



A RESOURCE OF
THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION

Dual Citizens

*A Practical Guide to Christian
Citizenship and Civic Engagement*

ERLC RESEARCH TEAM



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FOREWORD

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS HAVE LONG BELIEVED that a free church in a free state is essential toward furthering each church's ability to fulfill the Great Commission within its local contexts. While the Church and government are both ordained by God, they have distinct spheres of responsibility and must be respected. At the same time, citizens can and should actively participate in local, state, and national governance in a constitutional republic like the United States. As citizens, Christians can exercise their faith in a way that influences public life, which presents a unique opportunity while introducing unique challenges.

Christians have dual citizenship: we are citizens of an earthly kingdom and God's heavenly, eternal Kingdom. We are called to be faithful citizens of God's kingdom while wisely stewarding our earthly citizenship. As Christians, we recognize that we seek to fulfill the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40), to love the Lord and our neighbors within a social and political context. The methods we use to seek human flourishing and live out Christian mission (Matt. 28:19-20) heavily depend on the relationship between church and state, both as individuals and local congregations, and whether the actions of church and state promote the common good. This means Christians can and should participate in civic processes as a by-product of their faith in Christ.

The opportunity for Christians to be involved in political processes presents several questions the Church must consider. What is the proper relationship between the Church and the state? Why is preserving religious liberty essential for both the Church and the state? What is the role of the Church in social action? What responsibility does the Church have in promoting civic virtue? Can a Christian run for public office? Should churches endorse candidates? Should Christians be patriotic? Should Christians engage in civil disobedience? While these questions are not exhaustive, they underscore the complexities of being faithful citizens of our nation and, more importantly, being faithful citizens of God's Kingdom.

Here at the ERLC, we are committed to serving our churches by providing resources to help Southern Baptists navigate our political structures while remaining faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. It is for this reason that we have produced this church guide on religious liberty and the role of the Christian in public engagement. This guide introduces a theological and ethical framework that combines a biblical foundation for public life with our long-held Baptist convictions stated in the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000* and various resolutions affirmed by Southern Baptist churches throughout the years. Additionally, this guide offers various practical, real-world scenarios and questions that pastors, ministry leaders, and churches should consider, along with suggested answers. We hope this guide serves as a resource for Christians to evaluate our social and political commitments in light of the Church's mission to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in every sphere of life.

RaShan A. Frost

Director of Research, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

THEOLOGICAL & ETHICAL FRAMEWORK



Citizenship is a work of stewardship under God's providence, and Christians should look to Scripture for principles that define faithful citizenship.

Christians are first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God, which is eternal, unshaken, and outlasts the temporary kingdoms of men. Christians are also called to live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in the places God has sovereignly appointed them. Faithful earthly citizenship does not conflict with, but is informed by, heavenly citizenship. Scripture offers guidance on participating in the life of the community, city, and country. This includes praying for earthly kingdoms and their authorities, obeying just laws, and seeking the flourishing of society. A pivotal aspect of Christian discipleship is seeking the common good out of love of one's nation and its people. When one's love for God and neighbor is properly ordered, an appropriate secondary love of nation and seeking the common good becomes a natural outgrowth.

Scriptural References: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 29:4-7; Matthew 22:15-22, 34-40; 28:18-20; Romans 13:1-7; Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 2:1-2



The Great Commission of global disciple-making begins in the nation wherein we reside.

All Christians everywhere are called to fulfill the Great Commission by sharing the gospel and making disciples of all nations. The first nation in which we are responsible for fulfilling this mandate is our own, communicating with our words and by our lives the perfect life, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian citizenship entails Great Commission obedience. Our missionary endeavors must not stay at home as we obey Jesus' words to take

the gospel to all people groups as part of God’s plan to gather people from every tribe and nation. Just as the early Church moved from Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the Earth, so must American believers think and act both locally and globally.

