

Being a Faithful Christian, Being a Good Citizen

Should Christians participate in politics?

Politics has a profound influence on our society. Public policy influences the way we interact with one another and how we organize our schools, businesses, voluntary associations and even our churches. It matters.

Without strong Christian involvement in politics and public policy, Christian witness is missing in the public square. The nature of that witness is one of compassion and mercy, and concern for the well-being of all members of our society – particularly the vulnerable and powerless. It is a witness that speaks up for the religious freedom of all faiths and recognizes religious freedom as a fundamental freedom that we are called to protect, for the good of all Canadians.

Our witness matters. How we live it out matters.

Jesus did not instruct His followers to withdraw from society, but to work to transform it. Jesus said we are to be like salt and light (Mathew 5:13 -16).

Salt that remains in the salt shaker, or light that is hidden under a cover, influences nothing and no one. The EFC believes our participation in politics, like our engagement in all other areas of life, is an essential part of our witness. We call people to repentance and invite them to experience God's

transforming forgiveness, but we must also work together to reform the structures of our society that cause injustice and prevent people from flourishing before God. We believe this witness is a way we love our neighbour. It is invitation and not imposition. It is always based in compassion, mercy and humility.

Our role as citizens

Simply put, as citizens we have responsibilities, benefits and opportunities.

Scripture says that the governing authorities are God's agent to do good (Romans 13). When asked about paying taxes, Jesus said we are to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's (Luke 20). We are to pay what is legitimately owed. And since God is sovereign over all, what belongs to Caesar also belongs to God, and what we give to Caesar we give to a servant of God.

We also enjoy the benefits and opportunities of citizenship. Paul appealed to the rights of his Roman citizenship to gain an audience before political authorities and to bear witness to his faith. As Canadian citizens we have the ability to form or join political parties, to participate in the election of politicians and to influence the development of public policy through submissions to government bodies.

In the Old Testament we find the stories of Joseph, Deborah, Daniel, Mordecai and David, all of whom were engaged in the politics of their day. The Bible is replete with examples of believers holding political office, and of their desire to be obedient to God in the pursuit of justice and care for the vulnerable.

Should we be mixing religion and politics?

People who say “no” often cite the principle of the separation of church and state. This principle does not appear in our constitution, and is interpreted in a variety of ways.

The church and the state are both designed by God, each with its own unique purpose. They have distinct roles that shouldn't be confused and the two should never be merged. The state shouldn't compel adherence to specific religious doctrine, and the Church shouldn't pose as a political party.

But discussing faith and politics is not the same as discussing church and state: our faith, and every other faith (even lack of faith), expresses a specific vision of how life should be lived, and that vision affects both the church and the state.

Our faith affects *all* areas of life, including the political realm. Jesus is Lord over all creation and all things are to be reconciled to Him.

Isn't there just too much compromise in politics?

Some Christians are reluctant to participate in politics because it involves compromise. We may not agree with the policies that governing institutions put in place. There are

times when we participate in order to help move the discussion and policy toward the best possible outcome, knowing it is not ideal. Yet politics is just as often about choosing between good alternatives, or settling priorities between two valid goals. Politicians face such decisions every day and they need wisdom and discernment. We believe there is a role for Christians, and people of every faith, to play in the formal political structure.

How we can participate

Each of the institutions and associations in our society - businesses, schools, voluntary groups, political organizations and churches - has a distinct role that contributes to politics and shapes public policy. One role of the Church is to exercise a prophetic ministry in society. The Church articulates biblical principles and encourages governments and politicians to honour these. The Church can also serve as an agent of reconciliation in a divided society and promote prayer for the nation. We do not seek to dominate, but to share God's love and mercy within our culture and society.

How can we personally be involved?

1. We can pray. We should pray regularly for our leaders, for the issues that concern us and encourage others in our church to pray as well.

2. We can learn. We need to develop a biblical perspective on politics and public policy issues. It's also important to understand how the political system works. We have a duty to interpret and apply

scripture with care and judgment. We must not manipulate the Bible in support of our political or personal prejudices.

It's important for Christians to "think Christianly" about the issues. No individual can know every issue in depth, so it is wise to select key issues that concern you, and ensure you are operating with a basic biblical, political and contemporary understanding of the subject.

Resources such as discussion papers and briefs are available from the EFC and other sources to assist you in thinking faithfully about a range of issues.

3. We can communicate our views. Signing petitions is a quick, easy action and can be effective when signatures are gathered in sufficient numbers, but more direct forms of communication tend to be more effective.

Writing or calling are both effective ways to participate. Be polite, concise and clear. Remember to support good initiatives and express appreciation, as well as to communicate concerns.

It is important to identify the appropriate person with whom to communicate. If writing to the Prime Minister or Premier, it helps to send a copy of your letter to the leaders of

the opposition parties. If writing to cabinet ministers, send a copy to the opposition party critics for that ministry. And don't leave out your own federal or provincial representative.

Visiting your elected official can be very effective, whether done individually or as part of a group. Politicians are elected to represent you and it's important to develop a relationship with them and express your views directly to them.

We can also speak in a united voice through the EFC. One of EFC's purposes is to bring attention to how scriptural principles apply to specific situations and issues.

4. We can participate. Voting in elections is the most basic means of participating. It is one of the benefits of living in a democracy. Another way of participating is to be actively involved in a political party, although this requires more time and effort.

Remember, while we are citizens of Canada, we are also citizens of God's Kingdom and it is Christ who we represent. Our primary concern is to see Christ glorified, not to win political battles or to score political points.

As His ambassadors, we must act with respect, integrity, wisdom and perseverance.

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