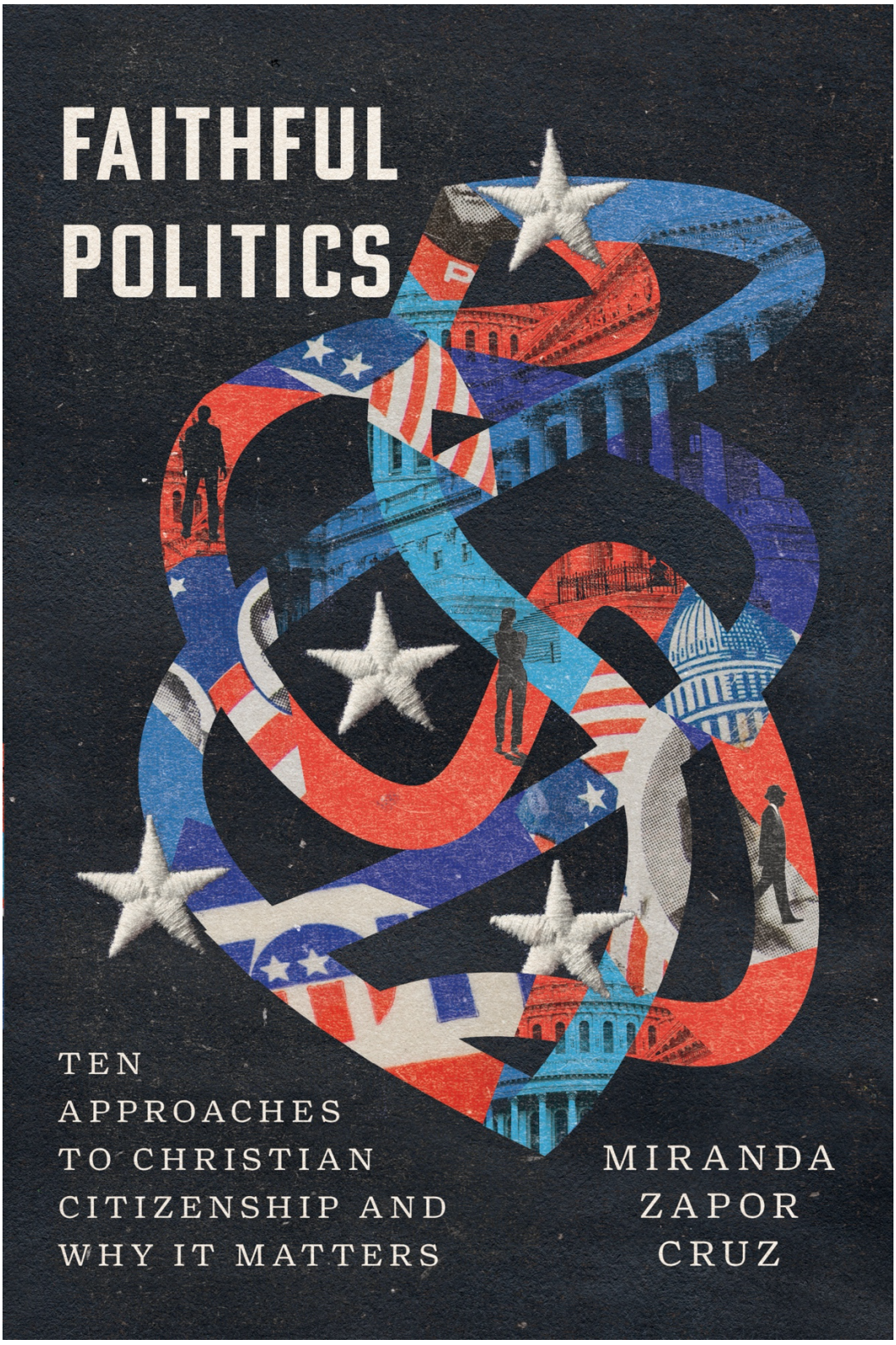


Study & Discussion Guide

Study and Discussion Guide written and prepared by Jonathan D. Cruz

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How to Use This Study Guide

This companion Study & Discussion Guide serves as a fully developed study for church and faith community groups of any size. The aim of this guide is to provide group leaders and facilitators with everything needed for a healthy and robust discussion of the book's content, while promoting listening and understanding among participants.

