

Should Christians Be Politically Driven?

John 18:36: *Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm.*



The world of politics IS our world. It is incredibly difficult to go through a typical day of interactions and online activity without being BOMBARDED with some form of political activism or opinion or outrage. With political victory comes power, and with power comes authority. With authority comes the ability to shape the lives and directions of the masses. Because of where we are in the stream of time, the grip of politics is not likely to let up at all. On the contrary, it is likely to grow and dominate. So, what is our role as Christians? Should we

apply ourselves to get involved so we can bring sound thinking, righteousness and integrity to the process for the greater good of all people? Or should we stay away from the whole process knowing that it is ultimately going to fall apart anyway?

To understand what Jesus taught us about being involved in politically-driven issues, we need to first understand how the politically-driven powers of his day functioned. What we'll see is a dramatic difference from when God established Israel as a sovereign nation after their release from Egyptian slavery.

God created government. At that beginning, God was their King. Their original form of secular government was through Moses as their representative before God. That secular setup later developed into a system of judges. Centuries later they clamored for a king, and God granted them King Saul against His strong advice. Still, Israel was to adhere to God's Law and His will. Israel's governance was in all circumstances to be God-driven.

At Jesus' first advent, Israel (called the province of Judaea by the Romans) was entrenched in the iron grip of the Roman Empire. (Herod was their vassal king to Rome—the appointed king by the Roman Senate.) However, they were given significant leeway to be able to rule themselves as long as they paid their taxes, followed Rome's rules and posed no threat to the authority of Rome.

In other words, *Pay us heavy taxes and don't cause any trouble!*

Let's look at this period of time and define some of the diverse, politically-charged, influential groups in Israel during Jesus' day.

We're going to briefly look at five political and religious groups of people. There were other groups like the Galileans, Herodians, Levites and the Samaritans that we won't touch on today.

(Source: Willmington, Harold, "Political and Religious Groups in the Days of Jesus Christ" (2017). The Second Person File. 57. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person/57, Liberty University)

Some of these groups were organized well before Rome conquered the people, long before the time of Jesus.

The Scribes

The Scribes were organized back in the days of Ezra: Scribes (also called "experts in religious law") (Matthew 22:35; Luke 7:30) were the students, interpreters, and teachers of the Old Testament Scriptures. Scribes had great power in Jewish society and were often called upon to settle disputes.



Some translations call them *lawyers*. They were called "Scribes" because back in the days of King Hezekiah, their work was to transcribe old records and put in writing what had been handed down orally. The Scribes wanted to make the Law of Moses the rule of life for the nation and individuals.

(Additional Source: A Dictionary of the Bible, Edited by William Smith, 1897) The zeal of Hezekiah led him to foster the growth of a body of men whose work it was to transcribe old records, or to put in writing what had been handed down orally (Proverbs 25:1). Over time it began to be interpreters of the Law boasting of their wisdom (Jeremiah 8:8).

A saying is attributed to Simon the Just (BC 300-290) which embodies the principle on which they had acted. "Our fathers have taught us three things, to be cautious in judging, to train many scholars, and to set a fence about the Law." They wished to make the Law of Moses the rule of life for the whole nation and for individual men. The Jewish teacher could recognize no principles beyond the precepts of the Law.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees, who came to prominence around 100 B.C. during the time of the Maccabees, were known as the champions and guardians of Israel's written and oral law...They numbered about 6,000 in Christ's day.

The Pharisees were more the religious teachers of Israel. The name "Pharisee" means "separated ones," and they kept separate from the Gentiles and from other Jews who were not keeping the rituals of the Law as they were. The Pharisees controlled the local synagogues. They added more details to the Law to dictate exactly what every Jewish person could and could not do. It was called the "oral tradition of interpretations." It was a big area of contention with our next group, the Sadducees.

The Sadducees

Taking their name from Zadok, high priest during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 2:35), the Sadducees came into prominence at about the same time as the Pharisees, a century before Christ. The Sadducees were the Jewish aristocrats of Christ's day and held most seats on the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was the Jewish Supreme Court for both religious and legal matters.

As the "insiders" of the priestly class, they accepted only the written Law and rejected the oral traditions popular with Pharisees.

The Sadducees were the priests performing the functions of the Temple. However, they were influenced by Greek philosophy and were more into the politics and the running of the state rather than the religious elements in which they should have been involved.

There was a strong division between Sadducees and the Pharisees.

- The Sadducees were after political power.
- The Pharisees were after religious power.
- The Scribes were all about making sure everybody lived up to the Law.

