

What does the bible say about politics?

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[0 : 0 0] Aha, there we go. Yeah, so I've been working for about eight months or so as a content writer for care, who work with UK politics. So without wanting to go into all the details again, they represent the church to politics, helping resource and equip politicians to be able to speak into the issues that Christians care about and represent politics to the church. So helping us as Christians think politically, think from a biblical worldview, and think about some of those key issues of the day.

So we're this evening going to think about this topic of what does the Bible say about politics? Hopefully that is roughly what you're hoping for. We're going to spend some time looking at some Bible passages. We're going to have some time to discuss, and then at the end we'll also have a chance of some Q&A; which might be about what we're thinking about this evening, or it might be other questions that come to mind. I don't much mind, so if you've got questions, that's a great chance to ask them as we get towards the end of the session. But let me begin by a story. Well, it's not a true story, but it is a story. So a politician, a surgeon, an electrical engineer, and an anesthetist were discussing which of their professions went back in time the longest. And the surgeon claimed that his work was the oldest, because in Genesis 2.21, God took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. That is surgery at its most basic, there we go, back in Genesis 2. But of course, the anesthetist laughed, because before that happened, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, beating it. The electrical engineer, however, thought he had it all completely beat, because when God, in Genesis 1, saw the chaos and the darkness, his first act was to say, let there be light. So there you go, electrical engineer surely has won this. Genesis 1, right back at the beginning, until the politician piped up. Where do you think the chaos came from?

Now, that joke probably isn't terribly funny. Takes a while to get. But I think it does illustrate what a lot of people's views of politics are. What are politicians for? What is going on in Westminster, or up in Scotland, or Northern Ireland, or in the Welsh Assembly? What on earth are they up to, other than causing chaos? Well, let's think about that for a moment. Why don't you turn to those around you, and just for a couple of minutes, think about this question. What comes to mind when you hear the word politics? Unlike most questions posed to you in church, first thing, there isn't a right answer, and secondly, the right answer is not Jesus. So there are no wrong answers here. You can genuinely say whatever comes to mind. So what comes to mind when you hear the word politics? Talk about that in your group for just a couple of minutes. What comes to mind, and I'll repeat it. Tickling of the ear. That's a great phrase. Yeah, tickling of the ear. Anything else?

An impossible job. Yeah. Rules and regulations. Rules and regulations. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Stewardship. Yeah, great word.

In some cultures, corruption. Yeah, in some cultures, corruption. I'll leave it up to you to think whether that applies to the UK. So corruption is everywhere. Corruption is certainly a possibility when you have people in power and authority. Absolutely. Yeah.

[4 : 3 1] Personal criticism. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. So... The art of government. Yeah. Yeah. And spin, was that? Yeah. Yeah. So spinning the truth, spinning what is being communicated.

Doing people good. Doing people good. And agendas. Yeah. So politicians have agendas, and hopefully are working to do people good. Populism.

Populism. Interesting. Yeah. I mean, there's loads that we could say, and you've probably got some more that you mentioned in your groups, but my guess is that those are views that are largely representative of what most people, Christians or otherwise, think about politics. They generally lean towards the negative on the whole. If we think about it positively, we certainly think about it as a tough job.

It's a job that involves trying to hold together a large group of people, a diverse group of people. But I think the general sense about most people these days, in terms of politics, is that they tend to be a bit tired of politics and tired of politicians. So I want to try and help us to think about why we should even think about politics in the first place as Christians. So the thing that I want us to do, first of all, is to recognize that whether you like it or not, you are political.

And the reason for that is because of where that word comes from. Politics comes from the Greek word polis, which simply means city. So at its heart, politics is about how we live together in cities, or think about it a bit more widely, in communities, as countries. So unless you're living on your own, in a cabin somewhere up in the woods, and never see another person, you are political. You are engaged in politics. You may not be a politician. You may or may not be enamored by what happens in the corridors of power, but we are engaged in community living, and therefore we are political. And in fact, we should be political because God has made us for community. God has created us not to be on our own. Right at the start of the Bible, we have that wonderful verse after God has created Adam.

[7:20] God says, it is not good for the man to be alone. And of course, we have the verses that talk about marriage and procreation, but fundamentally, we are designed by God not to be alone. We are designed by God to interact with others, to live in community. And this idea goes back all the way to the sort of origins of political thinking. So if we go back to 5th century BC, in Athens, this is a chap called Pericles of Athens, and he said this, we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business. We say that he has no business here at all. We've got to do a bit of unpacking there, of course, very gender-specific language, but you get the idea. If we are part of community, if we play a part in our wider group of people, well then we are in the business of doing politics. It's not about minding our own business if we take no interest. It is something that we are already interested in and engage with.