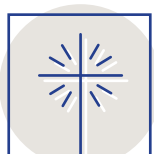
Scriptural References: Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Revelation 7:9



Discipleship includes the duty to make the will of Christ supreme in our lives and in our society.

Christian discipleship includes both personal piety and public witness. God’s people are called to surrender to the lordship of Christ in every area of life and bring Christian principles to bear on society, motivated by our love for God and our neighbors.¹ Discipleship involves personal spiritual disciplines, gospel life in the community of a local church, and active participation in the pursuit of human flourishing in the world. Private devotion, personal ethics, evangelism, and social action are all part of a life of obedience to the will of God in Christ. Christian citizens should neither neglect the life of faith in favor of public activism nor retreat to private piety while ignoring the real human needs of a fallen world. Discipleship includes personal transformation through the power of the Spirit and joining God on mission in the nation to which we have been called.

Scriptural References: Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 10:24-25; 2 Peter 1:5-8



Christian social action should be rooted in the gospel, which alone is the power to save sinners.

Christians should work for good public policy and just laws in the city, community, and nation as an expression of our properly ordered citizenship. Every law is a statement about morality. Just human laws flow from God’s transcendent law that governs the universe and is given as a gift to image-bearers for our flourishing. Christians root public activism in the reality that laws are useful guides and correctives, helping to order society rightly, yet are insufficient to bring about real spiritual change. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can turn people away from sin and evil.

¹ *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, “Article XV: The Christian and the Social Order,” <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/xv>.

Only the power of the Holy Spirit can regenerate dead hearts and make them come alive to righteousness. While Christian engagement in the culture is more than gospel proclamation, it is never less. The truth of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection shapes our public witness and brings reality to our attempts to seek the flourishing of society. Christians must never move away from, be embarrassed by, or attempt to conceal the strangeness of the cross and the beauty of the resurrection from the broader society we inhabit.

Scriptural References: Exodus 20:3-17; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:13-16; John 3:3, 5, 16-18; Romans 15:1-4; 1 Corinthians 5:21



Christian social action includes promoting civic righteousness and opposing unrighteousness.

Christians are called to promote what is true, good, and beautiful about the way God has ordered the world and designed human beings to flourish in it. The way of the Lord is not a burden but rather is a delight to those who have been deceived by the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Jesus came to rescue, redeem, and offer abundant life. At the same time, Christians are called to fight evil in every way because not only is unrighteousness displeasing to God, but it also ensnares and traps human beings in misery and despair, leading to violence and death. Christians should have the courage to oppose wicked ideologies and should dare to promote the common good. We can do this by applying Scripture to contemporary questions and by making arguments from God's revelation of himself in creation through natural law and appeals to common grace. Christian citizenship entails both promoting civic righteousness and opposing unrighteousness. How we embark on this task will often be the subject of good-faith disagreement among believers and must be guided first and foremost by Scripture, supplemented by prudence, realism, and the best of the Christian tradition. For Southern Baptists, this includes our confessional standard, the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*. We should give brothers and sisters in Christ the benefit of the doubt when such disagreements arise, while also loving them enough to call them to account when we believe their actions fall short of the commands of Scripture and God's design for a flourishing society.

Scriptural References: Exodus 20:3-17; Proverbs 27:17; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 17:3; Romans 2:15; Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Peter 4:8



God calls and equips believers to be salt and light in every domain of society.

The cultural commission to humans—to be fruitful, multiply, and exercise dominion—has implications for all of life. We were created by God to create and cultivate culture, though the Fall has distorted every aspect of every human culture with the effects of sin. Because of his love for his world, and especially his divine image-bearers, God commands all believers to use their spiritual gifts, natural talents, acquired skills, and accumulated experiences to proclaim the gospel and promote authentic human flourishing. As Christian citizens, our public witness extends to every domain of American society, including the family, the church, arts and entertainment, business, education, technology and media, and government.