These three groups were the political powers in the time Jesus was born. They were the driving forces in Israel as he grew up. They were the ones who had the power because they controlled the Law, its interpretation, and its application from their three different perspectives. Essentially, they ruled everyday life in Israel in Jesus' time subject to the tolerance of Rome.



We now move on to those organized *as a result of Roman rule*:

The Publicans

These public officials were authorized by Rome to collect taxes from the Jews for that Empire. Because of this, they were hated and despised by the Jews who associated them with terrible sinners (Matthew 9:11; 11:19), harlots (Matthew 21:31-32), and outright pagans (Matthew 18:17).

It was the basest of all livelihoods. The strong feeling of many Jews as to the absolute unlawfulness of paying tribute to Rome at all made matters worse. In addition to their reputation of cheating the people, the Publicans of the New Testament were regarded as traitors and apostates, willing tools of the oppressor.

The Zealots

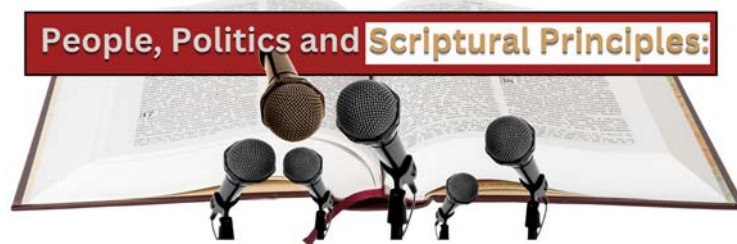
The Zealots were an intensely nationalistic sect, anti-Roman to the core, advocating that Israel should return to a theocratic form of government. They were the direct opposite of the tax collecting Publicans.

These last two groups were not in a position of political power per se, but they influenced the political climate and outlook of the Jewish people of their day from one perspective or another.

We chose these five groups to help us understand what politics meant to Jesus and his followers—and to help us understand how we should view politics in our day.



- The Scribes
- The Pharisees
- The Sadducees
- The Publicans
- The Zealots



Outside of the Publicans who simply worked for Rome and were generally hated as a result, each of these other groups represented widely diverse perspectives as to how to cope with Roman rule. One could argue that any of these approaches had great value and yet they were not known to get along too well between themselves.

What similarities can we see to our present-day, politically-driven ideologies?



When we compare these different groups and their views with our current political climate, we can see that each time period contains parties attempting to apply their ideologies to those around them for the purpose of gaining power. Politics grows from organizations wanting to impose those convictions on others.

There were three different perspectives on how to guide and influence the people. The Pharisees wanted to control the people through ritual practices of the oral Law. The Scribes were legalists interpreting the Law, and the Sadducees wanted to narrow the Law down to just the original written portion.

The Publicans worked for the “bad guys,” and were thought of as traitors to their own people. The Zealots wanted to kill the bad guys and drive the Romans out of the land. Many wished they would succeed! Does this sound like where we are today?

What effect did John the Baptist have on any of these politically-charged groups?

The Pharisees and the Sadducees

Matthew 3:7-10: *7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10 The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

This is strong language. In other words, *Don't be too comfortable with your pedigree. God is about to reverse His blessings because you haven't been doing what you are supposed to be doing. If you don't “bear fruit,” you will be removed.* The New Living Translation states verse 8 this way: *Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.*

The Pharisees and Sadducees looked and acted holy. Most people tried to avoid them, so John's strong admonition was an unusual approach. He stood up to them by telling them they were sinners like everyone else. They needed to live in a repentant way, or *the axe is already laid at the root of the trees*—the power they enjoyed was going to be cut right out from under them.



The Scribes

Luke 7:28–30: *28 I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. 29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers (Scribes) rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.*

The Scribes ignored the opportunity of John's baptism. We don't have any report of them directly interacting with John. Apparently they stayed away from him. They did not seek to be baptized or pay any attention to the guidance John was preaching in preparation for Jesus' ministry.

The Publicans

Luke 3:12–13: *12 And some tax collectors (Publicans) also came to be baptized, and they said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? 13 And he said to them, Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.*

They came to John with humility, and he encouraged them to have integrity. *Do what you are supposed to do in the most righteous way you can.* He didn't tell them to quit their jobs. He just said, *don't cheat the people.* The Publicans were hated by everybody else, but some individually responded to John.

The Zealots

We have no scriptures that show John interacting with the Zealots. Why not? Perhaps they saw him as too weak and too focused on repenting. They were all about fighting and conquering the Romans.

Of the five groups we've looked at in their interactions with John the Baptist, so far it seems like only some of those Publicans responded as having a heart for God. Notice, John wasn't trying to work with these groups and their political leanings.

John the Baptist was from the priestly tribe of Levi and could presumably have had some political influence, but his focus and message was on personal accountability and repentance in preparation for the Messiah.