Accordingly, here are some tips to help group leaders make this study a success:

- This study discusses politics, which may be an uncomfortable subject for many. Openness and acceptance of one another are the keys to a successful small group study. Encourage an atmosphere of respect and dialogue within your group, especially at points of disagreement. Do not allow anyone to be dismissed or belittled because of their viewpoint. The central premise of this book is that Christians can learn from one another, even if we have differing political views and come to different conclusions regarding our political engagement.

- Facts are important. The book has been peer-reviewed, and all facts presented have been documented with citations. As you work through this book and study guide, urge your group members to foster a relationship of trust that relies on provable facts and steers away from speculation or unfounded claims.

- Each session contains a Bible Connection section, which presents a Scripture text relevant to the chapters being discussed. This section is optional and may be omitted. It is not necessary in order to understand or discuss the content of the book.

- Select questions, or parts of questions, for each chapter ahead of time. There is more material in this guide than any group could conceivably cover in a meaningful way. Group leaders should use their discretion to decide which questions will stimulate the best dialogue and engagement in their respective groups.

- Thoughtful dialogue takes practice. John Wesley's Guidelines for Christian (Holy) Conferencing provide helpful contours for our dialogue with one another. They are printed on the next page. Consider printing this page as a group covenant or commitment during this study.

- More resources for small groups and small group leadership can be found on the InterVarsity Press website.

John Wesley's Guidelines for Christian Conferencing*

1. Respect others, as Jesus did when he was here on earth.

2. Pray for others as well as yourself, especially those with whom you disagree.

3. Listen to others before thinking about what you want to say in response.

4. Understand what others are saying so clearly that you could accurately state their view.

5. Share your own point of view with grace and humility, as well as honesty and candor.

6. Focus your comments on issues being discussed, not on the person(s) expressing them.

7. Commit yourself to the unity of the Spirit, seeking consensus whenever possible.

8. Give the time needed to work through the process in which you are engaged.

9. Acknowledge that you may be wrong, even when you think you are right.

10. Allow the fruit of the Spirit to permeate your way of interacting with others: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

* Adapted from "Christian Conferencing Guidelines," approved by the Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church, May 29, 2014, https://firstchurch.thrive.am/files/69/Governance%20Board/Christian-Conferencing-Guidelines.pdf.

Session 1
Living in the Kingdom and the Country

Reading: Introduction and Chapter 1

Overview

- The introduction lays out the premises and outline of the book.
- Chapter 1 explores the differences between the Kingdom of God and earthly countries.

Bible Connection: Matthew 7:24-27

- In following Jesus, hearing and doing are inextricably connected. It is not enough to hear his words; we must act on them. Action on our part is what Jesus likens to building a house on a rock.
- Why do you think Jesus equates hearing and action when it comes to discipleship? In what ways do your actions create a firm foundation that inaction does not? How might this connection influence your approach to politics?

Key Quote

"What are you scared about, just because earthly kingdoms perish? That's the reason that a heavenly one's been promised you, that you won't perish with the earthly… Earthly kingdoms go through changes, but there will be One coming of whom it is said: 'And of His kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1:33)… Why do we place our heart on earth when we can see earth is getting turned upside down?" – Augustine of Hippo[1]

- In what ways have you placed your "heart on earth," instead of in God's eternal Kingdom? How might having our hearts in the correct place affect our approach to politics and political discourse?

Discussion Questions – Introduction

1. How have you approached the connection (or disconnection) between faith and politics in your life up to this point? In what ways have your theology and ethics influenced your political positions?

[1] Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 105," in *Augustine in His Own Words*, ed. William Harmless, SJ (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 322.

2. A common adage for navigating polite society is, "Never talk about religion or politics." How has this helped or harmed our ability to discern these topics within our faith communities? Can you think of an example where you have seen discernment of faith and politics done well, within a Christian community?

