

## Grace Downtown CG Discussion Guide

May 28- May 31, 2018

Topic: The Bible and Politics

Series: Theology in Life



### Announcements:

**Spring Get Away (6/2):** Bring your friends and family to the Strawberry Jubilee Festival at Great Country Farms in Bluemont, VA. Enjoy playgrounds, wagon rides, a jumping pillow, farm animals, a pie-eating contest, and more. **Saturday June 2.** Pick your own strawberries 9-11 am and/or gather with Grace Downtown from 11 am- 3 pm. Cost: \$8. More details on website. Contact: Mazaré at [mazare@gracedc.net](mailto:mazare@gracedc.net).

**CG Curriculum Q&A (6/3):** We will have a CG Curriculum Q&A following the worship service on June 3. Bring any lingering questions you may have and our elders will be there to answer them.

**Commons Weekly Intern Dinner (6/5):** If you're an intern in DC this summer, you're invited to COMMONS, a weekly dinner and discussion group on Tuesday nights at 7pm, 2908 18th St NW. Contact [sampsoncm1@gmail.com](mailto:sampsoncm1@gmail.com) with questions or for more info. Starts **Tuesday June 5.**

**Network Worship and Members' Meeting (6/10):** Save the Date! Our next network-wide worship service and members' meeting will be June 10 at 10:30 am at Grace Meridian Hill, 810 Shepherd St, NW. There will be no 5 pm Downtown worship service.

### The Bible and Politics

#### **Note to CG leaders:**

*Please read the Bible passages and discuss how Daniel and Paul's audiences would have read and understood the message. There are many questions in the discussion guide, so feel free to pick the ones most relevant to your group.*

#### ***Does Orthodox Christianity Lean Conservative or Liberal?***

**Scripture Passages:** Romans 13:1, Daniel 2:21, Romans 13:7, 1 Timothy 2:1-2

There are two main ideas that we hope you and your CG members will dive into tonight:

- The first is that many of the powers and responsibilities that the biblical authors assumed to be concentrated in the office of monarch fall on citizens today.
- The second is that orthodox Christianity transcends, challenges and refines both conservatism and liberalism.

## ***Who Are Our Rulers?***

In Babylon and Rome, kings lived unique lives: While they were directly involved in international diplomacy and military strategy, they often had little to do with the actual work of domestic statecraft. They set the tone for domestic policy and pointed it in broad directions, but most of the day-to-day work of policy and government was executed by networks of appointed officials, who were responsible for translating the monarch's general ideas into actual policies and programs.

The highest levels of appointed officials were selected by the monarch, and often they could appoint lower officials below themselves. At the highest levels, these officials would often jockey for influence over the monarch, trying to persuade the monarch to give them directions that they preferred themselves. (Sometimes their policy preferences stemmed from concern for the good of the kingdom's subjects, and sometimes they were self-serving.) On occasion, these monarchs would make domestic policy by unilateral declaration or fiat—declarations that would also be binding for themselves.

1. What powers and responsibilities do elected officials have in common with Babylonian and Roman monarchs? With appointed officials?
2. What powers and responsibilities do citizens have in common with Babylonian and Roman monarchs?
3. When you read the Bible, how do the unique dynamics of a representative democracy, especially the dynamics between electorates and elected officials, inform your response to the power dynamics between Daniel and the Babylonian kings? Between Paul and the Roman authorities?
4. What are some of the biggest challenges to you've seen to your neighbors living peaceful, quiet, godly or dignified lives?

## ***How Should We Govern?***

At their core, both conservatism and liberalism in the US are approaches to deciding what the relationship should be between a citizen and the government in a representative democracy.

While it's impossible to capture the contours of either conservatism or liberalism in one sentence, conservatism generally tends to place a heavy focus on individual autonomy, viewing government as an important but volatile safeguard against violence that is most wisely leveraged sparingly. (Think in terms of Paul's mention in Romans 13 of the sword that government wields.) By contrast, liberalism often begins from a place of seeking to respond to specific problems—especially problems facing either the entirety of a community or its most vulnerable members—and often views representative government as a collaborative tool for solving shared problems or administering relief for acute ones. (Think in terms of Joseph's initiative to stockpile and distribute grain in Egypt.)

These political movements are crafted extra-biblically—formed by and intended for application within a social/political structure that would have been foreign to the biblical authors. And because these movements are crafted by people who are simultaneously good and fallen, there are going to be ways in which each of them reflect and distort the image of God. (Both, for example, are obviously concerned with specific aspects and applications of the idea of justice, even if they don't often touch on the same dimensions of it.)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. To do anything wisely, we must be aware not just of the good goals we are pursuing, but also of the ways we tend to distort or over-emphasize certain "goods" while ignoring or discounting others. What friendships do you have, especially in the church, with people who have different ideas of what's "good" in politics than you do?
2. What is one thing you have learned from them about the way you tend to distort good things in your own heart and mind?
3. Think about someone you know whose politics you disagree with. Can you identify a way in which their approach to politics is not just bad, but is actually an over-emphasis or distortion of something that you yourself might actually consider to be good?

### **Prayer:**

*The Grace Downtown Prayer Team creates opportunities for our community to learn more about prayer together for our church family, our city, and our world. Throughout the coming week, the Prayer Team is asking our church community to...*

- Praise God for bringing a government to us that rests on the shoulders of Jesus.
- Thank God for giving you the honor and dignity of being implicated in the process of government, even as you are also subject to its successes and failures.
- Confess ways in which you have not taken the dynamics of that responsibility seriously.
- Thank God for brothers and sisters in the church who can help you think about those responsibilities in ways you wouldn't be able to on your own.
- Ask for the ability to refine one another in humility and love as you seek to make the gospel's challenge and healing and winsome invitation felt.
- Thank God for these opportunities to see his Kingdom grow here and now even as you await its arrival in full.