Citizen Christian: Christians as Citizens, part 1

1 Peter 2:13-17

MPS Christians are called to live as good citizens by prioritizing our identity in Jesus and bearing faithful witness to His Kingdom.

OBJ Every person can understand a Christian’s relationship to human government by four principles.

INTRO I want to begin this morning with some questions that people honestly ask about Christians and citizenship. Should Christians really be that engaged in politics? Is this the best realm for us to engage to impact the world with the gospel? Aren’t politics just about power, and shouldn’t we just trust God’s power to change people?

Early on in our very young church’s life, the Elder Council was discussing how best we impact our city and the world with the gospel. We discussed a wide array of strategies. But one aspect I have always vividly remembered. Frank Clark stated, “If we really want to impact culture, one important element will have to be that we encourage our people to run for and hold public office.” He was right, and still is. Historically, the church has made many mistakes in engaging politics, but one thing we cannot do is withdraw.

Saying that Christians shouldn’t engage in politics because power corrupts is like saying we shouldn’t engage in the financial industry because of greed. Or, we should stay away from the arts because some people paint weird stuff or sing stupid songs. Transformation is a fundamental value and driving passion of the Christian faith. Carl F.H. Henry wrote, "A Christianity without a passion to turn the world upside down is not reflective of apostolic Christianity."[[1]](#footnote-1) The extent to which we believe that Jesus is Lord over all creation will fuel our passion to cultivate every realm for the glory of God by the proclamation of the gospel and the salvation of people.

TRANS In the last messages we considered government’s role. Today we move to our citizenship as Christians.

Challenge Before we move into this topic, allow me to clarify one key purpose. I aim to heighten the awareness of the Christian’s responsibility and stewardship to engage in politics as a vital aspect of our public witness. I also aim to call for greater engagement by every Christ-follower as a necessary and vital expression of our witness to Jesus as King and Lord of all. I do NOT mean more political commenting or better “meme-ing” on social media. In a day and time when political engagement seems life-threatening, the words of contemporary scholar and theologian Bruce Ashford still hold true, “withdrawal is not an option.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This is true NOT because the world is in such bad shape, but because God’s Word still holds true. His command to make good culture and cultivate good in society for people stands. And in your engagement, I hope and pray that some of you will hear the call and consider running for office, locally or at the state level.

TRANS Building a theology of citizenship is not a simple process because the number of governments are many. But the gospel transcends to apply within them all.

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**“*Good*” does not mean a nebulous sense, but according to God’s designation**. Romans 13 states, “*God’s servant for your good*.” As the Bible teaches that government serves for our good, then the goodness of our Christian citizenship should reflect the “good” that God intends for all citizens. Christian citizens should reflect the wholistic well-being of life, freedom and advancement of oneself in this world as God intends when He ordains government for our “*good*”.

TRANS We’ve drawn from Romans 13 in our last two messages, and we will continue for these messages. However, today I want to move to another passage that is rich for us in this realm as well.

READ 1 Peter 2:13–17

*Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,* **14***or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.* **15***For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.* **16***Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* **17***Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor*. **1 Peter 2:13-17**

OBJ I want to build a theology of Christ-honoring citizenship by **Four Foundational Principles**.

Principle 1: Christian citizenship begins with the priority of our identity in Jesus Christ. **1 Peter 2:1-12**

Peter begins his letter with a glorious exaltation of our eternal hope in Jesus Christ and our call to holiness in Him. Chapter two then opens with a clarion call to live as we’ve been redeemed in Christ Jesus because God is building His people to accomplish His redemptive work in the world. Peter culminates this call with a bold, radical declaration of the new identity for God’s people in Jesus Christ; a chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and a people for God! The hope we have in Jesus Christ changes everything about our lives in this world; we exist to proclaim God’s excellencies.

This first principle reminds Christians of who we are and what we are called to do in all of life, to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.**Matt6:33** We must begin here because our eternal citizenship in God’s Kingdom defines our identity (understanding of WHO we are), frames our worldview (all of WHAT is going on in the world), and establishes our purpose (WHY God has us here and now). Seeking God’s Kingdom first defines our whole life. For the Christian, knowing self, understanding the world and defining our purpose only comes by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But, is the gospel really political? Is the political realm the right place for Christian witness? Matthew 4:23-25 makes clear that the days of Jesus’ ministry were political; a new Kingdom, perfect healthcare, fame of the masses, and a call to follow. Do you think politicians are jealous of this? Jews expected a political figure. Romans perceived Jesus’ message as a political threat. Everything about Jesus was political because His authority was a threat to earthly power. But Jesus’ interests involved so much more.

**Consider the political inclusion of Jesus’ teaching**. “*Your Kingdom Come, Your will be Done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”**Matt6:10** is a political manifesto! Too often Christians treat it as an escapist prayer, but this is a prayer of missional advancement, a supplication that catalyzes one from willing submission and desirous enlistment to full participation in bringing the reality of God’s eternal Kingdom of “then” into a fuller reality in the “here and now”. Carl Henry states, “The extent to which man centers his life and energy in the redemptive King now determines the extent of the divine kingdom in the present age.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Bruce Ashford states, “The local church is the most important political community in our nation.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Christians must reject the idea that we are merely a voting block to be courted, and establish the conviction that we exist to labor in the here and now to bring “*good*” from God’s Kingdom to all people.