3. Political leaders occasionally make the case that Christians should rightly – and only – vote for their party. What arguments have you heard politicians make to this end? What assumptions do political parties and politicians make of Christian voters?

4. "*We need a robust framework for bringing our faith convictions to bear on our political participation. Such a framework will enable us to be more faithful to Christ in our political lives and to respect fellow Christians who arrive at different political conclusions,*" (page xiii). Have you considered how Christians in different historical or theological traditions from your own approach faith and politics? What have you thought of Christians who have polar opposite political convictions from your own? In what ways have political differences created rifts instead of unity among Christians?

5. Do you see your political actions and positions as part of the way you contribute to God's mission in the world? Reflect on how your political behavior is a part of your Christian witness.

6. Because faithfulness requires Christians to be well informed, how have you worked to discern true and helpful information from misinformation or disinformation? Do you have any tips or suggestions for the group that you have found useful in becoming, and staying, well informed?

7. How have you viewed compromise in politics – is it good, bad, or a necessary evil? How can Christians be uncompromising in our allegiance to Christ, yet compromise in policy making?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 1

1. Have you considered the paradigm of dual citizenship for understanding and articulating your Christian and American identities? In what ways does dual citizenship provide a helpful framework for connecting your faith and politics in a positive way?

2. The earliest Christians wrestled with how to live in a pagan society, often as the object of ridicule and persecution. How do you think this experience influenced early ideas of Christian citizenship? Do any of these ideas still dominate Christians' approach to society and politics?

3. Augustine of Hippo's distinctions between the City of God and the earthly city have been foundational for Western Christianity since the fifth century. Have you encountered this idea before this study?

4. Augustine cautions against the extremes of attempting to build a utopian society or becoming cynical, and seeing all earthly affairs as meaningless. How might a renewed understanding of the City of God prevent us from embracing these extremes today?

5. The Kingdom of God is universal, whereas earthly countries must have boundaries (see page 7). What does this mean? Where have you seen the universal nature of God's Kingdom in contrast with the boundaried nature of an earthly country?

6. What are the different bases for economies in the Kingdom of God and in the United States? In what ways have you seen these mixed up, confused, or conflated?

7. What are the four opposing values of the Kingdom of God and the United States of America? Which of these do you consider to be the most disparate in its application in the Kingdom of God versus the United States?

8. When considering your dual citizenship in God's Kingdom and the country in which you live, what shifts can you make to better regard the former as primary and the latter as secondary?

Closing Prayer

"Holy Triune God, thank you for the opportunity to study together and sharpen one another, in our pursuit of ever more faithful living. As Jesus prayed, we ask for your Kingdom to come and your will to be done, in every realm and space of creation. Help us to ponder the ideas we've encountered here, that we may become more faithful to you and more loving toward others, through our approach to faith and politics. We pray this in the name of the risen Christ, Jesus. Amen."

Session 2
Biblical Citizenship in the Kingdom and the Country

Reading: Chapters 2 and 3

Overview

- Chapter 2 considers several Scripture texts relevant for Christian political engagement, as well as various political models present in the Bible.
- Chapter 3 explores the nature of partisan affiliation and draws the broad contours of a framework for a faithful, Christ-centered approach to political engagement.

Bible Connection: Jeremiah 29:4-14

- Jeremiah is writing to encourage Israelites who had been exiled in Babylon. The prophet implores them to seek the welfare of the city in which they find themselves. This passage offers a message of encouragement and hope for the community.
- In what ways might the present situation of the church resemble the biblical account of exile? In what ways does the church's situation differ from the Israelites in exile? What tensions present themselves, if we approach our dual citizenship with an exilic mindset?

Key Quote

> *"Beloved there is now set before us life and good, Death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his Ordinance and his laws, and the articles of our Covenant with him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship and serve other Gods, our pleasure and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it."* – John Winthrop, employing Moses' last words to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land (cf. Deuteronomy 30:15-18)[2]

- Have you encountered theological or political ideas that closely connect ancient Israel and the United States of America? What language, concepts, or notions have you seen tied together?