Scriptural References: Genesis 1:26-28; Exodus 20:3-17; Jeremiah 29:4-7; Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Hebrews 2:4; 1 John 2:15-17



Christians should partner strategically with others to promote civic righteousness, though we must be careful to never compromise our commitment to biblical truth.

In God's common grace, many people who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ share our convictions about particular issues. Whenever possible, it is a good thing to collaborate with others, including nonbelievers, to order society in ways that reflect God's truth. As stated in the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, "Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth."² We should especially work with other citizens of goodwill who share our commitment to the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, the reality of two fixed genders, the dignity of marriage between one man and one woman, and religious liberty for all people. However, our cultural witness should never lead us to suppress our evangelistic proclamation. Our first allegiance is to the Lord Jesus and what he requires of us as citizens of the Kingdom of heaven. That informs our responsibilities within our earthly allegiances. We must never allow our strategic partnerships

² *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, "Article XV: The Christian and the Social Order," <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/xv>.

for limited ends to prevent us from proclaiming the gospel to nonbelievers, including those who might be our allies in some of our cultural debates. We must enter these coalitions to bear witness to the truth of the gospel rather than let temporary alliances for policy goals shape our theological convictions.

Scriptural References: Genesis 1:26-28; Leviticus 20:13; Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:45; 22:15-22; Acts 14:16-17; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 10:29; Galatians 3:28; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; 3:9



God alone is Lord of the conscience, and he alone is due our ultimate allegiance.

We are ultimately accountable to God alone for our beliefs and actions. It is to him that we will give an account of our lives at the end of the age. Therefore, we submit fully to none but God because he alone is our Creator and King. However, we do submit to others in meaningful but limited ways. This includes children submitting to their parents, wives submitting to their husbands, employees submitting to their employers, and citizens submitting to governmental authorities. However, these forms of temporal submission are part of our ultimate submission to God. As such, they are limited by his design and ordered according to his revelation in Scripture. Earthly authorities should never bind one's conscience concerning eternal matters. A coerced faith is a nominal faith, so as Christian citizens, we should champion and defend religious freedom for all people, both in our own nation and in others.

Scriptural References: Matthew 22:15-22; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:12-17



God has ordained civil government, which we are obliged to obey in all matters consistent with God's revealed will.

Christians should be exemplary citizens. It is a good and godly thing for believers to submit to earthly authorities. However, our submission should never be unreflective, begrudging, or idolatrous. It is never our civic duty to endorse evil, even if that evil is enshrined by law or celebrated by custom. Rather, our citizenship

should always be characterized by a holistic civic faithfulness that includes praying for our rulers, participating in political processes, supporting candidates and causes that demonstrate alignment with biblical principles, and advocating for laws that are just and promote authentic human flourishing. Since even the best governments are distorted by the Fall, Christians may sometimes feel led to exercise civil disobedience. However, civil disobedience should be undertaken only when the choice is between obeying God and obeying men. Such actions should be consistent with Scripture and ordered by love for God and our neighbors. Moreover, in just examples of civil disobedience, individual Christians must submit to the legal repercussions and temporal punishments that follow such actions. This principle is modeled by the story of three young Hebrew men recorded in Daniel 3, the early Christian martyrs executed by Rome for their faith, and modern examples of civil disobedience like the nonviolent active resistance that marked the protests of the Civil Rights Movement. As much as possible, we should respect the consciences of our brothers and sisters in Christ when disagreements arise in such matters.

Scriptural References: Exodus 1:15-21; Daniel 3:6; Matthew 22:15-22; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:12-17



A free church in a free state is the ideal arrangement to protect religious freedom and enable faithful obedience to the Great Commission.

Southern Baptists affirm that “A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal,”³ and accordingly, America is not necessarily a Christian nation in the formal sense of that term. However, America is healthiest when we are a nation of Christians who “seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society,”⁴ rooted in and reflective of the Judeo-Christian tradition and biblical morality. Christian citizenship affirms that a healthy society should be supported by laws that reflect natural law and echo biblical principles, but also believes this can only be realized to the degree that the gospel transforms the hearts of its citizens.

