for leaders who affirm freedom, equal rights, and the dignity of all humanity. We hold them to the highest legal and moral standards and expect them to have humility and the wisdom to compromise. Simultaneously, we exercise caution against elevating political leaders above their appropriate place in our hearts, not allowing ourselves to be led astray. We take a stand for truthfulness, believing that our leader is found in Christ Jesus. *“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Col 2:8-10 [ESV]*

This is our ideal, and as we live in a fallen world, no candidate meets all these criteria. Therefore, as per Andrew Walker (question 38), *“Christians should vote with wisdom, justice, and public righteousness in view and should be impartial in evaluating the moral worldview of all policies, candidates, and platforms.”*⁵

Conclusion

To sum up MBC’s position, we maintain that the individual believer can and should be involved in politics at the local and national level, seeking the welfare of the nation. Individual believers can and should vote, run for office and advocate for political positions, while always maintaining a Christ-like attitude and a commitment to seeking God’s kingdom first. As a church body, however, we believe that the mission of the church is spiritual, not political. According to our mission statement, *“our church exists to bring glory to God through lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.”* We honor the institutions of government but do not serve them or any political party, and we insist on the religious freedoms enshrined in the U.S. constitution. As such, as an institution we stay out of the political arena on matters of government. We do not endorse candidates or political parties; we do not take official positions based

⁴ King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Penguin Books, 2018.

⁵ Walker, Andrew. [*The Nations Belong to God: A Christian Guide for Political Engagement*](#).

on political ideologies. At the same time, we do not shrink from lovingly speaking the truths in the word of God, even when its values and principles may conflict with those of the world and its political agendas. We do participate in the public square on matters of truth and righteousness; furthermore, if called for by God, we will participate in civil disobedience on matters of conscience (Acts 5:29). Our mandate is to please our Heavenly Father and advance his kingdom. We live as citizens of the world, but our true allegiance and loyalty is to the God of Israel.

In the end, we should remember that no political party or candidate can “save” or “destroy” our country. God is in control, and His sovereign will always comes to pass. Thus, we can be confident and have faith that God will do whatever He wills in our political process. Our job is to submit to His will and work toward building His kingdom, whoever our political leaders are. Thus, we as individuals and MBC as a church should perform our roles as discussed above and rest in God for the results.

*“The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me:
When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God,
He dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,
like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.” 2 Sam 23: 3-4 [ESV]*

***Approved by MBC Board of Elders
September 3, 2024***

Recommended Resources on the Church and Political Engagement:

Video Lectures:

- [A Baptist View of the State](#) by Dr. Hunter Baker
- [A Biblical-Theological Reflection on the Relationship between Church and State](#) - Dr. Stephen Wellum
- [Baptists, Take Up and Read Tocqueville](#) - Dr. John D. Wilsey
- [Disestablishment Does Not a Jeffersonian or Rawlsian Make](#) - Dr. Andrew T. Walker
- [The Authority of the Church and the Authority of the State](#) - Dr. Jonathan Leeman
- [Must Liberty Mean Licentiousness? American Baptists and Public Theology](#) - Dr. Cory D. Higdon
- Mark Dever Talk on [Politics and the Local Church](#)

Sermons

- [The Gospel and Government](#) – Message on Romans 13 (Pastor Bob Erbig)

Books

- [Politics after Christendom](#): Political Theology in a Fractured World by David VanDrunen
- [Living in God's Two Kingdoms](#): A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture by David VanDrunen
- [How the Nations Rage](#): Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age, by Jonathan Leeman
- [The Case for Christian Nationalism](#) by Stephen Wolfe
- [The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism](#) by Tim Alberta
- [How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?](#) (9 Marks Church Questions) by Naselli and Leeman
- [A New Christian Authoritarianism](#) (9 Marks Journal)
- Walker, Andrew. [The Nations Belong to God](#)

Website Links:

- ADF (Alliance for Defending Freedom) <https://www.adfchurchalliance.org/electionguide>
- ERLC <https://erlc.com/resource-library/guides/a-christian-guide-to-political-engagement/>