

Putting Politics in Its Place: Rome / Paul (Week 7)

Discussion Guide



You can use this discussion guide on your own, with your family, or with your discipleship community (virtually or in-person). To watch or listen to this week's sermon, visit bellevuechristian.church/sermons, subscribe to the Bellevue Christian Church podcast on your preferred provider, or watch our weekly service at youtube.com/bellevuechristian.

Introduction

We're in an 8-week series called *Putting Politics in its Place* that will take us all the way to week of the election. In a time where it feels like politics has forgotten its place, we want to be a church where we put politics back in its place. And, we believe that the best way to do that is by exploring political life in specific places throughout the Bible—places like Eden, Egypt, Israel, Babylon, Rome, & New Jerusalem.

This week we're exploring the political implications of life in the Roman Empire (week two)—specifically looking at what Paul had to say about putting politics in its place. We'll be looking at the ideal basic job descriptions of political authorities and Christians citizens.

Since political conversations tend to be particularly volatile in our cultural moment, we want to go over a few guidelines every single week that can shape we talk with one another:

1. **Seek to understand before you're understood.** This means that we're practicing active listening, not just thinking about how we'll respond. Before you counter what someone is saying, try your best to repeat back what the person is saying—to *their satisfaction* ("Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying").
2. **Hold the Bible tightly and your political opinions loosely.** Instead of trying to forcefit the Bible into our preconceived political opinions, we want to approach the Bible with humility that says, "God, I give you permission to reshape any of my opinions in light of your Word." If we're not careful, it's easy to let our political opinions shape how we read the Bible—instead of the other way around. This also means we want to keep our discussion centered around the text we're actually studying.
3. **Love the person even when you don't love their idea.** And, just because someone doesn't love your idea doesn't mean they don't love you. In the end, Jesus says that people will know we are his followers not by "the uniformity of our political opinions" but by our "love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

Questions

It's okay if you don't get through all the questions. These questions are nothing more than a launching point for moving toward everyday life like Jesus. Feel free to add additional questions of your own.

- One of the best ways to break political polarization is getting to know people who hold different views than you—so every week we'll have a get-to-know-each-other-better question. **If you could go back in time and make little changes to your childhood, what is one thing you'd learn and master over the years so you'd be an expert at it today?**
- This week's text is Romans 13:1-7. **Can someone read through the text? Listen for some things that strike you about the text. What are some things that stood out to you from a first reading of the text?**
 - Many people feel like Paul would have had Matthew 22:21 in mind when he wrote this ("So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"). **How does what Paul writes here feel like a more in-depth explainer of what Jesus meant in that verse?**
- In this text, many commentators have pointed out that we get an ideal job description of human political authorities and Christian citizens. Let's start by talking about political authorities: **What do you see in this text as part of the job description of political authorities?**
 - One part of their description is to *promote good*—both good individual behavior but also the good (or *flourishing* of society).
 - **What could it look like for a government to promote good individual behavior?**
 - **What could it look like for a government to promote the collective good (or flourishing) of a society?**
 - Another part of their description is punishing wrong:
 - **What are some reasons why society can't work well without a strategy for punishing wrong?**
 - **How does this text both leave room for the existence of law enforcement *and* for reforming the methods that law enforcement uses?**
- Now, let's talk about the job description of Christian citizens. **What do you see in this text as part of the job description of Christian citizens?**
 - "Submit" carries lots of negative energy in our cultural moment. **What are some reasons why we react so strongly to that word?**
 - **What are some of the reasons why Paul tells us to submit to political authorities?**
- In your opinion, **what does it mean "honor and respect" a political authority? What does it *not* mean?**
- On Sunday, Austin said that simply ending with the idea that Christians should submit to political authorities at all times no matter what is a misreading of this text—and, *misreading this text makes us into passive rather than active participants in the political process*. **How does this text (and the whole of the Bible) leave room for advocacy, protest, and even civil disobedience? (Or, if you don't think it does, you can explain why.)**

- **What was your biggest takeaway from the sermon or discussion this week?**

Prayer

Spend some time responding to this week's discussion in prayer—especially for this political season. Pray that our political authorities would live up to the ideal in this text, and that we would be able to wisely navigate the complexities of submission as Christian citizens.