3 *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, “Article XVII: Religious Liberty,” <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/xvii>.

4 *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, “Article XV: The Christian and the Social Order,” <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/xv>.

Positively, it is not the state's prerogative to establish religion, adjudicate matters of faith and practice, or coerce belief. Negatively, it is not the state's prerogative to undermine religion or insist upon a secularist public square. Positively, it is not the Church's prerogative to "resort to the civil power to carry on its work"⁵ or to impose our faith and practice. Negatively, it is not the Church's prerogative to abdicate our spiritual mission to a secular government. The state should never interfere in ecclesiastical matters nor establish a state church. Church and state should be formally separate but ideally should never be antagonistic. The state should guarantee and protect the religious freedom of all people, and the Church should leverage that freedom to proclaim the gospel and its implications to all people, calling upon all to believe freely without state coercion.

Scriptural References: Matthew 22:15-22; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:12-17

5 *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, "Article XVII: Religious Liberty," <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/xvii>.

PRACTICAL SCENARIOS

It can be difficult at times for Christians to live as dual citizens. This reality is even more complicated in local churches, where members may hold different positions, have competing priorities, hold unhealthy or unbiblical views on contentious social issues, or simply be uncertain about how to best think about Christian civic engagement. Pastors and other ministry leaders can feel pulled in different directions because of cultural pressures, the diverse beliefs of church members, and their own political convictions and preferences. In some cases, the right answers might be unclear. We offer the following scenarios, not as definitive answers, but as a model for how pastors can help their congregations navigate matters of citizenship. In many cases, the response is more a matter of Christian conscience and pastoral wisdom than it is a matter of an obvious right or wrong answer.

1 A member of your church writes a post on social media arguing that it is sinful for a Christian to be a member of a political party. He argues that all Christians should be political independents because all political parties make various compromises that undermine biblical truth. The post has created a stir in your church since most members are registered members of a political party, and some have even served as delegates to political conventions. The member who wrote the post asked you to meet for lunch to discuss the issue. What should you say to him?

First, you should affirm his instinct that our loyalty to Christ and his Church is infinitely more important than our loyalty to a political party. You can also acknowledge the reality that party platforms change over time and that every party sometimes

endorses positions inconsistent with Scripture. No Christian should be *uncritically* devoted to a political party and defend everything a party might endorse in its platform or advocate for in public policy debates.

Second, you should remind him that there is no biblical mandate to avoid membership in a political party. The fact is, many Christians share enough values with a political party that, all things considered, they desire that party to have a more influential voice in government than other parties. In fact, many Christians join a political party not in spite of their beliefs but at least in part because of their beliefs. It is possible to be members of imperfect earthly institutions while preserving our highest allegiance to Christ. Pastors should remind church members of this important ordering of their loves and that they serve as ambassadors of Christ in these spaces.

Finally, you should assure him there is also no biblical mandate to join a political party. If he cannot join a party in good conscience, he should not do so. His choice is not unusual. In recent years, between 40 and 45% of Americans have indicated in polls that they are political independents. However, he should not bind the consciences of other church members who desire to join a political party.

2 A deacon in your church has decided to run for a vacant seat in your state’s legislature. He is a godly man, he loves your state, and you have no concerns in principle about his desire to enter politics. However, he would like to speak to some of the church’s small groups about his candidacy and encourage members to put yard signs in front of their homes. How should you respond?

First, you should affirm this brother’s desire to run for office, commit to praying for him regularly, and offer to help him find some accountability partners to help him walk closely with Christ as he enters the political fray. You should also affirm public service as a noble calling for a Christian. If you believe his views are largely aligned with most church members, you might consider telling him that you think his candidacy will be well received within the church. However, you should discourage him

from candidating during the church's small group hour. Suggest instead that he consider inviting small groups to his home (or another church member's home) during a weeknight when there are no regularly scheduled church activities to share about his campaign and encourage their support.