**The importance of the Christian church as a political force in this world serves a greater glory**. Yes, the church as an organization should be very careful how it participates in matters of the state. Our mission is far greater than only state matters. But the church as an organism should infiltrate every realm of life to labor for God’s glory by the gospel. Christians serve as a **prophetic voice to God’s good for public conscience**, declaring the Law and truth of God in the world. This resonates with us, Christian, because we know the importance of the conscience and that God communicates with people through it. When we speak God’s Law and truth, we resonate with a part of every human that we know God created within them. We’ve reduced gospel proclamation to the last few minutes of a church service. I’m appealing for us to see gospel proclamation as what we do with every breath we draw and sound we utter.

Christians engage the public square with the gospel narrative that proclaims a larger and greater glory and universal good for all people. The Christian voice declares God’s goodness to people on earth through **three testimonies** that equip Christians in HOW to prioritize our Christian identity for good citizenship (Principle 1).

**Testimony 1:** Christians testify to God’s creational narrative as the context for the whole world.

Genesis records the beginning of all things. This beginning establishes our understanding for how we view the world. The Christian voice sets the world in its rightful narrative – creation, fall, redemption, consummation – to address all things by the truth of God’s Word. We are not striving to make the world God’s Kingdom. We do not have to do so. The world is God’s creation. We view the world under Jesus’ Lordship to look at what is and point to the One who brings all true good to it.

HYMN This is My Father’s World

This is my Father’s World, and to my listening ears, all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.

This is my Father’s World, I rest me in the thought, of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, His hand the wonders ought.

This is my Father’s World, the birds their carols raise; the morning light, the lily white declare their Maker’s praise.

This is my Father’s World, He shine in all that’s fair; in the rustling grass I hear Him pass, he speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father’s World, o let me ne’er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.

This is my Father’s World, the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heave be one.

The gospel not only brings good, but distinctively addresses evil and suffering to bring understanding, meaning, confrontation and victory. Without Jesus, suffering holds no meaning in this world. Whatever good one may hold or do, it always falls short when it fails to confront our suffering. The gospel declares that in Jesus Christ our suffering, hurts, wounds, sickness and even death is neither useless nor ultimate. There is no greater good in this world than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Testimony 2:** Christians testify to God’s command in creation as highest good and each person responsible before Him.

Christians hold a specific task to declare an endued responsibility to recognize God as He has revealed Himself. God has revealed Himself in His Word by His command. This doesn’t mean we go around quoting Scripture to everyone. We are informed, though, both by God’s special revelation in the Scriptures to see and understand His general revelation in creation. This is how we apply the Bible to every realm, and why science is the friend of Christians. The Bible commands that we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give a drink of water to the thirsty, and care for the sick. But we look to the sciences and engineering of this natural world to know how to cook, make clothe and sew, dig wells, and perform an appendectomy, open heart bypass or brain surgery. The Christian testimony bears witness to God’s command and creation as the source and standard for all that IS truly good.

**Testimony 3:** Christians testify to God’s creational mandate to cultivate good in the world.

Humanity is the apex of God’s creation, of a unique kind for a particular purpose. God’s creational mandate**Gen1:28** to people is to fill the earth, subdue and exercise dominion. The essence of this practice is cultivating, laboring to create culture that is good. This mandate includes every realm and sphere of life, like the sciences, business and economics, arts, humanities, craftsmanship, etc., but this also includes politics. There are plenty of “babel towers” being erected in the world that scream of lesser glory and counterfeit good. Christians bear the distinct call to engage the political process for good and righteous purposes that proclaim God’s glory and good.

When Christians devalue government or citizenship, we reduce God’s voice in the culture and give over laboring for good to people who do not know the One who is true good. Balancing Christianity with American Citizenship is something that no Christian should ever do. As we prioritize our new identity in Jesus, we should remember the words of **John F. Kennedy**, the famous and well-liked, Democratic president, who famously stated, “Ask NOT what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” And to make this even more accurate for Christ-followers, ask not “what would Jesus do?”, but “what has Jesus said?”. Then, Go as you are sent**John20:21** in the power of Holy Spirit and make disciples of all peoples**Matt28:18-20** by bearing a faithful witness**Luke24:48;Acts1:8** and preaching the gospel to all creation.**Mark16:15**

Have you considered how God is doing this in your job? …in your marriage and home? "With all political engagement, it is always done uneasily, wrestling with their place in society.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The Christian’s call to good citizenship begins with this first principle, to prioritize our identity in Jesus Christ.

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1. Carl F.H. Henry. The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), Loc 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo. One Nation Under God. (Nashville: B&H Academic Publishing Group, 2015), p1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Carl F.H. Henry. The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism., Loc 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bruce Ashford, Letters to an American Christian. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), Loc 467. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dr. Jason Duesing in a forum message on critical issues of politics and the gospel. <https://vimeo.com/180977390?utm_content=buffera8ac5&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer>. Last accessed September 17, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)