

Confronting Christianity

Week #10

Small Group Notes

Introduction:

Ice breaker: Read this statement out loud: *“There are three things we should never talk about at family gatherings: religion, politics, and money.”* Do you agree or disagree? Are there things you could add or take away from that list? Why do we tend to stay away from these topics? How have you seen them approached in a healthy discussion?

This week we are going to look at the question: “Is God a Republican or Democrat?” There are few issues that are so divisive, that anger so many, or that have more Christians at odds with one another than the issue of the Church and politics. But today we are going to look at this tough question. (Spend some time in group prayer before you begin.)

Discuss:

1. Mark 12:13–17

Explain: *In this section, the opponents of Jesus attempt to trap him by means of a similar difficult political question: Should Jews pay taxes to Rome or not? To over-simplify it, The Pharisees were the conservatives, the right-wingers of that day. The Herodians were the liberals, the left-wingers, advocates of big government. The Pharisees hated Jesus because He was messing with their religious agenda. The Herodians opposed Him because He was threatening their political advantage with Rome. But they both agreed that Jesus needed to be gotten rid of so they actually team up.*

Ask: 2-3 Discussion questions related to the content.

- ❖ **For what reasons should Christians be involved in political discussions? For what reasons should Christians should steer clear of political discussions?**
- ❖ **What about you? Do you prefer to engage in political discussions or avoid them? Why?**
- ❖ **Do you think politics has become an idol to you personally?**

- ❖ **On what points do you disagree with our government? In what ways can you disagree with our government?**
- ❖ **How do you think your situation compares with the Jews under Roman rule?**
 - Israel had been occupied by the Roman Empire which ruled through a corrupt puppet government. Immorality was rampant and many Jews wanted to cast off the bonds of their overseers and go back to their religious/political traditions. Jews really could not participate in a political process like we know it today. (They were not in a democratic republic like America.) For example, there was no signing petitions, writing to senators, no social media, etc. There were a lot of factions and some had even attempted to rebel, but Rome was quick to squash them out.
- ❖ **What were the intentions of the Pharisees and Herodians in Mark 12?**
 - The interaction in Mark 12:13-17 concerns the imperial Roman tax. The Jews despised it because it was a constant reminder of their subjection to pagan Rome. So, if Jesus said to pay it, the people would turn on Him as a traitor. On the other hand, if He said not to pay it, He could be arrested and tried by the Romans for sedition and insurrection. Silence was not an option. His enemies thought they trapped Him. But Jesus will not be trapped.
- ❖ **In your own words, explain Jesus' answer in (v.16-17)**
 - If the coin has Caesar's image on it, then it belongs to him. So, give him what is rightfully his. However, as humans, we all (including Caesar) bear the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). God owns everything—our entire life.
- ❖ **What are some of the implications of Jesus' response as it relates to government/politics?**
 - All governmental authority is established by and comes from God (v.17) (Even bad ones.)
 - We should pay all taxes levied by the government, recognizing its right to do so (Mark 12:17)
 - We have dual citizenship with duties to both earthly governments, and most importantly, duties as citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- ❖ **How do you think we should view the “Republican vs. Democrat” debate in light of Mark 12?**

- The kingdom of God will always be in conflict with the kingdom of man.
- ❖ **Consider the statement: “The government does not have the power to create righteousness in people’s hearts.” Do you think that is true? Why or why not? If that’s true then how should Christians approach church and politics?**
 - Christians should engage in the mission of the church more than the platform of their party.
- ❖ **Do you think the church has lost sight of its purpose and become inappropriately involved in politics?**
- ❖ **What is the primary role of the corporate Church? What is the role of individual Christians, especially as it relates to politics?**
 - Make disciples (See Matthew 28:18-20)
 - The goal of the church is not to “take back America” but to win individual Americans to the transforming power of the gospel.

2. Read Romans 13

Explain: In Romans 13, Paul writes to the church in Rome about the general principle of submission to government. Several other passages show that God approves of Christians disobeying government, but only when obedience to government would mean disobeying God (see Ex. 1:17, 21; 1 Kings 18:4–16; Est. 4:16; Dan. 3:12–18; 6:10; Matt. 2:12; Acts 5:29; Heb. 11:23). Ultimately though, earthly government serves the purposes of promoting good and punishing evil (Rom 13:3-4). Bad government is almost always better than no government.

- ❖ **(Rom 13) Go through the passage and make a list of all the purposes for which God establish government.**
- ❖ **(Rom 13) Go to the passage again and circle all the phrases that describe our responsibility to government.**
- ❖ **Do you pray for those in government why or why not? What do you tend to pray? (1 Tim 2:1)**
- ❖ **What would change in your life if you lived more like a citizen of heaven than of America?**

Application:

- ❖ **What is your biggest takeaway today?**
- ❖ **How can being a good citizen help with the spread of the gospel?**

- Culture will be transformed as Christians begin to live like Christians.
- ❖ **As you think about your everyday life what are some practical ways you could build bridges for the gospel by being a good citizen?**
 - We can be good citizens by living in subjection to governmental authority, even a pagan one (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17).
 - We can be good citizens by responsibly engaging in the political process. By voting to seek to bring Christian convictions into the public arena (see Prov 14:34).
 - We can be good citizens by living “internationally” like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Jesus Himself on earth.
 - We can thank God for all the good He does through the government, praying always for all who are in authority (1 Tim 2:1-5)
- ❖ **Close: How can we be praying for one another? How can we encourage one another this week?**