Good Government
Preacher's Toolkit

CARE FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Summary
We can very easily become frustrated with the Government; after scandals and broken promises, trust in our elected politicians is at a low ebb. But good government is God's idea and something that Christians should value and promote.

A Clash of Worldviews

A better story

The Bible tells us that "the authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1), and that His purpose for government is to promote good and restrain evil. Government is God's idea and good government is God's ideal. When government is working well, we see a society where injustice is challenged and where the powerless are protected, where good is promoted and evil restrained.

Points of difference

Some people believe that **government is always a bad thing,** arguing that Christians should stay out of politics altogether. But government – and good government especially – is God's idea and something that Christians can promote and work towards. Governments don't always get things right, but they can do good and we need Christians to help steer and shape them.

Some might say that **Christians are not under government authority.** After all, we have Jesus as our lord and king, so what use do we have for earthly government and politics? But as we open our Bibles we see that God's word tells a different story. Government isn't something to be avoided or derided, but is given to us by God, and to be obeyed and respected.

Others argue that we need not **submit to unhelpful laws,** such as speed limits. However, we are called to submit to leaders and authorities, not pick and choose which laws we want to obey. Part of respecting government is respecting the decisions they make and the laws they pass, even if we don't like them. Where a government makes decisions that directly oppose what God has said, we have freedom as Christians to resist the government in appropriate ways. But we cannot choose to disobey just because we dislike something.

Some see **government as the way to solve all our problems.** There is much that governments can do which is good. But finding just the right policies, laws and societal structures won't be enough. We need God's salvation in Jesus Christ. He is our true King and we belong to his kingdom. We look forward to the day when Jesus returns and his kingdom comes in all its fullness.

Politics

The UK Parliament is made of three parts: the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the Crown. A Bill is generally debated by both Houses of Parliament. Bills can be introduced in either the Commons or the Lord for discussion and amendment. Once a Bill has been agreed by both Houses, it is passed on to the Crown for Royal Assent, after which it becomes law.

Bills receive three 'readings' in each House. The first reading is the formal introduction of the Bill and does not involve debate, the second reading involves debate and a vote to see if the bill progresses any further. The third reading is the final stage for debate and a vote on whether the Bill becomes law. There are also committee and report stages where discussion and amendments to the Bill can occur. Bills can often end up passing back and forth between the Lords and Commons as details and amendments are worked out, a process known as 'ping pong'.

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland all have devolved governments which have various degrees of autonomy over executive and legislative matters. Each of the Parliaments can pass laws in devolved areas, but not in areas which are 'reserved' matters and remain the responsibility of Westminster, such constitutional matters, foreign policy and defence. The UK Parliament can still legislate in devolved matters, but does not normally do so. Each of the three nations has slightly different areas in which it can pass laws. In general, devolved areas include education, housing, social services, and transport.

Glossary

ALL-PARTY GROUPS
All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal cross-party groups within Parliament with a common interest. They are run by MPs and Peers, and can involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament. While they have no official status, they bring together politicians from different parties and political views. In Northern Ireland they are called All-Party Groups (APGs).

BACKBENCHER
A member of parliament who holds no governmental office or role within the opposition. They are so-called because they sit on the benches in the House of Commons behind the front bench ministers and leaders.

COALITION GOVERNMENT
A government that is formed of more than one political party. This usually occurs after an election results in a hung parliament, where no one party wins an overall majority. The parties who form a coalition work together and divide cabinet positions between them.

MAJORITY
When a political party has more than half of the MPs in the House of Commons. There are currently 650 seats in the Commons, so a party needs at least 326 MPs to command a majority. A party with a majority is able to form a government and will be able to pass legislation, assuming they can keep their members in line.

MANIFESTO
A publication that is produced by a political party in advance of a General Election. A manifesto lays out the main policy positions that a party intends to enact if it comes to power. For the winning party it forms the governing document for the incoming administration.