3 You are approached by some members in your church who would like you to publicly endorse a particular gubernatorial, congressional, or mayoral candidate. These members are very concerned that a number of Christian values that they hold dear will be threatened if the other major party candidate wins the election. The candidate they want you to endorse is probably the preferred choice of most of your church's members. In fact, you will likely vote for this candidate. What should you do?

It is hard to make a clear case from Scripture that it would be sinful to endorse a candidate publicly. It is also hard to make a clear case from Scripture that keeping your opinion about specific candidates to yourself would be sinful. So, the real question is whether or not it would be wise for you to endorse a candidate publicly. Most of the time, even if a pastor holds very strong opinions about which candidate would be best, he still believes that other Christians could, in good conscience, vote for the candidate he does not prefer.

Normally, it seems unwise to endorse a candidate from the pulpit, in your church's newsletter, or in some other venue where such an endorsement would bear the weight of your pastoral authority. A personal blog or social media account is somewhat removed from official church contexts, so sometimes a pastor will make a personal endorsement in those outlets, noting he is speaking as a private citizen and not as the pastor of his local church. You may or may not believe this approach mitigates the concerns about attaching pastoral authority to political endorsements.

Many pastors have found it most helpful to address the specific policy positions and moral qualities of various candidates rather than officially endorse one candidate or

another. This approach creates a “teachable moment” to help church members learn how to think biblically about the issues. Furthermore, it is often easy for church members to discern how the pastor will be voting without his needing to make any sort of formal endorsement. You might consider this as a good way to stay true to your sincere convictions without tying your pastoral authority—and thus staking your reputation—to a particular candidate.

4 Your state legislature is considering a number of bills: a “fetal heartbeat” law that would make it illegal to obtain an elective abortion in the state after six weeks of pregnancy; a law banning biological women from participating in men’s sports in public schools; a law raising the state gasoline tax by 10 cents a gallon to refurbish state highways; a law requiring students in public schools to place their mobile devices in a locker during school hours; and a law allowing for an increase in the number of charter high schools that focus on fine arts programs. As a pastor, should you address any of these issues directly in your preaching and teaching ministry?

In their short booklet, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?*, Jonathan Leeman and Andrew Naselli make a helpful distinction between “straight-line” political judgments and “jagged-line” political judgments. With some issues, the biblical principle is so clear that most Christians would agree it directly applies to particular policy matters. Such cases allow for a straight-line judgment, enabling the pastor to apply the Scriptures to a particular law or policy proposal. With other issues, the biblical principle might be clear, but how best to translate the principle into law or policy might be a matter of sincere debate among mature Christians. Such cases call for a jagged-line judgment, meaning the pastor should probably either refrain from making a direct application or, at the very least, clarify that he is sharing his personal opinion and is open to changing his mind. As a general rule, pastors should feel free

to directly address straight-line issues as part of their preaching and teaching ministry while being far more cautious about jagged-line issues.

Using the examples in this scenario, the sanctity of preborn life and a biblical understanding of sex call for straight-line judgments. You would be wise to apply biblical teachings to the laws being considered by the legislature. This might even be a prophetic stance if the legislature seems unlikely to adopt the measures. You should be willing to take a countercultural stand when the biblical principles are clear.

Although all are connected to the careful application of biblical principles to some extent, the other issues would require more nuanced judgments. Christians might have a variety of opinions about these issues, so you should probably refrain from addressing them directly. If you feel led to address one of them, it would be wise to communicate clearly that you are not arguing that the Bible explicitly necessitates a particular position on the proposed laws. Pastors should be wary of confusing matters of wisdom with areas where Scripture is clear.

5 One of your church’s Sunday School classes has recently studied Romans 13:1-7. While everyone in the class appreciated the admonition to pray for governing authorities, there was a spirited debate about when it is appropriate for Christians to exercise civil disobedience. They have asked you to come and talk to the class about this issue. What should you say to them?

