

How Would Jesus Vote? 1 Peter 2:13-17

Introduction

In 1896, Senator Benjamin Tillman was running for President. He was a former Confederate soldier, governor of South Carolina, an avowed white supremacist who helped erect Jim Crow laws that discriminated against newly-emancipated African Americans. Tillman famously disagreed with President Grover Cleveland to the point that he publicly threatened to attack him with a pitchfork. Thereafter, he became known as “Pitchfork Ben.”

Pitchfork Ben is what we get when we poorly steward our worldly citizenship. In two days, those of us here who are Americans over the age of 18 will enjoy the privilege of voting. In fact a dozen states across the nation will go to the polls on this Super Tuesday to vote or caucus in their primary elections. Take a moment to reflect on how unusual this is. In the grand sweep of recorded human history, going back some seven thousand years, across dozens of different cultures, nations, empires, and states, only a tiny minority of people who have ever lived have enjoyed the right of choosing their own leaders. For millennia, leaders inherited power, or took it by force, purchased it, or were simply born from the right family line, with the right ethnicity or the right religion.

In other words, for Americans, and citizens of other democracies, our worldly citizenship is both a greater blessing and a greater responsibility than the worldly citizenship of most others in history. As a greater blessing, it is also a greater temptation: we always tend to make idols out of our gifts. And it is a greater responsibility because Jesus told us that **“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more,”** (Luke 12:48).

That means we Americans, and other citizens of democracies, have a special obligation to be extra careful with how we think about and use our worldly citizenship. We, more than most Christians who have ever lived, should be extraordinarily careful with our worldly citizenship.

Happily, God gives us guidance. We’ve been studying the book of 1 Peter this year, and Peter takes a moment in this brief letter to counsel his readers about their worldly citizenship. Their situation was different than ours—they lived under an unelected military dictatorship. Nonetheless, the counsel Peter gives is universal. In four short verses, he outlines what government is for, why we should obey it, when we should disobey, what freedom is, and what our heart attitude should be towards the earthly authorities. As we go to elect a president, I pray that we heed the counsel of our King.

I. Peter's Command to US: Obey

The first thing Peter emphasizes is that we are to obey the government, because it has a legitimate role. He says we should **"be subject"** to the government in verse 13. The verb here means "to place oneself under." We are in a position of subordination to the authorities. Peter is both explicit and expansive in his command: he specifically tells his readers to be subject to the Emperor verse 13 and to his governors in the next verse. Peter seems to be making sure there's no wiggle room and no ambiguity: obey the government—the ruler, his proxies and subordinates, the bureaucrats and petty officials, the lady at the DMV counter, and the police officer who pulls you over for speeding. Obey them: they have a job to do and it's an important job.

In fact, Peter commands more than obedience: he actually commands us to **"honor"** the authorities. Verse 17, in the King James, says **"Fear God, Honor the King,"** which became a famous phrase in English, a sort of summation of the duties we owe outside the family. To honor is to "give proper respect to." Government officials perform an important function; we should respect them for it. Paul even reminds us to **"pray for those in authority"** (1 Timothy 2:2). When was the last time you prayed for President Barack Obama? Governor Jim Abbott? Chief Justice John Roberts? House Speaker Paul Ryan?

Obeying and honoring government is actually part of our Christian witness. Peter tells us to be subject **"for the Lord's sake"** and teaches that **"This is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."** In Peter's day, Christians may have faced rumors that they were a cult or a revolutionary political sect, fostering anarchism or mob rule because of their concern for the poor and their belief in the dignity of all people, including slaves and foreigners and women. Those were shocking doctrines and challenged the view of human nature that undergirded the Roman imperial system. Roman civilization was built on hierarchy, with adult male Roman citizens on top—and wealthy one from certain family lines on top of the top—and everyone else beneath them. Perhaps not too different from today. Christians' obedience to authority helped allay fears that their concern for the poor, the widow, and the orphan was prelude to revolution.

Today, Christians still face rumors—rumors that some of us want to take over and create a theocracy; or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, withdraw from American society and create isolated Christian ghettos. Quiet obedience and respect for the authorities would help our friends understand that we Christians desire neither to take over nor to withdraw; rather, our ambition is to lead a quiet life, mind our own business, as Paul counsels us (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), while seeking the peace and prosperity of the city in which we are exiles (Jeremiah 29:7). That's our political philosophy as Christians: Raise our families, love our neighbors, pray for our city, love justice.

