



## “Challenging questions 1: Christians and Politics”

1 Timothy 2:1-6; Romans 13:1-7. Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon audio and text available at [www.waitara.anglican.asn.au](http://www.waitara.anglican.asn.au)

### The way we talk...

People often don't have nice things to say about politicians in Australia. Here are some examples: (<http://www.independentaustralia.net/2012/politics/prominent-liberal-says-gillard-should-be-kicked-to-death/>)

In March 2010, Paul Keating was interviewed about Tony Abbott. In the interview on radio national, he said

- “If Tony Abbot ends up the Prime Minister of Australia, ... you've got to say ‘God help us’.” (March 2010)

Alan Jones, who was quoted on 2GB last year talking about the Lord Mayor of Sydney. He said we should

- “put her in the same chaff bag as Julia Gillard and throw them both out to sea.” (29<sup>th</sup> June 2011)

In April this year, Graeme Morris, John Howard's former chief of staff, was interviewed on Sky news by David Speers. Talking about Julia Gillard, he said that Australians

- “ought to be out there kicking her to death”. (30<sup>th</sup> April 2012)

Today we're talking about what you're not supposed to talk about in church – politics! Apparently, people like to leave politics out of religion. But God won't let us do that! Today we're going to look at what the Bible says about how we as Christians respond to the worldly authorities. And today I want to focus on just one word:

- **Responsibility.**

Responsibility is an important word for Christians. It's a word that implies involvement and action. It's a word that implies accountability and duty. This is not a sermon on how to vote. It's not a sermon on policy. This is about how we, as Christians, involve ourselves in politics as God's people and how that affects the way we live in society.

So let's begin with Romans 13:1 –

- *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*

We are told to, simply, submit. It's quite firm isn't it? Submit to the authorities. BECAUSE, those authorities “*have been established by God.*”

We're told to recognise that the authorities over us have been established by God. But does **submitting** to this authority always mean "**obeying**"? Did God really establish the authority of people like Hitler and Pol Pot and Mugabe, and should Christians obey that sort of authority?

If we keep reading, we see that God has established these authorities for a purpose – verse 4:

- *<sup>4</sup> For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

God has established Authorities **as his servants**, to do 2 things:

1. To do you good.
2. To punish wrong.

This is what authorities have been established to do. We submit to this authority, but there is also an expectation of the authority we submit to. When the authorities are "doing us good" and "punishing wrong", then this is why, verse 6, we pay taxes and give them honour.

But what happens when the authorities are not doing good, or punishing wrong?

Here is where I think we need to be careful. The Bible instructs us how to be WISE in the way we deal with governments when we have problems or don't agree with policies. And as Christians, we have a **responsibility** to listen carefully to God's word and give careful consideration on how to engage in politics, especially when we have problems with the authorities.

## So, how do we engage in politics as Christians?

Lately, there have been a lot of political issues in the news. The carbon tax. Refugees. Same sex marriage. These are BIG issues! These are important issues for our society. Our politicians are dealing with some very serious issues at the moment and they are responsible for some very important decisions that will affect the lives of many people. Can we agree that they have been given a great deal of responsibility in their leadership, and that it's a hard job to do? How do we, as Christians, respond to these big issues? How do we get involved?

### 1. Pray

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul makes it very clear that Christians are to pray for all people, and he especially mentions kings and those in authority. Why? Verse 2:

*...that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, <sup>4</sup> who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

We're called to pray for all people, especially our leaders, because God wants us to live in peace and see people saved. Prayer is our responsibility. Pray for our leaders, pray that we would have peace, and pray that people would be saved.

Those in authority have a difficult job. Yet how committed are we in praying for them? We see these issues as important, yet how often do we commit to God, in prayer, these issues and the people dealing with them every day?

Throughout the world, governments and leaders are open to corruption by greed and power. They desperately need prayer – for wisdom, for honesty, for peace. But do we pray? Leaders have a difficult job. No matter what country you're in. And Satan loves to corrupt governments. Prayer is our first responsibility to politics.

## 2. Listen

Christians need to listen to God first of all. There are many examples in the Bible of God's people not obeying the authorities:

In Acts 4 and Acts 5, Peter and the apostles are told not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. And they said:

- The Apostles: *"We must obey God rather than men!"* (Acts 5:27-29)

In Exodus 1, the Egyptian midwives were told by Pharaoh to drown the Hebrew boys when they were born. But:

- Egyptian midwives: *"The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live."* (Exodus 1:17)

In Daniel 3 and Daniel 6, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Daniel refuse to worship other gods, even though it's against the law.

- Daniel 3 – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown in the furnace
- Daniel 6 – Daniel in the lion's den

There are many examples of Christians who have not obeyed the authorities because it would mean disobeying God. Following God must come first. But do we need to be careful about how we make decisions and listen to our politicians as well. We must be careful of just jumping to conclusions about what's right and what's wrong. A great example of this is the way we vote. Do we support a political party because we always have? Do we know their policies? Do we know what they believe? Do we know their view on matters that we consider important? Or do we just walk into the polling booths and tick a few boxes that seem OK? WE do need to listen and be informed of policies – that is also our responsibility.

We have a responsibility to pray, and to listen. And we also have a responsibility to...

## Act

James 1:27 says:

- <sup>27</sup> *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

In Isaiah 1:17, God calls his people to stop doing wrong and:

- *learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

God calls us to ACT to help those in need. To protect the innocent. To look after the weak. We are called on as Christians to be actively doing good in our world. So how does a Christian “get active” in politics? It will be in different ways for different people:

Some Christians will run for politics. Some will campaign. Some will lobby. Some will take social action. But I believe our calling as God’s people is that we must be active in whatever way God has called us to be involved. But being active doesn’t mean just making a lot of noise. We need to listen first, and be well informed.

This came home to me a few years ago when I was looking at the issue of human slavery and trafficking. There was one Christian group who were raising money to BUY people out of slavery. They would buy a slave and set them free. Then help them get established and be able to look after themselves and their family. It sounded noble. And good. To set people free from slavery. **But** others believed that the money they paid the slave traders was then used by the slave traders to fund the kidnapping of more people into slavery – that for every one person they freed from slavery, 3 more people became slaves.

We need to be informed. And then, be active. If we stand and complain about the carbon tax or the refugee situation, or same sex marriage, with little understanding of the issues, we will not only look like fools – but we won’t really help anyone!

At this point, I think a lot of us back out. It seems too hard. But we shouldn’t! Protecting the fatherless and the widow, the poor and disadvantaged, is an ACTIVE role we are to play. It’s our responsibility. We should learn about the refugee crisis and be involved in helping our governments to find a solution, rather than just criticising a situation we may not even understand properly. Ignorance is a great weapon against progress.

Being active, being responsible, takes time and effort.

To sum up, I want to be really clear... today, I really just want to express what God calls us to do – what our responsibilities are as Christians:

1. Pray. Pray for those in authority. God has established those positions for the good of society.
2. Listen – listen to God first. But also, listen to our leaders – understand the issues before rushing to judgements.
3. Act – be involved. We have a responsibility to pursue the good work God has called us to do.

Pray. Listen. Act.