John's message to members of the politically charged groups that he crossed paths with was for each to rise up to a higher level of righteousness. He was not about strategizing with or using the influence of one group or another. His only concern was pointing everyone to repentance and godly righteousness as he prepared the way for Messiah.

Are we willing to build our foundation of dealing with the politically-charged systems of our society on the same basis as John?

John stayed away from the politics. He did not get involved, and he warned all he spoke to that whatever societal layer they were in, whatever job they did, they needed to do it at a higher level after they realized and repented from their own sinfulness.

Even though he didn't call people out of their groups, John the Baptist sent a clear message with his preaching. Is anyone listening?

The amazing diversity in the politically-charged environment of Jesus' day brings us to our next question: What did these groups think of Jesus?

Based on what we already know about Jesus' life, answering this question is easy, so why do we even ask? We ask because examining the answer, as well as Jesus' own responses to these groups, will help us see what he did with the politics of his day. We can learn from Jesus' example so we can define how we are to approach our own politically-diverse world here in the 21st century.

The Scribes

Where did they stand regarding Jesus?

Mark 3:20,22: *20 And he came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. 22 The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, he is possessed by Beelzebul, and he casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.*

The Scribes were authoritative and judgmental. They dismissed and discredited Jesus as being satanic because he was not working along the lines they expected of him. He did not fit into any category they valued or understood, so they labeled him as working with Beelzebul (Satan).

Here's what happened after Jesus cleared the Temple of the moneychangers:

Mark 11:18: *The chief priests and the Scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy him; for they were afraid of him, for the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching.*

They wanted to kill him because he was upsetting their world and *the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching*. He was a problem! He was wielding too much influence.

The Pharisees

Jesus was eating with Publicans and sinners at the home of Matthew. Matthew had just answered the call to be his apostle, so these are possibly Matthew's friends and former business associates.



Where did they stand regarding Jesus?

Matthew 9:11: *When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?*

Eating with the tax collectors and sinners was so far beneath the Pharisees that they couldn't understand that Jesus wasn't condoning sin but was seeking to lift up sinners. These were the people who needed him most, as they weren't learning much truth from their religious leaders.

The religious leaders like the Pharisees looked down on the common people as being too degraded. They did not believe the sinners were worth anything, so the common people did not expect to even be able to learn. Jesus is breaking the system, causing much reason for complaint among the Pharisees.

After the raising of Lazarus, here is their interaction about Jesus:

John 11:47-48,53: *47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, all men will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation... 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill him.*

They were threatened by Jesus. He was challenging their power and had great influence with the people. Their answer was to literally get rid of him! How sad and unrighteous. Just like the Scribes, they wanted to find a way to get him off the scene. He was an annoying nuisance, but more than that, he was a threat to their self-serving ways.

The Sadducees

Where did they stand regarding Jesus?

Matthew 16:1: *The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.*

They asked for proof of his Messiahship. The Sadducees had, for the most part, concentrated on the civil operation of Israel, so we see very little interaction between Jesus and the Sadducees in the early part of his ministry when he was a more insignificant religious teacher. It was not until the very end that we see the Sadducees take an active part in the persecution of the Lord.

The fact that the Sadducees even noticed Jesus at all indicates that they came to attach a political significance to him. They were worried now about his popularity with the people and the claims of his kingship. He became a direct threat to their political power. Because of their influential ties with the Roman authorities, they would be the primary group facilitating his death.

Two days before the Passover when Jesus was crucified:

Matthew 26:3-5: *3 Then the chief priests (many of which were Sadducees) and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; 4 and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill him. 5 But they were saying, Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people.*

The Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were the ruling classes in Israel at that time. All three “political parties” were threatened by Jesus’ popularity and wanted to destroy him.

Being under Roman rule, they wrangled for whatever political power they could get. They should have been deeply concerned with issues of the Jewish Law, but instead were consumed with issues of Roman and Jewish politics in order to maintain power and profitability.

Maintain power and profitability through politics—does that sound familiar in our day?

The Publicans

Where did they stand regarding Jesus?

Luke 15:1: *Now all the tax collectors (Publicans) and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him.*

What a difference between the religious rulers who should have known better and these tax collectors and sinners who were looked down upon by the Jewish elites. The Publicans are drawn to Jesus and don’t seem to be intimidated by his message of commitment and discipleship.

They work for the Roman government, yet they are drawn to Jesus because of his compassion, approach and sensibility. The Publicans and sinners stand out with a very different perspective than the others.

Not only do they work for the Romans, they are profiting in their position under the Roman government. Yet, they are still coming to learn from Jesus!