[2] John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity (1630)," *Hanover Historical Texts Collection*, accessed May 30, 2023, https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html. Spelling updated.

Discussion Questions – Chapter 2

1. What role has the Bible played in informing your political positions? Why have you used (or not used) the Bible in this way?

2. What models of civil government are represented in the Bible? In what ways can these models of political engagement speak to our present situation and context?

3. Christians from all political persuasions have used (and misused) the Bible in their political rhetoric and positions. Why is it important to exercise caution in applying the Bible to our present political situation and context?

4. *"[Samuel Langdon and John] Winthrop, along with others, read the United States as God's second chance for a chosen people to hold up their end of the covenant by succeeding in faithfulness where the Israelites had failed,"* (page 25). Have you encountered the idea that America is a divinely blessed and ordained nation? If so, where?

5. What are some dangers of the belief that America is a replacement for ancient Israel? How can Christians contribute to more theologically sound discourse about this?

6. American individualism is deeply rooted in our nation's body politic, but God calls Christians to seek the common good. In what ways can individualism and the common good be in harmony, or in conflict, with one another?

7. Both Romans 13 and Revelation 13 provide a basis for Christian engagement with earthly governments. One calls for submission; the other calls for resistance. How is a Christian to know when one is called for over the other? What safeguards can we put in place to ensure we are not simply imposing our political views of government onto the Bible?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 3

1. *"The body of Christ is not a political party, and Scripture is not a policy agenda,"* (pages 39-40). In what ways have you witnessed American Christians conflate these things? As individuals, or as a group, create a correlative to this quote: "Instead, the body of Christ is _____, and Scripture is _____."

2. Have you considered participation in party politics to be appropriate for a Christian? Why or why not? What are the benefits and risks of partisan affiliation for Christians?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a two-party political system? In what ways does this system benefit or complicate Christians' choices in elections?

4. What is "bland partisanship"? Have you experienced the temptation to become bland in your politics? Name an instance in which you have experienced or witnessed bland partisanship.

5. How does bland partisanship harm the church and the Christian witness? In what ways have you witnessed, or participated in, the "othering" of people with different political views from your own? How can Christians avoid an "us vs. them" mentality going forward?

6. What is "salty party participation"? How does one remain salty, while still participating in a party's political activities? Why might it be difficult to critique those who share your political beliefs, while still participating in a political party together?

7. What steps can you take to become more aware of, and reflective about, your political party's positions, actions, and candidates?

8. Teaching a Christian ethic (however it is understood in a given theological tradition) will inevitably step into the realm of politics. How can a church, as an institution, as well as church leaders, be political without being partisan?

Closing Prayer

"Merciful God, thank you for bringing us together once again, as we continue to strive to live faithfully for Jesus Christ. Help us to examine our words, our actions, and our deepest motivations in light of the love of Christ shown to us in the Scriptures. Give us the courage and strength to be salt in the world around us, ever vigilant to your call toward righteousness. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen."

Session 3
Separating the Kingdom and the Country

Reading: Chapters 4 and 5

Overview

- Chapter 4 outlines three separatist positions. Two arise from the Anabaptist tradition: radical isolation and prophetic witness. The third is an evangelical construction: strategic withdrawal.
- Chapter 5 outlines two separationist approaches: historic Baptist and Two Kingdoms (Spheres) separation.

Bible Connection: John 18:36

- At the time of Jesus' arrest, several messianic movements had arisen to secure the liberation of the region of Palestine from Roman rule. An entire sect of Jews, called the Zealots, existed primarily to resist Roman rule over the region. Some disciples of Jesus wanted – and perhaps even assumed – that he would take up this cause.
- What does Jesus mean when he says his Kingdom "does not belong to this world"? How does Jesus connect earthly kingdoms and violence in this passage?

Key Quote

"The true church [is] an alternative community, distinct from larger society and not responsible for morally propping up the political order." – Steven M. Nolt[3]

- Do you believe the church's mission includes propping up the political order? Does the intertwining of church and state, in any way whatsoever, create a danger of conflating the two? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 4

1. What encounters or experiences have you had with Christians who hold a separatist position?

[3] Steven M. Nolt, *The Amish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 14.

