

Many who profess to be Christians strongly believe that it is their duty to be involved in politics for the good of this world. There is no doubt that many of these Christians are very sincere and well-meaning in their efforts. Should Christians participate in politics?



“If I had to do it all over again, I would avoid any semblance of involvement in partisan politics . . . An evangelist is called to do one thing, and one thing only: to proclaim the gospel.”—Billy Graham, during an interview in the later years of his life

This is quite an admission for one of the most famous Christian preachers, who had spent time with many prominent people of the world, including 12 US Presidents. (See the article on this website entitled, ***“Learn One Thing From Billy Graham’s Life Confession”***). This should at least give us pause when considering our own decision of whether to be involved in “partisan politics. Billy Graham referred to the one thing a Christian is “called to do,” and that is what Jesus commanded: **“Go and make disciples of all peoples” (Matthew 28:19**

NLT margin). He also referred to a Christian's need for singleness of focus on spreading the gospel, which can be illustrated this way: **“Bear your share of difficulties, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one on active service involves himself in the affairs of civilian life, because he must win the approval of the man who enlisted him” (2 Timothy 2:3,4 NJB)**. Another Bible principle can also be applied here: **“Jesus said, ‘No one who sets a hand to the plough and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:62 NAB)**. To plow straight furrows in a field, one must keep focused on what is ahead, not behind. Political involvement could, at a minimum, cause a Christian to lose his/her focus on spreading the gospel.

For Christians, **“All scripture is inspired by God and useful for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be his people. This is how someone who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NJB)**. Is it possible that Christian involvement in politics could be included as a type of **“error”** referred to in the scriptures? While there are no examples in the Bible of God's people being involved in politics, there is no specific counsel to the contrary in the Bible either. Therefore, we do well to consider what Bible principles may apply in such a situation, and make decisions based on those Bible principles. Are there any Bible principles that indicate that God may not want his people to be involved in partisan politics?

Some Christians believe that it their duty to try to elect good people to political office so as to improve the world, and also to help facilitate the spread of the gospel. However, Jesus' direction to his followers seems to run counter to that idea: **“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:33 NLT)**.

There is nothing wrong with government employment. However, government employment is not the same thing as political involvement. God's people have worked for governments since ancient times. Examples of pre-Christians are Joseph, Mordecai, Nehemiah and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (**Genesis 41:41-43; Nehemiah 2:1; Esther 10:3;**

Daniel 2:48,49). Paul, apparently writing from the city of Corinth, concludes the book of Romans with greetings from some early Christians. **“Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus greet you” (Romans 16:23 NAB)**. Erastus was a Christian who was employed as “the city treasurer.”

The Bible tells us that, **“Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those placed in positions of authority have been placed there by God” (Romans 13:1 NLT)**. The point here is that **“all authority comes from God,”** and **“those placed in positions of authority have been placed there by God,”** not humans. There is no indication here, or elsewhere in the Bible, that God wants us to help select those **“placed in positions of authority”** by him.

The book of Daniel makes clear that **“the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of this world and appoints anyone he wishes to rule over them,”** and **“he controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up kings” (Daniel 5:21; 2:21 NLT)**. The Bible also tells us that, **“From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries” (Acts 17:26 NLT)**. Since he **“has perfect knowledge” (Job 36:4 NIV)**, and is **“Almighty” (Job 37:23)**, we can trust his decisions and judgments to always be perfectly right. Since “God controls the course of world events,” and has ‘decided in advance when nations and leaders should rise and fall,’ there is really nothing we can do to change that.

These Bible principles certainly do not mean that those in political power always do the right things. They don’t. The governments are run by sinful people, **(Romans 3:23)**, who make mistakes, and some are even **“corrupt” (Psalm 14:1 NIV)**. **“Satan, the ruler of this world” (John 12:31 NLT)** is shown in the Bible to have much influence over the governments of the world. When he **“showed [Jesus] all the kingdoms of the world”** and said, **“all this power . . . has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:5,6 NAB)**, Jesus did not contradict his claim, but he flatly

rejected Satan's suggestion to worship him in exchange for rulership over them. Keeping these facts and principles in mind will help us to realize that we will not be able to change this world.

Jesus said that his disciples **“do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world” (John 17:14,16 NAB, NJB)**. Jesus further emphasized this principle by saying, **“The world would love you as its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you” (John 15:19 NLT)**. Christians are told that, **“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: . . . to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27 NAB)**. These directives, combined with other Biblical statements, can be seen as Christians being advised to avoid partisan politics. Political neutrality is another way to express such an idea.

Did Jesus ever involve himself in any politics of this world? No, he didn't! **“When the people saw the sign he had done [miraculously feeding thousands], they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.’ Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew into the mountain alone” (John 6:14,15 NAB)**. He refused to be drafted into politics as a leader. The Bible tells us that **“Christ . . . left an example for you to follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21 NJB)**. If the greatest man who ever lived avoided political involvement, perhaps we should too.

Did Jesus ever make any political comments, or give any political opinions? No! He was asked, **“Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? . . . Jesus . . . replied, ‘. . . Show me the money you pay the tax with.’ They handed him a denarius, and he said, ‘Choose portrait is this? Whose title?’ They replied, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Very well, pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar-and God what belongs to God’” (Matthew 22:17-21 NJB)**. Jesus did not express any opinion one way or the other about paying taxes to the Roman government, other than to say, ‘If you owe the tax, pay it.’

Did the early Christians involve themselves in any politics of their day? No! So, because of this, they were viewed with suspicion. For example, it was said of them, **“They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus” (Acts 17:17 NLT)**. Paul, Silas and other Christians were not advocating rebellion against the Roman government, but their loyalty to another king sounded suspicious. Early Christians were known for their non-involvement in politics. Strict application of Bible principles by Christians today often results in misunderstandings.

Another aspect to consider is that all nations are eventually doomed to destruction from God. **“All the kings of the earth and their armies”** will be **“gathered together to fight”** against Jesus **“and his army”** during **“the war of the Great Day of God the Almighty” (Revelation 16:14; 19:19-21 NJB)**. Why put forth so much effort into something that God is going to destroy?

Sometimes people misunderstand those Christians who are politically neutral, and they think that their message is to get everyone in the world to stay out of politics. They raise objections, such as: ‘If everyone avoided politics, who will run the world?’ We can learn a lesson from Jesus’ statement concerning a different issue: **“Jesus told him, ‘Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is go and preach about the kingdom of God!’” (Luke 9:60 NLT)**. One point we can glean from this is that there will always be plenty of people who will ‘run the world’ by being in political power.