But you might then think, okay, what about us as Christians? So, okay, fair enough, Pericles, Athens, all that kind of stuff, people in togas, brilliant, but what about us as Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ? We are citizens of heaven. Above all else, we are strangers and exiles in this world, as Peter says in his letter. So what have we got to do with politics as Christians? Well, there's a lot we could say about this, but let me pick one particular thing. When God's people are sent off into exile in Babylon, back in the Old Testament, God speaks to them through the prophet Jeremiah. And he says, look, this judgment is coming on you because you have abandoned God. I'm going to send you off into exile, but it's not going to last forever. If you were here this morning, we thought about waiting, and so God tells the people to wait in exile until he will bring them back. But they are, in the meantime, to do the following. They are to seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

So I wonder if you see the connection there. Yeah, we are strangers and exiles in the world. Our home ultimately is with Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth. But God has put us in a place here and now, and we are to take an interest in how that is prospering. We're not to disappear off into a holy bubble. Apart from everything else, we are to seek the peace and prosperity of the place where God has put us. And if you think about it, the Bible is full of people doing politics and being involved in political leadership. So you might think of Joseph, who was elevated to a position of leadership in Egypt, at least towards the end of his story. Moses challenging Pharaoh in Egypt. Daniel navigating obedience in Babylon. Esther in the royal household in Persia. Nehemiah's diplomacy with the king. Or think of it in the New Testament, for instance, John the Baptist and his public criticism of Herod, which did not go down very well at all. Each one of those, and many others, are involved in politics in one way or another. So I want to argue that we should be involved in politics because we already are, and God sees it as part of our calling here and now. Let's just turn to our groups for a few minutes more and discuss again. So why do you think that some Christians, at least, refuse to see themselves as political? Have a thought on why Christians sometimes refuse to see themselves as political.

Yeah, I think that sometimes Christians think that politics is a dirty game. So you have to get yourself dirty to survive. And those that go in there will be looked at as people that have compromised their faith and are joining the bandwagon to do evil. So it has that feel.

[12:19] Yeah, absolutely. And it has a grain of truth in there, of course, as well, that politics, the reality of politics is compromise. So the question is, can you compromise on certain things and

legislation without compromising your faith, which is a really important question.

Okay, so first of all, to say, I know quite a few local politicians, and I think they are people of integrity, and they do what they do because they want to try and do good. But then just thinking of another similar context in Sri Lanka, politics there is very much for power, personal gain, putting your relatives into positions where they can get contracts and earn money. So I could quite understand Sri Lankan Christians saying, like you said, it's just so dirty, you can't get involved with it at all. And another sort of historical thing of German brethren assemblies who maintained their integrity in World War II with the rise of Nazism by just separating themselves completely from the state and feeling that that's the right thing to continue to do and not voting. I mean, they try and do good, but not in an active political sense.

Yeah, yeah. So we have some Christian groups who've said, look, we're just going to back away and see that as a, as the most faithful way to act, and of course, the sort of sleaze and corruption that comes with politics.

I've always just personally felt that to get overly involved in politics was to get overly involved in secular affairs, which probably may be wrong to think like that. But from 2 Timothy, where it says that we shouldn't be overly involved in secular affairs. But then I wonder how to translate that, because my thinking's changed slightly, as to whether what that actually means. Does it mean we shouldn't get too involved in like the things of the world?

Does politics come into that? It's quite, that's what I've always sort of thought, no, I'm not getting involved in politics. Yeah. But you can't help get involved in politics, obviously.

[15:00] Exactly. But it's a, it's an important correction. So how can we, as we're thinking about this morning, do good in the world, and politics is part of that, without becoming too invested in worldly things?

There is a distinction, but it's very hard to untie and tether. Yeah. Something that we had was how disconnected politics sometimes feels from a Christian worldview. So why do Christians sometimes refuse to see themselves? I think it's because more often than not, you can't see yourself in politics, like you don't see the space for Christians. And so it feels like, yeah, it just doesn't feel like a space where Christians would exist in a meaningful way, without, like you said earlier, without compromising, or without feeling like you're the only sane person in a room of crazy people. Yeah. Yeah, that's a really good point. And some of that is the way that we consume politics, the news that we get. There are Christians in politics, there are people who are doing a fine job, whether they're Christians or not, trying to serve the public good, but they don't tend to get the headlines. So we do tend to get, particularly when it comes to things like Westminster, we tend to have a, we can, well, we can have a skewed version of what politics is.