The Zealots

Where did they stand regarding Jesus?

They were more of a secretive group working in the shadows to violently overthrow Rome. We do not have any scriptural record of this group as a whole engaging with Jesus.

However, as we will shortly see, in addition to calling Simon the Zealot to be an apostle, Jesus was involved in a unique exchange with the Zealots.

We have looked at these different groups and their responses to Jesus. Essentially, the Zealots ignored him since he was not part of their rebellion. The three politically-motivated parties in power—the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees—judged him and eventually were able to have Jesus killed. The Publicans seemed better able to listen and learn from Jesus than the others.



How did Jesus respond to these groups?

Jesus' responses to these groups were wise, godly, varied and always righteous.



He gave them opportunity for dialogue:

Luke 10:25–26: *25 And a lawyer (scribe) stood up and put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 And he said to him, What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?*

Jesus engaged them in conversation, likely searching for individuals with the right heart condition. He did not pronounce judgment on them or the rulers in the way they judged others. He was different. He engaged with them.



He gave his time and fellowship to those who were humble enough to want to learn:

Matthew 9:10: *Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors (Publicans) and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and his disciples.*

This was the same setting we read before, right after Matthew was called to be an apostle. Jesus was having a meal with the people the rest of Israel looked down upon. Even the average Jew looked at them as enemies of sorts—they were working for the oppressors, the Romans. They made their money by collecting the crippling tax imposed on the Jews by the Romans. How could they do that to their own countrymen? And yet, Jesus was giving them time.

There is a consistent theme in how Jesus acted, responded and worked and how the politically diverse groups of his world acted, responded and worked. So far, we have seen the most disrespected group to have the highest quality of character.



Jesus warned his followers about the influence of the politically powerful:

Matthew 16:6: *And Jesus said to them, Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

Symbolically in the Bible, *leaven* is often used as a picture of sin.

Matthew 16:21: *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests (including many Sadducees) and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.*

The political powers of the day didn't agree on much, but they all agreed Jesus had to go! He was their common enemy.

The Sadducees had a narrow approach to religion. They only looked to the five books of Moses, the written Law—the Torah. Keeping a pure focus was good; however, they tainted it, making it sinful with their ambitions. The same with the Pharisees. They tainted what was good about what they were given, making it political, personal and prideful.



Jesus warned them directly of the coming consequences of their actions:

Matthew 23:13: *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*

Think about the opportunity to bring the people back to God the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees could have had if they had been righteous! They could have used their knowledge of the Law and the Scriptures to bring the people to acceptance of their Messiah. They had the “stage” but did not use it for the good of the people, just for their own purposes.

Before his crucifixion, Jesus was condemned to die while a Zealot was saved from his punishment:

Mark 15:7, 9, 11, 15: *7 The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists (Zealots) who had committed murder in the insurrection. 9 Pilate answered them, saying, Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews? 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. 15 Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.*

This is a powerful event because Barabbas was a Zealot. Jesus had no interaction with the Zealots as a group. He did not address them, nor did they seem to consider him part of their rebellion. Yet, his life is traded for this Zealot's life.

Barabbas was a criminal, but Jesus ended up dying in his place because when Pilate gave the crowd a choice, the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be saved rather than Jesus.

Jesus cared about the people so much that he died for them. But he also called out their errors, both individually and nationally. What he NEVER did was to participate in any attempt to gain political power over them.

Generally, these political parties hated Jesus because he stayed true to his mission, confronting their actions and yet remaining righteous in his dealings with them all along the way.



People, Politics and Scriptural Principles:

Jesus did not fit into the mold of any of these groups. They did not support him in any way, and he called out their hypocrisy and self-absorbed manner. Jesus did not “work” the systems that had been corrupted, rather, he called them out to strive for higher levels of humility and righteousness.


How are we viewing the politically-charged systems within our present-day society? Are we following and supporting, or are we a living example of a higher way?

Jesus lived as an example of a higher way. He did not work the system; he did not suggest to the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees or even the Zealots that they and he should all work together. Instead he brought attention to their errors. The basis or core of what they stood for had great potential, but the way they stood for it did not. He could not work with such corrupted systems. When we understand the corrupt systems cannot be fixed, we understand why Jesus handled the political groups as he did.

The wisdom and example of Jesus give us a high and godly standard to follow. His standard is challenging and exemplary.

We have seen how Jesus stood above the systems of the Jewish world of his day. How did he deal with the individuals within those systems?

Jesus had many interactions with individuals who were within these groupings of Israel.

IMPORTANT POINT  The way Jesus handled each individual was different from how he handled the system they were a part of.