And keep in mind what kind of government Peter was writing about: Rome was a tyranny, an absolute dictatorship that ruled by force, one that relied on established state religion of paganism, an empire one of whose governors had ordered the execution of Jesus, and which would soon embark on empire-wide persecutions of Christians—indeed, one that would soon execute Peter himself. While there are limited conditions under which disobedience is permissible, even obligatory (we’ll talk about that in a moment), the presumption is that, under normal circumstances, you should obey and honor the government. Even when the government is inefficient, run by pagans, corrupt, and bullying. Even when the government is unjust, despite what some ranchers in Oregon believe. Every government in history has been unjust to some degree; Rome certainly was. If every unjust act justified rebellion, we would be in a constant state of revolution and anarchy. It’s unpopular to say this in Texas, but you don’t get to decide when it’s time for revolution.

Christianity is therefore incompatible with anarchism and the more hostile versions of libertarianism which starts from the presumption that government is, in principle, wrong or suspect. Christians should start with the presumption that government is an ordinance from God who, in his mercy, created it to help restrain the worst consequences of sin and the Fall.

II. Peter’s Command to Rulers: Rule Justly

But note that even as Peter emphasizes our duty to obey, Peter also defines the roles and duties of government. This is kind of sneaky. The passage starts off as being about our obligation to obey, but then Peter transitions subtly to tell government what it is supposed to be doing. It would be risky and potentially treasonous for Peter, a person of no stature, to come right out and write a treatise in the early 1st century on the roles and limitations of government—Rome respected no freedom of speech, worship, or writing. If Peter came right out and said “Ceaser is only allowed to do X, but not Y,” they’d probably arrest him because the emperor did not recognize limits to his authority. Instead, Peter slips in a charter of government’s legitimate authority alongside a passage about our obligation to obey.

Peter says in verse 14 government exists **“to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”** Government is an essential human institution for restraining evil in this fallen world. Government’s first duty is retributive justice: in a sinful and fallen world, some people do terrible things, and we need the collective power of government to keep them in check. Law, order, and national defense are essential to what government is.

Similarly in Romans 13, Paul says **“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment....But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in**

vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

We need government to punish evil lest the world be overrun by evildoers—and by vigilantes. We would be caught in the proverbial “war of all against all” that the philosopher Thomas Hobbes warned about without the singular power of government to prevent it. What a blessing it is that, in the normal course of things, we largely don’t have to worry about our own physical safety. Without government, much of our lives would be spent fearfully guarding ourselves, our families, and our possessions. Government, when it works, frees us from the immediate concern for our physical well being so we can focus on other things, like work and family. This is what government is for, and—I know it may be shocking to hear this—it is a blessing from God.

Government is, thus, fruit of God’s common grace on all humanity. But let us also note, briefly, that it is also a necessary step in God’s long plan of redemption. To recreate humanity, he chose to save a people for himself—which means, God ordained that civilization continue even despite our sin. God ordained that there be a mechanism for keeping order and rough justice among sinners so that his redemptive purposes could play out. All government exists to serve God’s overriding purpose to save his people.

But—take note, libertarians and conservatives—government also has a positive role, to **“praise those who do good.”** Government isn’t *only* about retributive justice, public order, and national defense. Government can play a broader role fostering goodness and flourishing in human lives and human communities. Remember King David’s final words, in 2 Samuel 23:3-4: **“When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.”** In a sense, government should echo or image God’s government in his Kingdom in its concern for human flourishing.

This is what justice looks like. We don’t often here candidates talking about justice, but justice is actually the most important goal of government. Punishing evil, praising good, respecting the dignity of all and working for the flourishing of all are what the Bible means when it talks about justice. Isaiah 61:8 says **“I, the LORD, love justice.”** We are to do likewise: Micah 6:8 says **“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”** And this is especially important for rulers. Proverbs 29:4: **“By justice a king builds up the land.”**

The implication for those who wield authority—not only in government—are clear. If you have power, as a parent, boss, teacher, military officer, school board official, president, or head of a volunteer organization, use it justly. You are responsible for punishing evil and upholding good, which also implies *teaching* what

is right and what is wrong. The exercise of authority is a sort of public education in that it shapes the rules we live by and thus teaches norms of right and wrong.