I was just going to say, I mean, you don't get it so much now, but there was a sort of extreme pre-millennial view at one time, saying, what's the point in polishing the brass on a sinking ship? If the world is designed for destruction, condemned for destruction, what's the point in trying to polish the brass, as it were? Yeah. Yeah. Well, we'll, we'll think a little bit more about that as we, as we go on. But yeah, if the, if God is going to bring an end to this world and bring a new creation, you know, why, why, why, as you say, polish the brass on a sinking ship?

Yeah. Some people think that it's very messy to get involved in politics because it's, you know, it's, it just involves a lot of different issues and yeah, you do a lot of thinking and understand the whole, you know, different issues in, in the world. And it's just a lot of work.

[17:24] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. It's, it's hard. It's, it involves a lot of work being involved in politics with local politics or national politics, global politics even. And you might think, well, as Christians, isn't our time better spent telling people about Jesus?

Yeah. Maybe. We certainly need to tell people about Jesus. So, yeah. I think sometimes I'm put off politics. If I watch, uh, question time, not, or no prime minister's questions and just watch the behaviors. Yeah.

I always feel slightly embarrassed and thinking, oh my goodness, you, you're, you're supposed to be my, I'm supposed to look up to you and they, they just act really weirdly. And I feel sort of slightly embarrassed when I watch them. Yeah. The sort of political theater doesn't help. Let's just have, maybe. Just one more thing. Um, also people, I mean, I don't know about anybody else, but, uh, probably people, uh, the vast majority of people find, don't have the capacity or the, the gifts or the skills to be actually MPs or whatever. So they think, well, you know, other people will do it for me. You know, that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think to piggyback off that one as well, how it's become a

space so enshrined in specific terminology, where for not just a Christian, but like as a lay person, it kind of feels like, I don't really know what's going on, let alone to be able to meaningfully engage. And I think you also do have a Christian bent in some circles where it feels holier to be pacifist or disengaged from any sort of conflict. And so it's like, well, I'm going to do the holy thing and just pray and leave them to work it out. Yeah. Yeah. And I think let's have one more and I think, yeah. Um, but, but on, on that point, yeah, to involve yourself in politics in terms of like serving as an MP is to engaging disagreement and therefore conflict in some way. And that's, that's something you've got to reconcile. Yeah.

Well, whether we like it or not, uh, politics is part of life and some people will be called to that. Uh, and then, you know, whether you're a Christian or, or other faith, you are drawn into that. Mm. And as a Christian, your Christianity is part of who you are. It's not a separate entity. Absolutely. [20:16] You can't become a politician Monday to Friday and then Christian Sunday. Yeah. So it's, it's all encompassing, isn't it, Christianity? And if it's politics that, you know, that you've been drawn to, then do it, you know, with grace. Absolutely. Yeah. And of course, that's true of any, uh, career, any, uh, engagement that we have of any kind. Um, but if we're, if we're Christians going into politics in whatever capacity, we have to integrate that. We can't sort of switch off our Christian-ness at all. And that is a challenging thing. And if you've, uh, followed over recent years, Tim Farron's, uh, career, you'll know how challenging that can be to be a Christian and try to be authentic and, uh, true to what they believe, uh, what the Bible has to say and navigate politics.

Okay. So, um, there are lots of reasons why Christians perhaps are wary, if not absolutely against politics. Um, but I'm going to try and argue that politics is a good thing for us to engage with as Christians. Uh, but if we're going to do that, it is important that we do that as we've just been thinking as Christians. If we don't engage with politics Christianly, whether that's just us as normal people who get to vote through to maybe even serving as an MP, um, and everywhere in between, if we don't think Christianly about it, then we're just going to go along with the world's view and the world's understanding of how politics should be. Uh, so, uh, Paul tells us in, uh, Romans 12, uh, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. So, we're going to do a little bit of mind renewing, uh, by God's word, uh, as we think about a Christian view of politics. So, here's the first thing that I want to, uh, encourage you about, uh, and it is that government is good. That might be the biggest hurdle for us to get over, um, but it is true and it is biblical. Uh, US President Ronald Reagan once said that the nine most terrifying words in the English language are, I'm from the government and I'm here to help. I did count them. There are nine. Uh, so there is this idea, this attitude that we can have, whether we're Christian or not, uh, that the government is in our way and we are better off without it. And the best that government can do is just kind of stay out the way. And, uh, that can be true whether you're a Christian or not, but we can import that view as Christians. That government is just sort of a necessary evil, or even not even a necessary evil. Um, we have Jesus as our Lord and King. He is the one who reigns over all, uh, he is the one who reigns over our hearts. So what use do we have of earthly governments, of earthly politics? But the thing is, if we open our Bibles, we see that God's Word tells us a different story. Government isn't something to be avoided or derided even, but is given to us by God. Uh, these words from Romans 13 are really important to us, uh, care, because it helps shape the vast majority of what we do. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Now, there's lots about that that, uh, that might need, uh, more explanation and are unpacking, but I think one of the things that's fascinating is that when Paul wrote that to the Romans, there wasn't a nice moral upstanding Christian emperor over the Roman Empire. Probably the most likely emperor who was ruling at the time that Paul wrote this was the emperor Nero. Um, and there's lots of things about Nero that may or may not be true, but we certainly know that Nero was not a good or just leader. And he did persecute Christians. But nonetheless, Paul's words show us that this idea that government and authorities are good and God-given doesn't actually depend on the quality of the leaders. So, the idea of government, the gift of government, is a good thing given to us by God.