2. In what ways did the Anabaptists' history shape their conviction of total separation from the state and society? How has this conviction continued to shape the Christian communities within the Anabaptist traditions today?

3. The first separatist position discussed in chapter 4 is radical isolation. What groups fall into this category? What do you find compelling or challenging about this approach?

4. The second separatist approach explored is prophetic witness. How does this position differ from radical isolation? What are the strengths and potential weaknesses of these two Anabaptist approaches?

5. The commitment to nonviolence plays a key role in both Anabaptist approaches to separatism. Why does this belief, above all others, demand complete separation between the church and state? What are the benefits and risks of such a commitment to nonviolence?

6. The third separatist approach, strategic withdrawal, comes from the evangelical tradition. What is this approach, and how is it different from those in the Anabaptist traditions? What theological and historical influences shaped this approach?

7. *"Evangelicals and like-minded Christians who strategically withdraw are also likely to strategically engage when the political circumstances appear favorable to their success,"* (page 81). In what ways does this statement illuminate differences between the separatism of the Anabaptist traditions and that of the evangelical tradition?

8. Can a Christian be faithfully separatist? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 5

1. What are the differences between a separatist view and a separationist view? What are the benefits and risks of these approaches, compared to other approaches that are more heavily involved in politics?

2. What is the historical basis for a separation of church and state? In what ways has this approach shaped American history, society, and politics? Do you believe this approach has been beneficial to society and/or the church? Why or why not?

3. For historic Baptists, what is the historical and theological reasoning for maintaining a separation between the church and the civil government?

4. The second form of separationism outlined in chapter 5 comes from the Lutheran tradition. What is Two Kingdoms (or Two Spheres) separation? How does it compare and contrast with the historic Baptist separationist position?

5. What unique advantages or disadvantages does the Two Kingdoms approach present? In what ways might American society be different, if this approach had stronger influence in American history?

6. What insights can the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany offer us regarding a separation between the church and the state?

7. Can a Christian be faithfully separationist? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Closing Prayer

"Loving God, thank you again for the opportunity to come together and learn from other Christians, not only from those around us, but from those who lived long before us. Thank you for a vast and deep tradition, where faithful followers of Jesus have wrestled with these tough questions for centuries. In your grace and power, may we now take up their mantel and faithfully carry our responsibility to follow Jesus, in every aspect of our lives, and in community with one another. We pray this in the name of the eternal Christ, Jesus. Amen."

Session 4
Mingling the Kingdom and the Country

Reading: Chapters 6 and 7

Overview

- Chapter 6 explores past and present political approaches originating from the social gospel movement, which has been highly influential among mainline Protestants and Christians who regard themselves as politically liberal.
- Chapter 7 outlines two Calvinist approaches. Direct Christian influence has held significant sway for many conservative evangelical Protestants, whereas principled pluralism has been influential for many Reformed Christians across the political spectrum.

Bible Connection: 1 Peter 2:11-17

- As we have seen, the Bible presents various texts that pertain to government and society. Some of these are applicable in certain situations, but Christians must be careful not to cherry-pick or selectively apply prooftexts to support one's own political positions. In this letter, the author echoes both Jesus and Paul, in telling Christians to honor government authority, because it is given by God to enact justice in the world.
- What does it mean for a government to enact God's justice? How does this idea influence the way you see the role of government and politics? What responsibility do you have in enacting God's justice through government, given that in the United States the government is chosen and run by the people?

Key Quote

"Flourishing and justice are part and parcel of the creation mandate. Humanity's rule is designed to facilitate flourishing and to enact justice." – J. Michael Thigpen[4]

- This session explores two very different directions Christians have taken to put the ideas reflected in this statement into practice. What actions or policies come to mind when you think about facilitating flourishing and enacting justice?

[4] J. Michael Thigpen, "Flourishing and Justice as 'Subduing' the Earth," Oikonomia Network, October 5, 2020, https://oikonomianetwork.org/2020/10/flourishing-and-justice-as-subduing-the-earth/.