You sometimes hear people say that government shouldn't legislate morality; but *all* government is morality. The very act of legislating is making a rule that everyone has to obey about the right and wrong ways of behaving, and enforcing that rule of the threat of violence. In that sense, every law is legislating morality. Government is the embodiment of our shared norms of justice. It exists to enforce justice. We need to recover what it looks like to *punish* without anger or vindictiveness. Punishment is supposed to be an act of love and education, teaching what is evil by enforcing a consequence for it. In this, we mirror God and his creation, because he has built in natural consequences for evil.

III. The Nature of True Freedom

Reflect for a moment on the strangeness of this passage. Here we have a nobody, a fisherman from a backwater province who probably doesn't speak Latin and maybe had never traveled outside his little country in his entire life. The biggest city he had ever visited before his trip to Rome was likely Jerusalem, a city of perhaps half the size of Dallas. Any Roman sophisticates reading his letter would have looked at Peter's education and called it the narrow, provincial education of a religious zealot: he could read the Hebrew Scriptures but didn't have a "real" education. And yet here was Peter, passing out advice to the ruler of the world about how to do his job. Who does Peter think he is?

Peter thinks he is a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a far more important citizenship than anything Rome would ever offer. Look at verse 16. **"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."** This is an astonishing thing to write and it is absolutely packed with meaning.

Peter asserts that we Christians are free. The word here in Greek is best understood as "freeman," that is, someone not bound in legal slavery. Slaves didn't count; they were considered literally less than human, unfit for the dignity of citizenship, unable to participate in human community. By contrast, a freeman is a citizen, a full member of the community, a real person, someone whose voice matters, someone with dignity and rights. Now Peter is talking to Christians here, including women, slaves, and the poor, people who legally did not count as full persons under Roman law, who did not enjoy the same status as free Roman men. For Peter to tell women, slaves, and the poor that they matter is a revolutionary statement.

Does this mean Peter was calling for revolution? Did he envision a political and military movement to secure the rights of the downtrodden? Does the Bible demand that we rise up against the one percent in the name of the poor, seize the reins of power, and use them to redistribute wealth? Some people, then, and now,

read the Bible as calling for such a movement. The Romans were suspicious of Christians for just that reason. Communes occasionally cropped up during the Middle Ages. Pacifist and Mennonite movements have been inspired by this vision of the Christian life. And in 2016, you may have seen the meme going around urging Christians to vote for Bernie Sanders. It says “You’ve been worshipping a socialist Jew all your life; now vote for one.”

I want to answer carefully here, because I want to warn against some very real dangers while not discouraging you from pursuing real justice. I think we must recognize from Scripture that Christians are never called on to try to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. Scripture repeatedly attests that the evils of this world stem ultimately from the sin in our hearts, not ultimately from unjust political or economic arrangements; and therefore any political reform movement, like socialism, or libertarianism, or any other -ism, can only address the symptoms, not the cause, of injustice. And, in fact, history shows that revolutionary movements motivated by utopian visions have a terrible track record because they tend to justify any and all means in the pursuit of perfect justice. When we try to build the Kingdom of God on earth, we make an idol out of our political ideology and our nation, we turn our Christian faith into a prop to support our preferred policies, and treat political disagreement as if it were heresy.

Peter, in our passage today, warns against “**using your freedom as a cover-up for evil.**” Peter cautions us not to abuse our freedom. We often use “freedom” as license to indulge whatever resentment or sense of entitlement or grievance we cherish most; Peter calls this out and won’t let us use our true Gospel freedom this way. I think we Americans, we citizens of democracies, have to be especially careful about this—especially in an election year—because political campaigns are massive media machines devoted to tempting you to abuse your freedom.