[24:56] And there are, of course, people, authorities, who abuse that. But the principle of government is a good thing. And we see that also reflected in the wisdom in Proverbs. So, Proverbs 29.2 says, When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice. When the wicked rule, the people groan.

And we know that to be true, don't we? When we've got good leaders who are hopefully doing good things, implementing good policies, then hopefully the nation and the people thrive.

But when that goes wrong, when the leaders go wrong, it causes problems for all of us. And the Bible spells out how God has given us this idea of government for our good, in part by bringing order and justice to society. So, Peter writes in his first letter that God has appointed our political leaders to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. Now, again, we have to say, we know from our own reality that politicians, leaders, authorities do not get this right all the time.

They do not do this perfectly. But nevertheless, good government is intended to promote the good and to punish the bad, to bring safety and security to enable people to flourish. There are lots of different views on how this can be, which fundamentally show up in different political ideologies, political ideas. Some political parties will see one way of enabling good to flourish. Another will see a different way of doing that. I'll leave it up to you to decide which is right. I don't think the Bible spells out which political party we should vote for. But it does say the idea of working to promote what is good and also to restrain what is evil is something that God has given to us. Help for those in need, justice for those who are oppressed. It's a shape of society. And it's good for our good.

And there's, therefore, something else that follows from that, which is probably maybe the second most uncomfortable bit, which is that government, therefore, should be obeyed. If government is good, this idea of structure in society is given by God, then we should respect those in government.

[27 : 41] So, let's go back to those key verses in verse 1 of chapter 13 of Romans. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. And Peter says much the same in 1 Peter 2. He says this, he says, show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

And this would have been vitally important in the first century as Peter wrote those words. Because as Christianity spread and as people came to faith in lots of different places, generally speaking across the Roman Empire of that time, they faced the vital question, if Jesus is our king, he's the ultimate ruler that I obey, how should I act towards earthly rulers?

Do I just ignore them? Do I just ignore them? Because Jesus is my king? You can imagine people becoming Christians and then simply just ignoring the laws of the land because they follow Jesus. And what Peter is saying, what Paul is saying to the Romans is that God has established the idea of government. So, we should respect and submit to those in authority. And I think this applies not just to those in politics, but of course those who enforce the laws of our land, people like the police, the judicial system. As Christians, we have Jesus as our king. Yes, that is absolutely true. But that doesn't mean we are free to disobey and break the laws of the land. We are to respect them.

So, that means, for instance, we as Christians do have to pay taxes. I'm sorry about that, but it's just the way it goes. And in fact, Paul says this in Romans 13. He says, this is also why you pay taxes.

[29 : 41] See, the Romans needed a bit of encouragement that this is a good thing to do. For the authorities of God's servants, they give their full time to governing, give to everyone what you owe them.

If we partake in society, if we drive on roads that are maintained, sometimes better than others, if we, you know, if we're sick, we go to the hospital, you know, you think of all the ways in which we interact with society, whether we ought to pay what is due in terms of our taxes. Now, you can argue whether taxes are too high or too low, you can vote in accordance with that, but ultimately, taxes are part of what it means to be respectful of the government that God has given.

And Jesus, of course, was asked that question when he was posed the question, you know, should we pay taxes to Caesar or not? He asked for a coin, which, of course, the people who were trying to trap him actually had with them because they needed to use the Roman currency. And he said, whose image and whose inscription is on the coin? And Jesus tells them, give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. So, we pay taxes back for the services that we are part of, but we remember that question of Jesus. Whose image and inscription is it? Not on a coin, but on ourselves.

God's image, God's inscription is on us. So, our greatest debt, if you like, is to follow Jesus above all things. So, a couple of corrections before we discuss again. So, along with the fact that government is good and government should be obeyed, we also need to recognize government is not God.

Government is imperfect. I don't probably need to persuade you of that. We know that, don't we? Politicians get things wrong. Governments get things wrong. They do U-turns. Authorities sometimes enact or enforce laws that are unjust. We know that nothing is perfect. No political party will have things exactly right. There's no way to fully argue that this political party, I'm not going to name anyone, is the right ones for all Christians to vote for.