This topic is related in some ways to the difference between straight-line and jagged-line judgments, which were discussed in the previous scenario. Many issues that call for straight-line judgments are related to biblical anthropology, including the sanctity of human life, the dignity of all people, and biblical views of sex and marriage. When biblical anthropology is openly rejected, and especially when people are harmed and/or believers are coerced to endorse unbiblical views, civil disobedience may well be appropriate.

For example, two of the most significant civil disobedience movements of the past 75 years were the Civil Rights Movement and the Pro-Life Movement. While not all

participants in either movement were Christians, many were (and are). Furthermore, both movements were deeply shaped by biblical teachings about anthropology. For this reason, many Christians were willing to protest unjust laws about racial segregation or elective abortion publicly and, at times, submit to fines and jail time for their public stand.

Other examples of Christian civil disobedience include the refusal of some bakers and florists to offer services that would endorse same-sex marriage, the refusal of Christian organizations to offer healthcare that would fund contraceptives they considered to be abortifacients, and the refusal of Christian schools to conform to governmental endorsement of transgenderism. When believers have taken these courageous, countercultural stands, they have also appealed to the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty and challenged the legality of the offensive laws.

The justification for civil disobedience is less clear on issues that call for jagged-line judgments. For example, while nearly all Christians believe that the government should be committed to protecting public health, there was widespread disagreement about social distancing, masking, vaccine mandates, school closures, and especially church closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some Christians believed the government was violating their religious liberty, while others believed that at least some of the actions taken by the government were reasonable in light of public health concerns.

Whatever the scenario, we should respect the consciences of other believers when they are motivated by their faith to exercise civil disobedience. If we feel led to exercise civil disobedience, we should respect the conscience of other believers who do not believe civil disobedience is wise or appropriate.

6 Your church has appointed a committee to recommend an updated policy to guide the use of the building and grounds. One question the committee is considering is whether or not the facilities can be used for political purposes. As the pastor, the committee wants to know what you think about this issue. How would you advise the committee?

There is a difference between using your church's facilities for political purposes and using them for partisan purposes. Many political purposes serve the common good but do not imply that Christians must vote for a particular candidate or party. For example, many churches serve their communities by offering their facilities as polling places. Other churches allow their facilities to be used for candidate forums or debates. In both cases, the church's facilities are being used to serve the common good but are not tying the church to a particular candidate or party. These are great opportunities for the church to demonstrate love and service for the community.

It would probably be unwise to allow a particular candidate to hold a rally in your church's facilities or to platform a candidate in a way that could be considered an unofficial congregational endorsement. There is a danger in tying your church's public witness and reputation in your community to the fortunes of a particular candidate or party. If the candidate changes positions or has a moral failure, it could reflect poorly on the church.

A gray area is distributing voters' guides to church members. If a guide is nonpartisan and simply shows what different candidates believe about various issues of moral consequence that matter to Christians, then it can be of great service to make it available. But if a guide is obviously tied to a particular candidate or party, then it is best not to distribute it for reasons similar to why you should not platform a particular candidate.

7 A group of church members asked to meet with you because they are concerned the church is too patriotic. They believe that Christians are first and foremost citizens of God's Kingdom. They want the church to remove all patriotic symbols, refrain from singing patriotic songs, and not acknowledge patriotic holidays during worship services. How should you respond?

First, you should affirm their desire to prioritize the Kingdom of God over the United States. However, you should also use this opportunity to remind them of the Christian's dual citizenship. Patriotism is love for one's country and its people, which is not wrong.

This love for one's country and its people should not be our highest love, nor should it be an uncritical love. But, when properly ordered, it can be seen as an appropriate expression of the Great Commandment. As we pursue our nation's best ideals and virtues, we demonstrate love of neighbor and contribute to the common good. Hence, there is nothing inherently idolatrous in public displays of patriotism, nor in expressing a rightly ordered love of your country in a church context. However, you also do not want such public displays of patriotism to be a stumbling block to your congregation or visitors to your church. How best to navigate these questions varies from church to church.