Perhaps you’re angry at corruption and incompetence in Washington, D.C. The campaigns tempt you to abuse your freedom by turning that righteous anger into outright contempt for the blessing of government. Perhaps you’re angry at the culture of political correctness and believe, rightly, in the freedom of speech. The campaigns tempt you to abuse this freedom by indulging in mean-spirited insults against Mexicans, or Muslims, or African Americans, or take your pick. Perhaps you’re angry at the culture of dependence fostered by welfare programs. The campaigns tempt you to abuse this freedom by calling all poor people “takers” too lazy to work and therefore undeserving of any help at all. Perhaps you’re angry at income inequality and believe the poor don’t get a fair shake in today’s world. The campaigns tempt you to abuse this freedom by encouraging personal animosity towards the rich and a belief that all the problems of this world can be fixed with the right economic reform.

Peter condones none of this. Our freedom is of a different sort than our political ideologies imagine. Just as Christ’s kingdom is not of this world, our freedom is not of the sort the world imagines. We are not free from whatever

oppression most bothers us on the right or the left; we are free from the terminal disease this entire world, liberals and conservatives alike, is afflicted with.

Christ the King conquered all the powers of this world by his death on the cross and his resurrection. Our freedom is deeper, truer, and more permanent than anything our government can accomplish for us with lower taxes, or better health care, or stronger national security, or anything else. Whether or not we enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, we already have freedom from sin, death, and hell. We have the freedom to enjoy Christ, the freedom to dwell in the house of the Lord, the freedom to see God. We are freemen in the Kingdom of God, sons and daughters, co-heirs with Christ in a Kingdom of perfect justice without end. Our ultimate political authority, our ultimate political obligation, our ultimate political identity is not to or from any earthly government, no matter how exceptional it is. As Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that our **“citizenship is in heaven.”**

We Christians have dual citizenship. We are citizens of the world, and citizens of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom came when Jesus came; he reigns now in heaven and in the church and he will consummate his rule over all the earth when he returns. Now, it’s important to recognize that these are not separate, co-equal realms, like two spheres side by side. [Show slide] Rather, the world is wholly subsumed by God’s rule. [slide shows a small circle completely inside another circle.] Peter is echoing here Jesus’ famous answer to the Pharisees when they challenged him about paying taxes. **“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,”** (Matthew 22:21). Jesus establishes the basic idea that, yes, government is legitimate and we ought to obey—but, what are the things that belong to God that we should render unto him? All things belong to God including what belongs to Caesar. Caesar, Don Carson observes, is made in God’s image, after all. And so we owe God a higher allegiance in all things than we will ever owe to an earthly government.

Now, if you’re thinking that this sounds like Christians should just give up, stop voting or caring because the whole world is corrupt and sinful and its pointless to try to work for justice—No, that isn’t the right answer, but hang on to that thought, because I want to return to it at the end of our time this morning. There is a reason for us to work for justice in this world.

Christianity was startlingly “progressive” and “liberal” in the Roman context by saying that women, slaves, and the poor could also be full persons. But it doesn’t give in to the full throated individualism and autonomy of the Enlightenment, much less to today’s postmodern progressivism. We aren’t servants of reason or of ourselves, but of God, which prevents our worldly freedom from becoming a destructive idol. As servants, we are to reverence, worship, and obey our king. The Romans were right, in a sense: kings deserve worship and awe. They just had the wrong king. We render worship to the true King, to Christ. And we are people who matter—to our King, whether or not our president agrees.

IV. When Should Christians Disobey the Government?

And this seems to open the door, very slightly, for the right to disobey, resist or even rebel. Because we're Americans—more so, because we're Texans—we hardly need convincing that it is sometimes acceptable to disobey. Rather, we need counsel on how rarely disobedience is justified. But if the government has defined duties, then, by implication, there are plainly things it should *not* do. To put it another way, for any lawyers listening, Peter outlines government's "enunciated powers" and leaves it to us to infer that government should not do whatever conflicts with those powers.

Biblically, I think there are two situations. First, Peter himself practiced civil disobedience. In Acts 5 he is arrested and ordered not to preach the gospel of Jesus. He declared "**We must obey God rather than man,**" (5:29). So we have to read 1 Peter 2 in light of Acts 5. When government directly orders or commands anything that directly contradicts God's command, it is no longer punishing evil and praising the good; it is doing the opposite, punishing good and praising evil, and you must disobey the government.