[32 : 11] They all have some things that are right or good and some things that are wrong. And what you think is right or wrong might be different to what I think is they're getting right or wrong. We will disagree.

And we are called to think and act rightly as we relate to a government that is run by sinful and imperfect human beings. And this imperfection of politics reminds us that government won't save us.

I think that's really helpful. As we start to think about the way that God has given us the idea of government and how being involved in politics can be, should be a good and Christian thing to do, we might start to think, well, okay, if only we have the right government in place, the right political system in place, well, then everything will prosper and be wonderful and the world will be saved. Not true. Government is not God. Jesus is our only saviour. It is good to have good government and we want to work towards that. But government will not save us. Only Jesus will.

And also, government can be resisted. Government can be resisted. We should honour and obey government. That's what God's Word tells us to do. But since we know that earthly government is imperfect, that it will get things wrong, there is room for that government to be resisted where appropriate.

Now, where that line comes is something that different Christians will disagree on. But it's there. And we see it in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 4, Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin, the religious rulers of the day. In fact, they're imprisoned by them. And then the next day, they're brought out. And these religious leaders, rulers, authorities, command Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus. And they respond by saying, which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to listen to Him? You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we've seen or heard. And that question is at the heart of any political engagement, which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to listen to God. And the answer, of course, is to listen to God first and foremost. And where those two things come into conflict, we obey God first and foremost. In the next chapter, all the apostles are arrested again. But God Himself encourages them to keep speaking.

[34 : 59] And standing before the rulers, we're told that Peter and the other apostles replied, we must obey God rather than human beings. Now, government will never get things exactly right.

There'll be laws proposed, policies enacted that go against what God has said in His Word. And in those cases, it's right for Christians to resist government. Paul tells the Romans, hate what is evil, cling to what is good. That's what we should do. And that's why care exists in many ways. In our modern democracy, we won't go and assassinate a leader like Julius Caesar. We can do a number of things to resist government, to respond and say, we listen to him above all else. We can write to our MP.

If you've never written to your MP, and you have no idea where to start, there is a terrific resource. I say that because I didn't write any of it. There's a terrific resource on our website and on the table called Dear MP, which gives you a really good overview of why you should engage with your MP and how to do it in a gracious way. We can sign petitions. They are listened to a little bit more in Westminster, for instance, than they used to be. We can attend peaceful protests, potentially.

One of the most powerful ways that, as Christians, we can resist government is by voting. If we think that the government is doing the wrong thing, we can vote for someone else.

Now, of course, they won't get it right either, but we can play our part by voting to say how we think the country should be steered, or indeed how our constituency, how our local government should be steered.

[36 : 51] And I think one of the key things that we need to remember in all of this is our aim is not fundamentally to make our lives more comfortable. I think that tends to be the way that I vote.

What are going to be the laws that are going to make me better off? Lower taxes, maybe, or better benefits, or a whole host of other things. That tends to be the way that I think. You, of course, are more godly, and you will think differently. But Scripture reminds us again and again, what should be our guiding principle is to advocate for the poor and the oppressed.

So again, alongside Romans 13, this is another key couple of verses for us at Kess. Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up, judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and the needy.

Okay, let's have another quick chat in our groups, and then I'm going to run through some very quick points, and then I'm going to have a chance for Q&A.; There are two questions here. You may only want to pick one of them, but if you feel up to it. Where do you find it most difficult to obey and respect authorities, and where do you think it might be appropriate for Christians to disobey the government? Have a chat about that for a few minutes before we move on.

Just before we finish this part, I want us just to think quickly about ways in which we as Christians can engage with politics. Very briefly, the first thing we can do is pray. And this is commanded by Scripture. So 1 Timothy 2 says, So we are commanded to pray for politics. If you have no idea what to pray for, I do want to commend to you our prayer diary. You can get it online, or you can get it posted out to you for free every few months. It is a great way to be reminded of a number of things to pray for, which aren't just the sort of big issues in Parliament, but a number of really important things to pray for. I really think this is an amazing resource. Again, I didn't write this. It's done by somebody else. It is really, really helpful. And we've seen answers to prayer. So the defeat of the assisted suicide bill in Scotland and in Westminster, neither of those were seen as achievable, not that long ago, just a few months ago, really. And we at Care firmly believe that while we and others have done a lot of work behind the scenes in speaking against those bills, it is the power of prayer that has enabled that to happen.

[39 : 56] So prayer is vital. So please do pray for politicians. Pray for those involved in politics. We hear about the bad stories of MPs and MSPs and whoever, but the vast majority of politicians are doing so because they want to see the country improve. And they are genuinely trying to do a good thing.

Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Talking about this country. So pray. Secondly, we've already talked about vote. Be involved in the political process. For general elections at Care, we produce as much material as we can to help inform people of how to vote. Not telling you how to vote, but where the issues are, where the different parties are, whether you get that information from Care or anywhere else.

But think carefully about how you vote for your local politicians, for national issues as well. Thirdly, act with love. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he said, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. And, sorry, this is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.

I don't remember any of us coming up with love that came to mind when we first think about politics, which is a real shame because it really ought to be. But we ought to, first of all, love God and show that in the way that we do politics and where we engage with politics. And love should mark how we are involved with politics as Christians, whether serving as an MP through to how we vote and everywhere in between. The next thing is to speak. How we speak is just as important as what we say. That's one of the principles that we are guided by at Care. We want to speak with truth and grace because that's who Jesus is. Jesus came as the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We want to try and do both. The church reformer, Martin Luther, used to describe the issue with Christians as like somebody riding on a donkey. Our temptation is always, I've never ridden a donkey, but I imagine if I did, this would happen to me, which is that you slide off one way or the other.

[42 : 34] So we want truth and grace, not sliding too far one way into speaking only about truth, which we desperately want to do, but without grace, or just speaking graciously and kindly without being truthful and saying what the Bible says. We want both. We want to balance on the donkey and have truth and grace. We want to stand up for what God's Word says, but we want to do it graciously. We want to do it with compassion and love. And we can do that in the way that we speak about politics and about politicians and about issues with those that we disagree with. So we speak.

And then lastly, to serve. Paul writes to the Romans that we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If your gift is serving, then serve. And those verses are primarily directed to a church, but I think the principle is still the same. If God's given you a gift to serve, then use that gift. And God may be calling you to be a servant in politics, whether that's local politics or even further

afield than that. We need Christians to serve in politics, just as we need Christians to serve in every other area of life. Very struck by these words from ex-US President Theodore Roosevelt, who said this, it's not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who spends himself in a worthy cause. Being in the arena. Again, whether that's actually serving in politics directly or talking with one another as a church, talking with those outside the church, praying, voting, a whole host of different things to actually be involved and to be God's servant in the way in which we engage politically.

Well, I'm going to draw things to a close there. I've probably gone slightly longer than I should have done, so I'm going to skip that. And have we got a little bit of time for Q&A; if people have got questions? It's half past. So, yeah. Okay. So, if you've got any questions, I may not know the answer to them. But I'm very happy to field them.

Mine is a quick one. I've been wondering since the morning, what does the logo represent, like with the red lines and whatnot? That's a great question to which I don't know the answer. Because it was put together before I started at Care. I mean, it's the C of Care. But beyond that, I'll find that out. I will find that out. This is from a marketing student. I would like to ask your advice about writing to MPs. Our local MP here in Brighton Pavilion is Sian Berry, a Green MP. And on certain issues that Christians would feel very strongly about, she would be diametrically opposed. So, I think, you know, trans, gender, same-sex marriage.

[46 : 08] And also, she was in favour of the assisted suicide bill. So, my question really is, do you still think it's worth writing to her, even though you know that she's already made up her mind and she won't change it on these sorts of issues? I mean, I'd say I did write to her. But what do you think about that?

That's a great question. I mean, I don't want to encourage you to spend your time on a lost cause. But you never know what might change someone's mind.

So, if you don't write, you won't know whether that actually has an effect. I think, if you're thinking about it purely from a worldly point of view, politicians need to get elected.

So, they do care about what their constituents think. It is their job, in large part, to represent their constituents to Parliament. And so, the more people who write to an MP saying, we feel really strongly about this, they are going to listen to that.

I'm not going to stand here and tell you, therefore, they will change their mind on this issue or that issue. But they might. They might abstain if they feel like, actually, you know what, there's enough opinion here that while I have a conviction that this should go forward, I'm going to abstain from this vote because I can't represent my constituents.

[47 : 47] So, that they can then put in their mailings out through your letterboxes that they weren't the tub-thumper on this issue and therefore gain your vote.

Now, it depends. It depends on the constituency. It depends on a whole host of things. But I think our voice has more power than we often think.

And I think I want to add into that, as Christians, that God can do the impossible. And He can change people's minds. And so, if we act and we cover that in prayer, you never know what will happen.

Again, I can't tell you that God will definitely change our mind on any number of issues. But He could. So, yeah. I would say, yes, do right.

I understand the feeling of futility. But it still could be worthwhile. How did you get into politics?

[48 : 57] Well, I've only recently been involved in care. So, I used to be a Church of England vicar until relatively recently. God called me out of that, not into this.