As we touch on these interactions, let’s observe how everything he said and did was for the purpose of opening their eyes and bringing them to the higher ground of understanding the cost and privilege of following him.

The Scribes

Let’s look at examples of two individual Scribes.



After hearing the Sadducees arguing with Jesus (Mark 12:28–34), another Scribe engaged him. Jesus saw his sincerity and responded in this way:

Mark 12:34: *When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. After that, no one would venture to ask him any more questions.*

Jesus gave him encouragement, NOT condemnation!

Remember, it was the Scribes who had said Jesus was of Beelzebul, the devil. Look at the dramatic difference with this Scribe. Jesus sees an individual who seems to have a grasp of what is pure, so he tells him, *You are not far from the kingdom of God*. He is not looking at him as a Scribe, but as an individual who needs to be encouraged.



An unidentified Scribe proclaimed he would follow Jesus:

Matthew 8:18–20: *18 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea. 19 Then a scribe came and said to him, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. 20 Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*

Jesus gently warned him of the challenges he would face, as he would be leaving his comfortable life behind. Jesus doesn't say, *Oh, so NOW you are changing your mind, and I am not of the devil!?* He says, *Listen, it is a hard road—foxes have their holes, they have the places where they sleep, the birds of the air have their nests, they have places where they sleep—I don't know where I am sleeping tomorrow night, or the night after*. He invites him to follow but is honest with him. He is inviting, not discouraging.

He treated these two Scribes with grace and respect, even though he was continually disrespected.

The Pharisees

Let's look at examples of two individual Pharisees.



Nicodemus, who was likely a secret follower, became a public follower after Jesus' crucifixion:

John 19:38–40: *38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away his body. 39 Nicodemus, who had first come to him (Jesus) by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.*

In Nicodemus a noble candor and a simple love of truth shine out in the midst of hesitation and fear of man. — A Dictionary of the Bible, by William Smith, LL.D

Jesus' influence was enough for Nicodemus, the Pharisee, to walk away from his previously held position of power and prestige as a Pharisee. This was a big thing to walk away from—he had the world at his fingertips. When he walked out onto the street, people respected him as an acknowledged leader. He had a very comfortable living as a Pharisee. Yet, he met with Jesus by night to question him.

While he could not bring himself to openly acknowledge Jesus while Jesus was alive, his crucifixion gave Nicodemus the strength he needed to stand up for what his heart truly believed in. We can see the power of Jesus' influence allowed him to break away from his political party.



Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, was called to be one of the 12 Apostles!

Acts 9:3-6: *3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? 5 And he said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.*

Saul was called OUT of his life as a Pharisee in a dramatic way, into the life of a footstep follower of Jesus as one of the 12 Apostles. There were only 12, and one of them was a Pharisee! Of all people, a Pharisee!

The Sadducees

There is no scriptural record of any personal interactions with any individual Sadducee. Perhaps this was because they were so conservative (accepting only the books of Moses) that they worked to eliminate Jesus only through their lofty positions among the Jews and in the Sanhedrin. Later we see them using their influence to get Pilate to do what they wanted—to kill Jesus.

There does not seem to be any Sadducee who takes it upon himself to break away from his political affiliation and meet Jesus one-on-one. That is sad. What would Jesus have done? What he did with everyone—he would have given him an ear to hear words of wisdom. He would have given him a direction that was higher than what that Sadducee would have known. But we have no scriptural evidence it ever happened.

The Publicans



First, Jesus called Matthew the Publican (tax collector) to be one of the 12 apostles!

Matthew 9:9: *As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and he said to him, Follow me! And he got up and followed him.*

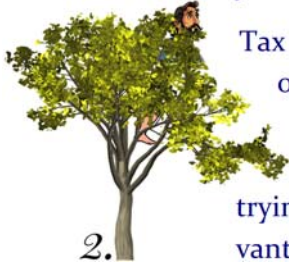
That was dramatic!

(Source: Bible Commentary by David Guzik) There is archaeological evidence that fish taken from the Sea of Galilee were taxed. So Jesus took as his disciple the taxman that may have taken money from Peter, James, and John and the other fishermen among the disciples. This might have made for some awkward introductions.

That might be part of why Jesus chose Matthew. Jesus was about unifying people. He taught forgiveness, and this would be a difficult lesson for the men who were his closest followers.

When we look at the political ramifications of those groups in Jesus' day, what were they about? *Follow our way and everything will be good!* What are the political affiliations today all about? *Follow our way and everything will be good!* What was Jesus' answer to this? *None of it works. One by one, come and follow me and see something higher.*

Jesus touched the heart of Zaccheus:



2.