If today the government told Christians they weren't allowed to go to church or proselytize—as the government of Saudi Arabia does—you should disobey. If it regulated churches heavily and censored sermons and took over the licensing of pastors to ensure they conform to the government's ideology—as the government of China does—you should disobey the government. If the government tried to censor sermons in the name of stopping "hate speech," we will disobey, and we will preach the gospel exactly as we have received it in the Bible and exactly as Jesus preached it. The world has always found the gospel of Jesus Christ hateful.

The second situation that merits disobedience is when government no longer governs. Note what Peter is doing in these chapters. Much of this book is an extended meditation on the nature of authority. After these verses on government, he goes on to talk about authority between masters and servants, husbands and wives, elders and the church. We'll dwell on these passages in greater length in coming weeks. But briefly, we would never interpret these passages to say that servants have to submit to being murdered, or wives to being beaten and raped, or that church members have to submit to elders who fleece them in the name of a false gospel. Authority exists to promote human flourishing; used that way, authority is good. When someone uses authority to systematically undermine human dignity, they are not acting as a legitimate authority figure.

This argument has a long lineage in Christian political thought. Augustine argued in the fifth century: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale?"¹ The crucial thing that distinguishes government from

¹ City of God, Book IV, Ch. 4.

organized crime is that government uses coercion for the purpose of justice, not profit. When it directs its energies towards profit and murder, it is no longer a government. Aquinas argued in the twelfth century: “A tyrannical government is not just, because it is directed, not to the common good, but to the private good of the ruler... Consequently there is no sedition in disturbing a government of this kind.”²

Note however, that Peter would not count even the Roman Empire as being evil enough to merit civil disobedience on most matters. You have to meet an extraordinarily high bar to justify resistance to government. Only the worst and most comprehensively evil governments fit this category. If you were living in Germany in the 1930s under the Nazi regime, you would have no obligation to obey their order to hand over your Jewish neighbors for execution; in fact, you would have a positive obligation to *disobey* and help protect the innocent.

Note at the end of this passage, Peter tells us to “Honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor.” We are to give the Emperor “honor,” – no more and no less than we are to render to everyone. Honor is something given and received between equals and rough equals. In context, this is pretty subversive, as citizens of the empire were expected to render the Emperor quasi-worship. God commands us *not* to fear our fellow man—including, scandalously, the emperor. We honor him and obey him—but do not fear to disobey when necessary. The fear of God should overwhelm any temptation to fear a mere Caesar.

V. The 2016 Election and Beyond

How should we heed Peter’s counsel about government today? I’ve already suggested some of the more obvious application points. Obey the law. Don’t be a criminal. Respect the lady at the DMV. Be polite when the police officer gives you a speeding ticket. Maybe, just maybe, don’t speed in the first place.

But we can’t ignore the elephant in the room—nor the donkey. In two days we go to the polls and have the opportunity to help choose our governing authorities. Given what we’ve read here in the Bible about how Christians should relate to their government, how should we use this opportunity to choose our own rulers? What does it look like to cast a ballot while thinking Christianly? How would Jesus vote?

I realize some of you may be uncomfortable with a frank political discussion on a Sunday morning. Some might think this is illegitimate, in principle, because politics and religion should be kept separate. Of course, that’s not what Jesus meant when he said to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” He also said to render to God what is God’s, and all things belong to God. We should certainly seek to honor God in all things, including in our worldly citizenship, in our earthly political behavior.

² ST II-II, 42.2

Some others of you—probably the minority—are rearing to go, excited that at long last we’re talking politics in church. It’s about time, you may think, that we bring God back into the public sphere, “take back the nation for Christ,” start talking about how to “vote the Bible” as I saw one candidate advertise. To you, I simply repeat some of my earlier comments: that Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world, and we are not called to build it. He’s already built his Kingdom; we are simply to live as its citizens, obey its ruler, tell others about it.

No, when we go to vote, I think we go neither with a feigned secularism, as if we could stop being Christians once we step into the voting booth, nor as secret theocrats, just waiting to vote ourselves into power and turn the country into a Christian nation. Rather, I think voting Christianly looks different.