He kind of called me out of that. And I didn't know where that was going to lead me. That's a very long story that I won't bore you with now. But, and then he has now led me into working with care. And I think I have learnt a great deal about politics and political engagement over the last year or so that I've been working with care. I wasn't, I hope, entirely ignorant beforehand.

But what I have learnt is particularly talking with those who are involved in politics. Our head of policy used to be a Conservative MP, for instance.

The CEO of care, he stood but didn't get elected as a Labour MP. So, we have a range of political views amongst the team even.

[49 : 59] But recognising how many Christians there are involved in politics, whether that's on the front line as an MP or a peer or working in their offices.

And wanting to influence the country for what is good and what is right. And that is really inspiring. So, I think the reason I got into it is because God called me.

But the reason I keep going is also because I see the power of Christians making a difference in public life. Could I just ask you something about living in a country, we were talking about this actually, living in a country where the government is corrupt or a dictatorship.

How would you advise a Christian to act in those circumstances? That is not something I have direct experience of.

So, I want to speak in a very limited and humble way. I think the question of how much we resist government when the government system itself is broken is a really tricky one.

[51 : 28] A complex one. But one that we, as Christians, would need to navigate in those kind of circumstances. I hope that that isn't the case here.

It doesn't become the case here. But you never know. There are some Christians who would say, well, we just, that's where we retreat. That's where we retreat.

We just care for our own. And we see the government at the moment as, if you like, irredeemable. And we distance.

There are other Christians who would say, well, actually, there is a room for forceful resistance. And I don't mean violence in that. But I mean active disobedience of some laws.

[52 : 26] So, for instance, a government that is cracking down on people gathering. Christians may say, we stand up. We stand for truth and justice.

And we're still going to gather. But there is not an easy answer where you draw that line. And Christians will disagree on whether you should kind of go further and break laws in order to resist and to push back against governments.

Yeah. My question is similar to what Maria just asked.

But it's in the area of active service in politics. Where the culture or the practice does not align with scripture.

How does the Christian in that kind of space engage with the opposing views? Do you always have to go, sometimes you have to just retreat or leave the scene?

[53 : 41] Because there are different levels of engagement from what you shared. There is prayer. There is, you know, there is voting. And at some point, probably people give themselves to serve.

So, the one who gives himself to serve or gives herself to serve. How does one engage where the system does not align with scripture? You went there to change the system.

Yeah. That was not, everything was, so that's what you wanted to do. But at what point do you think, I mean, how do you just play in that space? Did you have a particular thing in mind in terms of how the system doesn't align with scripture?

Okay, yeah. Just from conversations I've had with some people I have known in the past that were in government that served in one capacity or the other. They went with so much fervor.

We were part of some groups that prayed for people in government. And then they kind of just joined the bandwagon. And you talk with some of them.

[54 : 40] Some of them are out of power now. They are not in that space anymore. They live with a lot of regret. Probably they should have done something different. They met a lot of resistance in the system.

And didn't know how to engage. What they thought from outside was different from how they saw it inside. Yeah. And now there was the battle that was going on.

Yeah. To conform or not to conform. And then, you know, one thing led to another. Some compromised. Some had cases on them of corruption. And so they had to just continue to get the people off their backs.

And then they're out of power now. And, you know, they are coming back to the church. They still live with that kind of regret that they could have done better. Yeah. Okay. I see. I see what you mean. Yeah.

I mean. What would I say to that? I think. I think you've got to go into politics.

[55 : 41] And I guess I'm speaking particularly about UK politics. Because that's the thing that I have the most experience of. And I'm not super Mr. Experience on that either. But other countries may have.

There may be other kind of nuances that are at play. But in UK politics, you've got to go in with your eyes open of what it means to serve.

Either in local government or as an MP or a minister of the Scottish Parliament. Whatever kind of way in which you serve. There are some people who go in.

And I don't know whether this is kind of the folks that you're talking about. But there are some people who would go into. Want as a Christian to go into politics. And say, okay. Well, I'm going to see the kingdom of God come.

And these are all the things that I'm going to pray to get done. And they don't achieve it. Whereas, certainly in UK politics, it is a question of compromise without compromising your beliefs.

[56 : 49] So what I mean by that is, the best example I can come up with is the Online Safety Act that came into effect last year. CARE has been crucially involved in that work.

And it's taken nearly 10 years to see that legislation come about. So it's not a quick fix. And it's not completely perfect.

And in fact, there are some things that, again, CARE and others have been involved in. That have come in through the recent Crime and Policing Bill. That have increased the protections of the Online Safety Act.

So there's a kind of sense of, okay, what do we want? And what can we achieve? And once we've achieved that, how can we move the next step towards the ideal?

So it's that idea of kind of saying, well, this is what I want. This is under God what I'd love to see happen. But realistically, this is what we can achieve.