Discussion Questions – Chapter 6

1. *"Most Christians believe that our faith should influence society in some way; some believe that way should be directly through politics,"* (page 103). Do you believe Christians should directly influence society through political action? Why or why not? In what other ways can Christians influence society, outside of politics?

2. Have you ever been part of a church or faith community that was influenced by the social gospel movement? What were their chief concerns regarding social justice in society? In what ways did you work to further that mission?

3. What elements of history and theology most heavily influenced the social gospel movement?

4. What are some churches or groups today that have been shaped and influenced by the social gospel?

5. Why do you think politically liberal Christians tend to be attracted to the social gospel? Do you believe that one must be politically liberal in order to claim the theological tradition of the social gospel?

6. What are some of the strengths and advantages of the social gospel?

7. What are some of the criticisms of the social gospel and its movements? Do you agree or disagree with these critiques? Are there other critiques of the social gospel not mentioned in the book?

8. Can a faithful Christian adopt the social gospel approach? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 7

1. Briefly describe John Calvin's political theology. How does it differ from Luther's Two Kingdoms approach? How did Calvin implement his political theology during his lifetime?

2. What is the direct Christian influence approach? Why do you think so many conservative Christians have found it compelling?

3. What role has direct Christian influence played in American history? In what ways have you seen direct Christian influence expressed today?

4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the direct Christian influence model?

5. What is the principled pluralism model? In what ways does it differ from direct Christian influence?

6. What do you think conservative Christians and liberal Christians each find attractive about principled pluralism?

7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the principled pluralism model?

8. Can a faithful Christian hold to a Calvinist political approach, whether direct Christian influence or principled pluralism? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Closing Prayer

"Almighty God, thank you once again for opening our minds and challenging our hearts to seek you faithfully in all areas of our lives. Continue to help us learn from one another, that we may grow in our respect and love for one another, and for all people. We ask you to guide our footsteps, as we work to make a difference in the world and accomplish your mission here. We ask your Holy Spirit to grant us wisdom and discernment in all things. We pray this in the name of the crucified Christ, Jesus, Amen."

Session 5
Uniting the Kingdom and the Country

Reading: Chapters 8 and 9

Overview

- Chapter 8 explores dominionism and the New Apostolic Reformation.
- Chapter 9 offers a history and evaluation of Christian nationalism.

Bible Connection: Romans 13:1-7

- Paul exhorts the Christians at the church in Rome to willingly subject themselves to governing authorities, as an act of faith in God.
- How is this text understood in light of the message and mission of Christ? In what ways can this text be misunderstood or misused to the detriment of the mission and witness of the church? Do these verses sanction a "Christian" government? Why or why not?

Key Quote

"Christianity is completely and radically anti-democratic… [and is] committed to a spiritual aristocracy." – Rousas John Rushdoony[5]

- What do you think Rushdoony means by this? Why do you believe some people find dominionism and Christian nationalism compelling?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 8

1. Before reading this book, had you heard of dominionism, the Seven Mountains Mandate, Christian reconstructionism, or the New Apostolic Reformation? If so, what was your understanding and impression of these movements?

2. In what ways does Christian reconstructionism build on Calvin's political theology? How is it different from the models of direct Christian influence and principled pluralism discussed in the previous chapter?

[5] Quoted in Randall Balmer, ed., "Rushdoony, Rousas John (1916-2001)," in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 594.

3. For Rushdoony, what was the goal of human morality, and how was this goal to be accomplished?

4. What role does postmillennialism play in reconstructionist theology?

5. According to the Seven Mountains Mandate, what are the seven areas of society that need to be brought into conformity with a Christian worldview? In what ways have you seen the Seven Mountains Mandate put into practice?

6. What role does spiritual warfare play in the worldview and eschatology of the New Apostolic Reformation?

7. What reasons does the author give for rejecting dominionism as a valid, orthodox form of Christian theology and political engagement? Do you agree or disagree, and why?

Discussion Questions – Chapter 9

1. What is nationalism? What is Christian nationalism? Have you heard of Christian nationalism before reading this book? If so, where?