Tax collectors or Publicans had a bad reputation of overcharging and extortion. They overcharged when they had an opportunity (**Luke 3:13**), and brought false charges of smuggling in the hopes of extorting hush-money (**Luke 19:8**). Zaccheus was a chief tax collector and very rich. Jesus was passing through Jericho, and Zaccheus was trying to get a glimpse of him, but he was too short. He climbed a tree to get a better vantage point.

We pick up the account in Luke:

Luke 19:5–10: *5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.*

In all the throngs of people, he not only noticed Zaccheus, but called him by name and announced he, Jesus, would be an honored guest at his home!

6 And he hurried and came down and received him gladly. 7 When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. 8 Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much. 9 And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Jesus wasn't concerned with the group's label of "Publican" and all that it represented. He was looking for individual hearts. Jesus made it abundantly clear that anyone's status within their culture was of no consequence when it came to responding to Jesus' message.



We see these two Publicans come to Jesus. Matthew leaves the occupation entirely. Zaccheus immediately gives away half of what he has, plus restores fourfold to any person he has wronged. He is willing to part with the financial benefits of the profession. They came to Jesus as sinners, but they didn't stay in that sin; they were lifted up to a higher way.

The Zealots

Jesus called Simon the Zealot to be one of the 12 apostles:

Luke 6:15: *and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot.*

Jesus called Matthew the tax collector who was employed by Rome, and he called Simon the Zealot who hated Rome and wanted it destroyed. They were on politically opposite sides.

A Pharisee of the ruling class, a Publican sinner and a Zealot rebel were all called to be apostles! That’s three out of twelve—25 percent! Each came out of their previous lifestyle to follow him!

We can conclude Jesus didn’t get involved in the political ideologies of his day, even though he could have used them to his advantage. He did care about the individual people.



While Jesus opposed the politically-charged systems of his day, he truly loved those who were entrenched within those systems. In every case we see Jesus inviting those individuals to come up higher—to leave behind the corruption of their associations and follow him in a new and living way.

Are we living examples of being open and inviting to those from such varied walks of life in our politically-charged environment?

We normally think of politics as relating to the government, but “being political” also means acting according to the interests of status or power rather than matters of principle. We look around and see churches can internally be very political, whether it’s a large name-brand denomination, or the local Bible church on the corner. Church politics exist. We want to be sure our focus is on scriptural principles rather than status or an “us-and-them” mentality.

The political groups of Jesus’ time had the potential to be better, but they were not. He did not try to correct them; he simply told them what was wrong. We can bring that same attitude into our own church groups. Avoid political wrangling on any level—that is not what a true follower of Jesus is called to do at any time.

The wisdom, compassion and love of Jesus were all on powerful display, as he called specific individuals out of their previous associations.

Jesus didn't work the system; he worked above the system. How does his example translate for his followers after his death and right up to our present time?

Anytime Jesus set an example, we who follow him may see it as a daunting template for what our lives should look like. Fortunately, we have many scriptures that show us how to practically apply the principles he laid out. As we study the scriptural evidence, we will see our scriptural path unfold before us.

How do we apply what Jesus showed us in his life? How did John the Baptist handle the political forces of the day? Neither got involved by joining forces with those groups. John preached that repentance was needed, as they were not following God the way they pretended to. Jesus was blunt about the groups' failings, but he then drew individuals onto a higher path than they had been following. He did not stop in the middle—there was no compromising. They either stayed where they were or followed him to that higher path.

Let's look at two more examples from Jesus' life.

First, when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, he was specific about how his followers should act:

John 17:14–18: *14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

We are IN the world but not OF the world!

This is the last free time Jesus had before his crucifixion. What did he do with it? He spent it praying for the disciples who were his at that time—and for his disciples all down through the age of the gospel message, which includes us. We are IN the world, but not OF the world. Let's hold on to that thought.

Second, the next day while being questioned by Pilate, Jesus profoundly clarified this stance:

John 18:33–35: *33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to him, Are you the King of the Jews? 34 Jesus answered, Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about me? 35 Pilate answered, I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered you to me; what have you done?*

Are you the King of the Jews? Jesus gives Pilate a bit of a hard time. He asks back, Did others tell you about me? Pilate gets annoyed, I am not a Jew... Your...chief priests delivered you to me; what have you done?

This was a matter of life and death for Jesus. Answer wrong and he would die. Answer right and maybe there was a way out. Did Jesus take this as a way of escape? No, that was not what he was there to do.



This matter of life and death for Jesus provided him with the opportunity to show his true mission:

John 18:36: *Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm.*



As followers of Jesus, we are not to in any way fight for political power in this world.

On the flip side, especially in a republic like the United States, the government gets its power from the people. The Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 13:1:** *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.* Good government is good! It allows the people to flourish, religion to be discussed and even our garbage to get picked up every week.



Some believe voting is part of our stewardship to vote for those who support scriptural values. Why wouldn't we, as Christians, want voters and political leaders of the Christian faith?



Let's look at Jesus' answer to Pilate: *If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews...my kingdom is not of this realm.*

His principle is sound, clear and simple. His kingdom has nothing to do with any man-made government. Rather, it is of heaven.

We do want to have good rulers. It is great to have good rulers; we have freedom, opportunities, and we can worship as we wish. But, if we are followers of Jesus and we believe in his words, our responsibility is to not be engaged with the kingdoms of this world because our calling and allegiance is above earthly kingdoms.

Does that mean we don't want somebody in power who allows us the freedom to talk the way we are talking? No, that is not what it means. It means our job is to be engaged in those things that are higher. Yes, we want good leadership, but we are not to "fight" to put them in power. Why? Because Jesus says, *If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting.* If Jesus' disciples in the first century did not fight, then we should not be engaged in such a fight.

To be a true follower of Jesus is to be a representative of God's will and word for all:

2 Corinthians 5:17–20: *17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*



Ambassador: *noun*

An ambassador is an accredited diplomat sent by a country as its official representative to a foreign country. They represent their home country's interests while living in the host country.

Do ambassadors get personally involved and become influencers in the political wrangling of the host country they are visiting? Ideally not. That is not their job. The Apostle Paul is telling us exactly what Jesus told us—*my kingdom is not of this realm*.

We are ambassadors of whom? Of Christ. Where is his kingdom now? It is a heavenly kingdom, *Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven...* knowing it is not here now, but will be on earth in the future *as it is in heaven now*. This is what we are supposed to be representing. Our true citizenship is in heaven—if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. As a new creation, we are not of this world, as Jesus prayed to his Father in **John 17:16**: *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*.

Let's verify this:

Philippians 3:20–21: *20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory, by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.*

Our citizenship is in heaven. This is where our primary allegiance is. Everything else is built upon this. This is what we fight for and stand for. This is the flag we should be waving.



Having citizenship in heaven is NOT an excuse to avoid paying taxes; rather, it points us to be good and righteous citizens!

How did Jesus react to being put on the spot about paying taxes?

Luke 20:21–25: *21 They questioned him, saying, Teacher, we know that you speak and teach correctly, and you are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. 22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 23 But he detected their trickery and said to them, 24 Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have? They said, Caesar's. 25 And he said to them, Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

His argument was brilliant!

The Apostle Paul agreed:

Romans 13: 6-7: *6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*



We pay taxes for things we don't necessarily approve of or agree with, or even to a corrupt government. The Jewish people had the same issue paying taxes to the Romans, which is partially why those Publicans were so hated. The people were, in effect, funding the oppressive nation that eventually destroyed them.

Just like I won't serve in the military but certainly am grateful to those who do, I also appreciate those who want to make things better for me through government.

This is a conundrum. We appreciate these things. We like the benefits of a representative government, and we do pay our taxes, but we are not supposed to involve ourselves in the running of the government. Why do we say this? Because this is what Jesus said and did. This is what the Apostles Paul and Peter said and did.

Those who are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps are to act in a way that says our citizenship is in heaven, and we are following heavenly guidance. Frankly, this old world does not need us. There is nothing that will save the current institutions and governments. More on this shortly.

Overall, we are to be contributory and respectful in this world in which we live. Our behavior should reflect Christlikeness in all ways:

1 Peter 2:13–17: *13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.*

Honor the king? The point is, simply be a good person. Be a reflection of Christlikeness. Jesus did not go against the system. He lived up to the system (the Law) in a way that was higher than anyone else.

When challenged on the Law, he showed the challengers how he fulfilled the Law. He showed them how to look at the Law in a bigger way—keeping the spirit of the Law as well as the letter of the Law. We are to be good people so that someone looking at us cannot find anything corrupt, vile or even political.

When we start to get political, we elevate one group and demonize the rest. We put “those others” aside. This is not what we are called to do.

Finally, once Daniel was given the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream by God, here is how he responded with praise and honor to God for His mercy:

Daniel 2:20–22: *20 Daniel said, Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. 21 It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. 22 It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.*

Daniel would interpret the king's dream regarding the rise and fall of several world empires. *You, O king...are the head of gold (Daniel 2:37-38).*

Nebuchadnezzar was the first king in the prophecy. Even though Daniel would be elevated within that first empire, the report of its demise would not change.