[57 : 54] And for some people, that disconnect is going to be really hard to reconcile. And so political life is going to be really, really difficult.

For other people, the danger is they get caught up into the political machine. And you're always compromising. And you lose track of what that ideal is. Somewhere in the middle is where kind of Christian MPs thrive, maybe.

I don't know if thrive is the right word. Exist and serve. To say, okay, what is it that we can achieve right here and now? And, again, that's the experience that carers have.

Has been trying to say, okay, what can we achieve to make things better now? How can we increase protections for children and young people being exposed to pornography?

How can we help those involved in human trafficking and in prostitution? We know we're not going to be able to solve that overnight.

[59 : 02] But we want to say, okay, what's the next step that we can take that's going to be a good and godly step? I think I don't have a huge amount of experience of talking to politicians.

I work in the communication side of things, which is separate from the policy team who do a lot of the politician-facing stuff. But talking to them, I think most politicians would say that they have regrets, whether they're Christians or not.

Because there's always more that you can do. And as Christians, we sort of live with that because we know that things will not be perfect until Jesus returns. Which doesn't make us sit here and go, oh, well, then, doesn't matter.

But we have a realism that says, we won't get it perfect. But I'm going to keep going because every step that I can take improves the lives of the most vulnerable.

I don't know if that answers your question or not. But I think hopefully gives a little way towards that. I think one more.

[60 : 08] Yes, I think that sounds like a good one. Are you sure? I'll stand afterwards. We'll pray at the end. So we won't finish on controversy.

Yeah. Go on. Go on. So I am blessed to be living in England. I come from Ethiopia.

And yes, the government is generally okay on the face of it. But what upsets me is when people say things like, well, you know, we don't have corruption here.

But that's not true. What you don't have is obvious corruption. Yeah. In Africa, it is obvious. In Mexico, it is obvious.

Yeah. In England, it is subtle. Yeah. So I don't want people to deceive themselves to think that, you know, and it is a democratic country, which is brilliant.

[61 : 16] And I have, you know, I'm thankful that I'm here for that, you know. But don't believe there is no corruption. Because it is man that's there.

And we are all, you know. Absolutely. I mean, I think when you're talking about politics, you're talking about people who are put in a position of power.

And we know that power corrupts. And people will be tempted to use that power for personal gain or for a whole host of different things.

And you're exactly right that we don't always see the corruption that comes along. And many of us will be old enough to remember various sort of political sleaze that has happened over the years. And some of that is, you know, you would definitely classify as corruption. Other things you might just sort of put down to sinful human beings. But every person who is in power has the potential to be corrupted because we're sinful.

[62 : 24] And as Christians, we have the advantage, if you like, of looking at politics, looking at government with open eyes. Because we know what the Bible says about everyone.

We don't go in with rose-tinted glasses thinking, everyone is so wonderful. Everyone has the potential to be corrupted because we all have the issue of sin to deal with.

And so, yeah, the fact that corruption is hidden is all the more reason to be praying for our politicians and for those in leadership. I think one of the things that we should continue to pray for, continue to thank God for, is the fact that we have, I would say, and you may disagree with me, in which case come down to me later, but I would say I think our system is not corrupt in itself.

Politicians can be corrupt, but our system does on the whole work. And where corruption is exposed, there is a system to get rid of MPs and leaders and whoever they may be.

But we can never depend on that completely. We can never say, oh, phew, that's all right, because things can change. So we need to be aware of that and we need to be praying. I think there was a second point I was going to make, but I'll leave it there.

[63 : 53] Very quickly. Yeah, because time's short. Thank you. I just wanted to add that the cultural role is also very important.

It's one way to fight in politics. Like in our everyday life, if you see someone doing something wrong, sometimes you can name and shame. You can change them.

Because the fight is first and foremost spiritual, I think. Yeah. Great. Thank you.

Yeah. Thank you so much for coming. First of all, can we just show our appreciation? And yeah.

Shall I pray?

Yeah. Yeah. Cool. Father God, thank you so much for your word. Thank you for speaking into our lives even today.

[64 : 47] Thank you that we see that you are the king on the throne, but you've also given us government, and that's a good thing. And we pray that you would help us to be people who are praying for our politicians, praying for the people that you have put in positions of power.

Lord, we pray that you would help each one in their different roles. Lord, help them, we pray, to serve our country rather than to be seeking to serve themselves.

Help us, we pray, in our other political engagement, whatever that looks like. Help us, we pray, to do that in love. And Father, thank you for Dan and others at CARE who are helping churches and Christians, communicating with politicians.

Lord, help them, we pray, in their different roles. And we pray that you would graciously make good ways for our voices as Christians to be heard in the doors of power.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.