

Intro:

Well, today we begin a 3 week discussion on discernment in the realm of "politics." I don't know how you feel, but with a groups like ours I'm sure there are a number of feelings:

- some of us may be pretty excited because we are politically active.
- some of us may be pretty concerned because we're turned off by the way religion and politics affect and corrupt each other.
- some of us may be actually pretty unemotional, because we think Jesus really has nothing, or should have nothing, to do with politics, and so we really are not too sure about this, actually.

I'm sure there are more feelings in the room. Regardless of where we are, though, my hope that as we embark on the next 3 weeks, we will ultimately make better choices about it all- that's the theme of our series, and love God and neighbor in the process.

A few things to say as we get started:

- This time is not about endorsing one candidate over another or one political party or agenda over another. There's quite a bit of diversity here when it comes to politics- that's a good thing, and I hope we can keep it that way.
- Furthermore, this is not necessarily about endorsing one theological view over another. If you've studied the issue of Jesus and politics before, you know there are many differences among Christians themselves about the issues. We will touch on some of these, but let me be clear at the outset- I am not planning to outright endorse one theological perspective over another.
- On the flip side, though, we cannot expect to go through these next three weeks without getting our personal political beliefs or theological beliefs challenged. Not just in the sense that we learn something more about another view, or get personally challenged and sharpened by it- that's very important for sure. But also in what I'll call the prophetic sense. What I mean is this: throughout the history of the Bible and Christianity, God's people have often played a prophetic role in relationship to politics, meaning it has often stood outside of government and spoken out against the sins of the government. I believe this should happen here to a certain extent, and so we should not be too stubborn and hold on to our political agendas too tightly.
- Finally, I would like to note that I will try and attempt to get us thinking about this all from a multicultural and global perspective. What I mean is this: the issue of Jesus and politics is not just a Christian and American, US phenomenon. It's something countries all throughout the world are trying to wrestle with, and it involves questions of how people of different faiths can and should relate with each other. We are obviously located in the US at the moment, and we will be studying the Christian texts exclusively in our times here. But please let's not forget that there is a bigger world out there, one in which we are connected with and one in which we need to learn from as well. So I invite those of you who are more acquainted with the politics of another country to make sure you speak up and share your input in this whole process, in order for us to learn.

How are we going to go about this, then?

- This week: I'll do some basic introductions, talk from proverbs, and then look at one encounter Jesus had with politics.
- Next week, we'll look at more of what Jesus had to say, and also answer some questions you may have based on your submissions today.

Finally, 3 weeks from now, we'll focus in on one of the more publicized issues of the election this November, the issue of making gay marriage legal, and use it as sort of an application, God willing, of the things we have had to wrestle with here.

There's a lot we could cover that we probably won't- I'll try and use our E-News to communicate more and provide links and resources for further learning.

So then, for today: a general overview, the proverbs, and then a teaching of Jesus.

General Overview:

Common threads among all Christians:

- God's rule is over everything, including governments. And so he orders governments, puts them in place, even (somehow) the bad governments (Romans 13:1, Habakkuk).
(Many would also add to this that the idea of government was part of the original creation, meaning God assumed humanity would have to naturally order itself and so government is something God intended for humanity. Others would disagree, though, and say that government, or human government, is a result of sin)
- Purposes include service, restraining sin and promoting public good (justice). This, from the Bible's perspective, applies to all countries, regardless of their rulers being "Christian" or not. Daniel 4:27, Amos 1, Isa 14-20, Romnas 13:4
- God's people are called to relate with government somehow.
The question is, of course, how. Which leads to a number of key differences that people have developed throughout the history of Christianity.
How do Christians get involved and how do they submit? Should they be involved in war or not? And the list goes on and on.

Let's move to our next section, then, on Proverbs, to begin to tease out some of these things. A few notes: 1) don't forget about the interpretive guidelines of proverbs, 2) remember that the context of much of what is here is written in the context of monarchies, not democracies. We need to be aware of that- it could obviously affect application. But I don't think it will too much.

What Proverbs Say:

God's role in government: he ultimately rules, and has ultimate justice

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD;

he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. Prov. 21:1

(can refer to God's sovereignty in general, or the fact that all good comes from God)

Many seek an audience with a ruler,

but it is from the LORD that man gets justice. Prov. 29:26

Application: be sure to discern the difference between trusting God or trusting government

The role of those in government: rule with character and justice

Arrogant lips are unsuited to a fool—

how much worse lying lips to a ruler! Prov. 17:7

A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor,

but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his day. Prov. 28:16, ESV

Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted...

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Prov. 31:3-5, 8-9

Application: the issue of being a character based voter is very appropriate. Christianity Today's article on how to vote was talking about this exactly issue, that the virtue of a politician trumps the policies of a politician as the more important thing to consider.

The role of those under government: be wise, respect, beware, and love.

A king delights in a wise servant, but a shameful servant incurs his wrath. 14:35

Fear the LORD and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious,

for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring? Prov. 24:21-22

When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you,

and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony.

Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is deceptive. Prov. 23:1-3

Love and faithfulness keep a king safe; through love his throne is made secure. Prov. 20:28

Application: there is a strong theme of submission that runs throughout the Bible.

Jesus: Matthew 22:15-22

Some themes that seem to emerge rather clearly:

Beware of revolutions.

Submit to the state.

We can live in the world and yet be citizens of another kingdom.

Live out the reality of the kingdom of God

But these all have their difficulty as well.

Questions?

Challenge: