



Session Objective

Participants will explore the belief that government is a gift from God, regardless of whether we always agree with a particular political view. While government is a gift from God, God is above and beyond all attempts to define God.

Faith Statement

Magistracy of every kind is instituted by God himself for the peace and tranquility of the human race, and thus it should have the chief place in the world.

—Second Helvetic Confession (5.252)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How interested are you in politics?
- Would you characterize your political beliefs as strongly held, wishy-washy, or somewhere in between? How did you become that way?
- What do the terms *Republican Party* and *Democratic Party* mean to you, in terms of the respective political beliefs of each party?
- In what ways do these political parties and their members reflect or express religious values?



Explore

Read Mark 12:13-17 and the faith statement together. Then explore the following questions:

- In what ways were the questions from the chief priests, scribes, and elders (vv. 14-15) a trap?
- In the first sentence of verse 14, Jesus' opponents compliment and flatter him. Do you think they are being sincere in their flattery? Why or why not? What are they trying to accomplish by complimenting Jesus?
- How does Jesus' answer (v. 17) help him avoid the trap set by his opponents?
- Does Jesus' answer mean that God and the emperor are equals? Why or why not? How do the emperor's "things" relate to God's "things"?
- If this session's question was rewritten to apply to Jesus' place and time, it would look something like this: "Is God a Roman or a Palestinian?" How does Mark 12:13-17 help you respond to this question?
- How does Mark 12:13-17 help you respond to the question *Is God a Republican or a Democrat?*



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Is God a Republican or a Democrat?"
- What difference does it make in your life that you have a response to this question?
- How has your understanding of American politics changed because of this conversation?



Exit

Close the session with a time of prayer, giving thanks to God for being greater, wiser, and more just than any human political party could hope to be. Invite the participants to pray for discernment and wisdom in dealing with the constant flood of political messages that are all around them.





Session Objective

Participants will explore how they are called to be good citizens to help bring about God's kingdom.

Faith Statement

God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of human life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate. It includes the natural environment as exploited and despoiled by sin. It is the will of God that the divine purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil be banished from creation.

—Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text (9.53)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What does it mean to be a good citizen?
- How does voting rank on the list of good citizenship behaviors?
- How do you define *politics*?
- What role does God play in the political process?
- Does God care whether we participate in the political process? Why or why not?



Explore

Read Romans 13:1-10 and the faith statement. Explore the following questions:

- Paul begins this passage by saying that "governing authorities . . . that exist have been instituted by God." Do you agree? Why or why not? How do we reconcile this statement with evil or corrupt governments?
- Paul argues that his readers should be good citizens not just out of fear of punishment, but for another reason (v. 5). What is this reason, and do you agree? Which is the more important reason to be a good citizen? Why?
- Between verses 7 and 8, Paul moves from the subject of paying taxes to the subject of loving one another. In what ways can love for others be connected to paying taxes and otherwise being a good citizen?
- If Paul were writing in the United States today, what other specific behaviors might he include under the heading of being a good citizen?
- Based on this Scripture passage, how would Paul have answered the question *Is it a sin not to vote?*



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- Review the categories listed in the faith statement about "the whole of life." What are some examples of actions that represent good citizenship in each category? (*For example, good citizenship in the technological sphere of human life might include using fair labor practices in the manufacture of products, limiting the use of nonrenewable resources, and disposing by-products safely.*)
- In what ways has this study and discussion changed your thinking on how God might feel about our participation in society and government?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Is it a sin not to vote?"



Exit

Close the session with a time of prayer. Invite the participants to pray that God would lead them to reflect on what their individual and corporate calls might be for engagement in the world around them.





Why Do Some Politicians Lie and Make Bad Decisions in Their Personal Lives?



Session Objective

The session will discuss the truth that none of us are without sin, including political leaders. Participants will also discuss the need for reconciliation among leaders and how and when a leader's behavior should determine that person's value as a leader.

Faith Statement

Q. 20. Was the image of God lost when we turned from God by falling into sin?

Yes and no. Sin means that all our relations with others have become distorted and confused. Although we did not cease to be with God, our fellow human beings, and other creatures, we did cease to be for them; and although we did not lose our distinctive human capacities completely, we did lose the ability to use them rightly, especially in relation to God. Having ruined our connection with God by disobeying God's will, we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves. We have become slaves to the sin of which we are guilty, helpless to save ourselves, and are free, so far as freedom remains, only within the bounds of sin.

—Study Catechism: Full Version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What is your opinion of politicians in general? On what do you base your opinion?
- Some politicians get caught in lies and bad personal decision making. What factors contribute to causing these behaviors to happen?
- At what point does a politician's personal sins disqualify him or her from further public service?
- Are forgiveness and reconciliation possible for politicians who lie and make bad personal decisions? Why or why not?



Explore

Read Romans 3:9–20 and the faith statement, and explore the following questions:

- Romans 3:9–20 picks up in the middle of a long argument Paul is making in response to people who think they're better than others because they belong to one particular group or another. Paul will have none of this. What force does Paul say we're all under the power of?
- What's the definition of *sin*?
- In verses 10–18, Paul quotes several different passages from the Old Testament. What one word describes the tone of these verses? How do they make you feel?

- These verses quoted from the Old Testament refer to specific parts of the body to show different ways that humans sin: throats, tongues, lips, mouths, feet. What kinds of sins do we commit with these body parts? What body parts are missing from this list?
- Based on this Scripture passage, how would Paul have answered the question *Why do some politicians lie and make bad decisions in their personal lives?*



Express

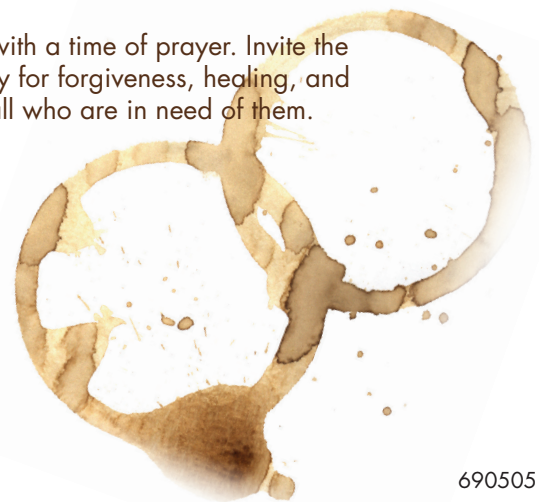
Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why do some politicians lie and make bad decisions in their personal lives?"
- In what ways has this conversation affected your opinion about our society's expectations of those who hold political offices?
- In light of this study and discussion, how should we react and respond to the sins committed by politicians?



Exit

Close the session with a time of prayer. Invite the participants to pray for forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation for all who are in need of them.





Is It OK or Not OK to Talk about Politics at Church?



Session Objective

Participants will explore when and where it is appropriate to talk about politics in church. Although we are called to be in the world rather than of the world, we are also called to work in the political sphere for justice, freedom, and peace.

Faith Statement

In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (lines 65-71)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- When have you heard an explicitly political viewpoint expressed in church, whether by an individual in conversation, by the preacher in a sermon, or in another way? What one word best describes how this viewpoint made you feel?
- Are some political topics more appropriate for discussion at church than others?
- Is it possible that there could be situations in which the church would be morally wrong *not* to talk about a political issue? Why or why not?
- What are the dangers of having political conversations in the church? What are the benefits of having political conversations in the church?



Explore

Read Acts 4:23-31 and the faith statement, and explore the following questions:

- The Scripture passage begins, "After [Peter and John] were released . . ." This tells us right off the bat that the people of this very early Christian congregation took great risks and put themselves in real physical danger by doing the work of the church. How would your life be different if you could be thrown in jail for confessing faith in Christ?
- After Peter and John tell their friends about their experiences, the people immediately begin to pray. What feelings and emotions are expressed in the prayer?
- The church's prayer in verses 24-30 is very political: it speaks of kings and rulers and calls out certain political figures by name. How is this prayer like or unlike the prayers in your congregation's worship services?

- What does the prayer in verses 24-30 ask God for? What evidence can you find in the passage that the prayer was answered?
- The prayer begins, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth . . ." (v. 24). If God is creator and ruler of everything, what does this tell us about whether politics has a place in church?
- What does the Scripture passage have to say about the issue of talking about politics in church? If it is OK to talk about politics at church, what are the limits to this sort of talk?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- How would your life be different if you could be thrown in jail for confessing faith in Christ?
- What do the church members in the Scripture passage do? What do they hope and expect to do in the future? What does the faith statement ask us—the church of today—to do?
- Is it possible to do all of these things as a church while avoiding politics? Why or why not?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Is it OK or not OK to talk about politics at church?"



Exit

Close the session with a time of prayer, giving thanks to God for this time together. Invite the participants to pray for mutual caring and respect and to give thanks for one another.