Daniel was given an opportunity as a Jew to be a part of that earthly empire, though it would eventually fall. He served where he was called upon to serve as a Jew. But it was a unique situation. Jews were in captivity in Babylon at the time or they would never have interaction or communication within a foreign kingdom or government. They were also about the physical world they lived in. Christianity is about the kingdom of heaven.

It is a different circumstance. But the point is that Daniel says of God, *He removes kings and establishes kings.* We do not do this—our vote or our influence does not take down or establish kingdoms or governments.



We have carefully considered Jesus' specific instructions regarding the politically-charged organizations that we as his followers would be facing. It is now our responsibility to accept his direction and, to the best of our ability embrace it and apply it.

While this may be challenging, we must always go back to our most important question: How well am I representing Jesus as his footsteps follower in my actions and reactions when it comes to politics?

How well are we representing Christ as an ambassador? Do we act as though our citizenship is in heaven? We need to act like that in every way. We are to be respectful to the laws of the land and the ways of the land, but living for a higher kingdom.



What is our role as Christians? Should we get involved so we can bring righteousness and integrity to the process? Or should we stay away knowing that it is ultimately going to fall apart anyway? If someone's conscience tells them to vote or even get more involved in their local or higher governments, do they have the Christian liberty to do so?



Yes, they do. We recommend being careful about such things because involvement often brings further and further involvement. We might see that we are doing some good and can maybe execute some change. The problem is that this involvement is for the purpose of building up the kingdoms of this world when the prophecies say they must fall. The good news is that they will be replaced with the righteous and holy kingdom of God, of which we are citizens.

Joshua 24:15: (KJV) ...choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

We must be clear on our stance. Our world is political and we will be pressed to take a stand for this or that. Consider the Scriptures and take a stand as best we can for the highest principles that Jesus not only spoke, but taught and acted upon. Let us be footstep followers of him in these tumultuous times.

**So, should Christians be politically driven?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



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Here are a few more scriptures we did not have time to develop:

Ephesians 2:18–22: *18 for through him we both have our access in one spirit to the Father, 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the spirit.*

1 Corinthians 2:1–9: *1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. 6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but*

just as it is written, THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Colossians 1:24-29: *24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of his body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to his saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*

1 Corinthians 4:1-5: *1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.*

Study QUESTIONS

Ep.1345: Should Christians Be Politically Driven?

See:



<https://christianquestions.com/society/1345-political/>

1. How was Israel governed through the years after God led them out of slavery in Egypt?
What was their situation under Rome during Jesus' first advent?
2.
 - a. Describe who the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were. Summarize their differences.
 - b. Describe the two groups who were organized as a result of Roman rule.
 - c. How did the five groups react to the message of John the Baptist? (Matthew 3:7-10, Luke 3:12-13,7:28-30)
3. What did these groups think of Jesus?
 - a. Scribes – why did they say Jesus was possessed? Why did they hate Jesus? (Mark 3:20,22, 11:18)
 - b. Pharisees – how did they see Jesus? Why did they want to kill him? (Matthew 9:1, John 11:47-53)
 - c. Sadducees – what did they ask of Jesus? Why did they want to kill him? (Matthew 16:1, 26:3-5)
 - d. Publicans – how did some of the tax collectors feel about Jesus? Why is this surprising? (Luke 15:1)
 - e. Zealots – what was the position of the Zealots towards Jesus?
4. What did Jesus give to individuals who came to him, no matter which group they were from?
What was the opportunity missed by the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees? (Luke 10:25-26, Matthew 9:10, 16:6,21,23:13)
5. Explain how Jesus dealt with the two Scribes who came to him. (Mark 12:34, Matthew 8:18-20)
 - a. Who were the two Pharisees Jesus dealt with individually? Discuss. (John 19:38-40, Acts 9:3-6)
 - b. How did the two Publicans interact with Jesus? (Matthew 9:9, Luke 3:13, Luke 19:5-10)
 - c. Who was Simon the Zealot? (Luke 6:15)
 - d. What did several of these men have in common? What is the lesson for us at this time?
6. How did Jesus interact with Pilate—describe their exchange: How did Jesus clarify his mission?
What does this mean for us? (John 18:33-36)
7. How are you an “ambassador for Christ”? As ambassadors for Christ, what should our behavior be? Why?
(2 Corinthians 5:17-20, John 17:16, Philippians 3:20-21, Luke 20:21-25, Romans 13:6-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17)
8. What does being “in the world but not of the world” mean in your life? Do you act as though your citizenship is in heaven, or do you have many ties to this earth which are difficult to break? If we live for a higher kingdom, how should we act towards the government we live under? If we support the governments on the earth now, what are we in effect doing?