

Professor: Why Your Vote Matters

Calvin College associate political science professor Micah Watson recently asked the following question in an article he wrote for The Gospel Coalition website:

Should Christians living in a democratic society vote?

Noting that politics carries with it a negative connotation, Watson set out to the answer the question nonetheless. But to do so, he said one needs to answer another question first:

Should Christians, as citizens, engage in politics at all?

Politics is misunderstood, though, he wrote:

Yet politics need not be so understood. Aristotle defined the root word for politics, the polis, as a community defined by its common understanding of and commitment to the good life. Augustine tells us that we can identify the character of a people by determining what they love. Surely Christians have a conception of the good life (Micah 6:8), and Scripture tells us our vision of the good life should be characterized by love for God and neighbor (Matt. 5:16, Matt. 22: 37-38, John 13:35).

Jesus himself seems to indicate a legitimate role for government insofar as we should give to Caesar his due and pay taxes (Mark 12:17). And the apostle Paul was the first Christian political thinker and activist, advising believers to get along with everyone as much as possible (Rom. 12:18), while also using his Roman citizenship to procure a better platform from which to declare the gospel (Acts 22-26).

Yet it is Paul's exhortation in Romans 13:1-7 that serves as the lynchpin for the Christian duty to love our neighbors

even in our temporary roles as citizens of an earthly polis. In this famous passage Paul first teaches that we must submit to political authority, then defines the proper role of government as promoting good and punishing evil, and finally calls Christians to give to everyone what is owed, including taxes, respect, and honor.