Some patriotic practices are good, and pastors should have no trouble defending them. On the Sunday closest to Independence Day, it is a good thing to offer thanks to God for our nation's freedoms, to pray for our nation's leaders, and to pray for revival in our land. On the Sunday closest to Veterans Day, it is a good thing to publicly thank the men and women who have served in our nation's armed forces. It is a good thing for a worship ministry to plan a special performance around Independence Day that celebrates America's Judeo-Christian heritage and presents the gospel to unbelievers, especially if that performance can be held in a concert hall, community park, or some other public venue.

Some practices might be unwise. Some patriotic songs are more nostalgic than biblical, or they are really about love of nation and not love of God. It would be best not to sing these sorts of songs during a regular worship service, especially when so many patriotic hymns openly acknowledge God's ultimate rule.

Many practices are judgment calls. Having an American flag on the platform of the worship center may or may not be distracting to some worshipers. Saying the Pledge of Allegiance during a worship service could be perceived by some as inappropriate. In such instances, look for ways to minimize offense. For example, perhaps the flag could be moved to a different place in the worship center or even the foyer, where it can remind members to pray for our nation. The Pledge of Allegiance might be reserved for a special event rather than a regular worship service. Whatever decision is made, the pastor should respect the consciences of members while also reminding them that (1) it is a good thing to love your country, and (2) you must not allow your love for your country to become an idol in your life.

8 Another church in your community is hosting a health fair in an impoverished neighborhood. The clinic will provide free medical screenings, dental services, and information about Christian counseling centers. Children who attend the health fair will be provided with backpacks that include personal hygiene products and healthy snacks. Volunteers will also be building relationships with attendees throughout the day in the hope of sharing the gospel. This church has asked your church to partner with them. However, the church has a reputation for being very partisan politically. Sometimes, political candidates speak there during Sunday morning worship. Those candidates disagree with most of your church members on some of our society's most controversial political issues. Should you partner with them?

The most important question is whether or not the other church believes the essentials of the gospel and the Christian faith as your church does. If the answer is no, you probably should not partner with them, lest it lead to confusion about your church's commitment to core biblical truth.

If the church is orthodox in these matters, you *might* consider partnering with them. The question is whether or not this particular event commits your church to the political positions wherein there is significant disagreement. If the event is really about helping people in the community to flourish and sharing the gospel, then this might be a strategic way to model unity in Christ despite differences in political perspectives. However, if participating in the event would likely communicate that your church is not thoroughly committed to the sanctity of human life and biblical views on sex and marriage, you should decline the opportunity to partner.

Here are the two guiding questions. First, does partnership extend your church's witness in the community, or does it compromise that witness? Second, does the partnership model unity in Christ despite disagreement over secondary (though important) matters, or does partnership promote false unity rooted in unbiblical compromise on core doctrines? You will likely have to do your homework about the host church and other community stakeholders involved in the event to best assist in answering these questions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Charles Colson, *God and Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries between Faith and Politics*. Zondervan, 2007.
- Daniel Darling, *In Defense of Christian Patriotism*. Broadside Books, 2025.
- Jason Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm Yarnell, eds., *First Freedom: The Beginning and End of Religious Liberty*, 2nd ed. B&H Academic, 2016.
- Nathan Finn, [“Southern Baptists and Religious Liberty,”](#) ERLC.
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- Richard Land, *The Divided States of America: What Liberals and Conservatives Get Wrong about Faith and Politics*. Thomas Nelson, 2011.
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- Jimmy Scroggins, [“Patriotism and the Gospel in American Churches: 8 Suggestions,”](#) ERLC.
- Andrew T. Walker, *Liberty for All: Defending Everyone's Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age*. Brazos, 2021.
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