First, if we are to honor the authorities, perhaps we might start by voting for candidates who merit honor. That is, someone who is held in wide regard because of their integrity, because of how they treat others, because of a sense of decency and respect in public and private life. As many of you know, I worked for two presidents in the White House. I’m convinced this is one of the most important, yet underappreciated, traits in a President.

Second, we’re voting for someone who is charged with enforcing law. This is a key part of their responsibility to do justice. So perhaps we should vote for someone who evinces a deep love and respect for law. Law is a gift, a blessing that makes civilization possible. Does your candidate think law is a tool to be used and manipulated for their end, or is it a welcome restraint that keeps the authorities cognizant of the limits they must work within?

Third, sometimes candidates directly appeal to us as Christians. Ask what they are promising in exchange for our votes. Are they promising equal justice for people of all religions? Or are they implicitly promising to favor us with the spoils of the state? Even if it may make us more comfortable and make our culture reflect “Christian values,” that is not what government is for. Government is for justice—for Christians, for Muslims, for atheists, for everyone. A candidate who promises you special favors for your group doesn’t understand what justice is. And remember, our goal as Christians is not to build a world in which it is comfortable to be a Christian. That’s a dangerous world because it demands no sacrifice for your faith. Easy Christianity is a faith in which you will soon forget your dependence on God.

Fourth, we’re voting for someone to wield an awesome power. The President of the United States is often said to be the most powerful person on the planet. As Christians, we know that all people are sinful, and vesting any sinner with power is inherently dangerous. Does your candidate show any humility in how he or she approaches power? Any awareness of its dangers? Do their plans for government require amassing even more power? I hope all Christians treat proposals that grant the government more and more power over citizen’s lives or the US economy with

extra scrutiny. We need power to make government function, but all power carries risk.

Let me end with one final thought. Earlier, I recognized that maybe some of you might be tempted to apathy because I warned against trying to build the Kingdom of God on earth. If all things are corrupted by the fall, why bother working for justice? Every ideology looks like idolatry, every candidate looks like a corrupt sinner grasping after more power. We're doomed to failure, aren't we?

No. We are to work for justice, peace, truth, beauty, and love. Peter ends with a command to "**Love the brotherhood.**" The command to love the brotherhood is also political. Christians were known for their compassion and mercy and especially for their love for one another. This wasn't normal. Christians were exiles from normal Roman society; so they went about creating an alternative order, one based on mutual love. In doing so, they ended up building something better than what Rome offered anyway.

As a friend of mine has argued, the most powerful political things the church can do is...be the church. As we love one another as Christ loved us, we show the world we are his disciples. We show them what it means to be a "holy nation" and "royal priesthood"—language Peter used just a few verses earlier in chapter 2. In other words, it's the love, righteousness, and justice of our lives together that presents a model for the nations of the world of what they *should* look like. Yes, we should pray for and look forward to a Christian nation. The Christian nation that is the church. We should not build the Kingdom of God on earth, but we should build foretastes of it as part of our witness to the world.

In fact, Peter may have been hinting at this in the opening. Note that Peter starts off saying we should be subject to "every human institution." Peter doesn't use the Greek word for "government" or "the state." Obviously the rest of the passage is focused on political authorities, but here he uses a different word with a very broad and flexible meaning, one that can mean every act of "founding," every human "creation." Perhaps Peter was suggesting that our best political engagement is a posture of humility and respect before every human organization—not just government, but schools, the home owners association, your local Girl Scout troop, the Sierra Club, everything that we might call "civil society"—yes, including the church.

Placing ourselves under these institutions means that we shouldn't take them for granted or grumble when they interfere with our lives. Rather, we should gratefully accept them, even cultivate them as the gathering together of our neighbors and acquaintances for common purpose. This is Christian political engagement—faithful presence in the midst of this world, caring for and cultivating the little patch of garden entrusted to us. How is this political? Well, what better way to love the city, seek its renewal, and to show your love as a Christian?

We Christians have historically enjoyed the privilege of religious freedom. It comes as part of the package of democracy, self government, and civil liberties. As Winston Churchill said, democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. Praise God we live in an open society. But please recognize how unusual, and how fragile, this is. Democracies can die. The church will always survive, but if we want to show love for our city and seek its renewal while also safe guarding our own freedom to worship undisturbed by the state, then cultivating the habits and institutions of self government is a good place to start.