2. *"Instead of being a Christian approach to politics, [Christian nationalism] is a political approach to Christianity,"* (page 176). What does the author mean by this statement?

3. How do Christian nationalism and patriotism differ from one another?

4. What role has Christian nationalist thought played in American history? Where does Christian nationalism appear today?

5. In what ways is white (European) supremacy foundational to Christian nationalism?

6. What lessons can be learned from nationalist movements in the past and present that might help guard against such movements in the future?

7. What reasons does the author give for rejecting Christian nationalism as a valid, orthodox form of Christian theology and political engagement? Do you agree or disagree, and why?

Closing Prayer

"Father God, thank you for calling us your children. Jesus, thank you for calling us your sisters and brothers. Holy Spirit, thank you for loving us as a mother loves her children. Open our eyes to see others the way you do, and deepen our capacity to love as Christ did. Guard our hearts against the temptations of power and security. Give us strength and courage to take up our crosses and carry them in sacrificial love for others. We pray this in the name of the One who is Love. Amen."

Session 6
Faithful Politics in the Kingdom and the Country

Reading: Conclusion

Overview

- The conclusion proposes a model for Christian political engagement that is neither uncritically partisan, nor politically neutral.

Bible Connection: Romans 12:9-18

- Paul instructs Christians at the church in Rome how to live with one another: with zeal, honor, affection, and peace.
- What does it mean to "live peaceably with all"? How might we apply this verse to our interactions with people who have different political views than we do?

Key Quote

"Different theological traditions and historical contexts have led Christians to develop a variety of approaches to faithfully living as citizens in the Kingdom and the country… As we thoughtfully form and evaluate our political views, we can consider a variety of approaches and resist the temptation to resolve the tension with uncritical partisan alignment. We can also understand and respect our sisters and brothers in Christ who come to different political conclusions." – Miranda Zapor Cruz[6]

- How can understanding different Christian theological traditions and histories impact your political discussions with others?

Discussion Questions – Conclusion

1. "*While Christian faithfulness can lead to a range of political approaches, underlying any approach should be a discernable* Christianness," (page 193). What does "discernable Christianness" mean?

2. According to the author, faithful Christian political engagement (i.e., Kingdom citizenship) consists of what five elements? Do you agree with this list? Why or why not?

[6] Miranda Zapor Cruz, *Faithful Politics: Ten Approaches to Christian Citizenship and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024), 193.

3. What are Kingdom citizens, and what three characteristics should describe them? How can these characteristics lead us to more reflective engagement in politics? How might these characteristics affect the way non-Christians view Christians' participation in political discourse?

4. According to the author, in what two ways should Christians act within the political realm? How can these actions impact your personal Christian witness in your neighborhood and community?

5. In what ways can you personally contribute to a more loving, healthy, and constructive political discourse?

6. In what specific ways can you seek shalom in your neighborhood, city, state, and nation? Write a short list and work to implement those things in the coming weeks.

Discussion Questions – Debriefing the Study

1. What have you learned in this study that you will share with others?

2. How has reading this book and participating in this study affected the way you see people with differing political views from your own?

3. The author proposes an approach to political engagement that combines strengths of various models and theological traditions. Do you believe this is a helpful way to avoid uncritical partisanship? What tensions do you think may arise from following this approach?

4. What role(s) do you believe a church, as an institution, should play in local, regional, and national politics? How might a church's mission and witness be affected by such a role?

5. What role(s) should church leaders play in political engagement and discernment within the congregation? What are the risks and benefits of church leaders guiding parishioners' political engagement?

6. Has your own approach to politics changed since the beginning of this study? If so, how?

Closing Prayer

"God of all people and all creation, thank you for the opportunity to study together, and to grow alongside one another in our pursuit of more faithful living, as followers of Jesus. We ask that in all things, you help us work for peace, demonstrate love, and offer your healing and reconciliation to everyone around us. Give us resolve and strength to be your voice of love in a wilderness of hate and division. Guide our steps, and steady our feet as we go forward. We pray this in the name of the risen Christ, Jesus. Amen."