PING-PONG
The process by which proposed legislation bounces between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. This happens when the Houses don't agree on the wording of a Bill and changes are suggested and either approved or rejected by each House. Formally the process is known as 'consideration of the Lords/Commons amendments'.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS (PMQS)
PMQs happen every Wednesday at 12pm for half an hour when Parliament is in session. It is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to answer questions from members of Parliament. Typically the Leader of the Opposition asks the first question, and then the Speaker of the House calls on MPs to ask their questions.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILL
Legislation introduced by individual MPs which are allocated by a ballot at the start of each session of Parliament. Only those coming in the top of the ballot are likely to receive serious consideration, and have to be considered in a single session of Parliament. If they do not receive Royal Assent in that time, they are considered 'lost'.

READING
A 'reading' is a formal stage which a Bill needs to pass through in Parliament before it becomes law. There are three reading stages that a Bill needs to complete. The first reading is the formal introduction of the Bill and does not usually involve a debate. The second and third readings usually include time for debate and a vote.

ROYAL ASSENT
Once a proposed Bill is approved by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, it is passed to the monarch for their approval. Once this approval has been given, which can take as little as a matter of minutes, the Bill is said to have Royal Assent and is able to become law.

SECRETARY OF STATE
A cabinet minister who leads a major government department. Many of the positions are referred to in a shorter form, such as 'Home Secretary' rather than 'Secretary of State for the Home Department'.

WHIP
Whips are MPs or Peers who are appointed by each party to organise their members and keep them in line. In particular they ensure that party members vote, and they vote in line with the party's policy.

Key Bible Passages

GENESIS 1:28
"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

GENESIS 41:39-40
"Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.'"

JUDGES 21:25
"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

PROVERBS 29:2
"When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan."

PROVERBS 31:8-9
"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

JEREMIAH 29:7
"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."

DANIEL 2:48
"Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men."

DANIEL 6:3-4
"Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent."

MICAH 6:8
"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

MARK 12:17
"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

For Further Research

CARE's Topic Page (care.org.uk/cause/government)

'Dear MP' Topic Guide (care.org.uk/resources/topic-guides)

Christians in Politics (christiansinpolitics.org.uk)

Christians in Parliament (christiansinparliament.org.uk)

UK government's 'How government works' page (gov.uk/government/how-government-works)

UK Parliament website (parliament.uk)

Elliot Clark: Pastors around the world apply Romans 13, 2023 (thegospelcoalition.org/article/applying-romans-13-around-world)

Kevin DeYoung: God and Government (thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/god-and-government/)

Jo Evans: When to start a rebellion (politicsnetwork.uk/think/when-to-start-a-rebellion-submitting-to-government)

Logos' Guide to political theology (logos.com/grow/political-theology-guide)

UCCF: God in the System (politicsnetwork.uk/live/god-in-the-system-parliament)

David Platt: God, Government, and the Gospel videos (radical.net/secret_church/secret-church-20-god-government-and-the-gospel/)

UCCF Politics Network: Pursuing gospel driven politics talks (politicsnetwork.uk/think)

Luke Bretherton: Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness, 2011

Eugene Cho: Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics, 2020

Mark Dever: God and politics, 2016

James K.A. Smith: Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology, 2017

Nick Spencer and Jonathan Chaplin: God and Government, 2009

John Stott: Issues facing Christians today, 2022

JOHN 18:36-37
"Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.' 'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'"

ACTS 4:19-20
"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

ACTS 5:29
"Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than human beings!'"

ROMANS 13:1
"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."

ROMANS 13:6-7
"This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour."

ROMANS 16:23
"Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings."

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-2
"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

1 PETER 2:13-14
"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right."

1 PETER 2:17
"Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor."

Quotes

"The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government."
THOMAS JEFFERSON, Former U.S. President

"Here is my first principle of foreign policy: good government at home."
WILLIAM GLADSTONE, former Prime Minister

"I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments..."
LORD BYRON, Poet

"The proper function of a government is to make it easy for the people to do good, and difficult for them to do evil."
DANIEL WEBSTER, nineteenth-century American politician

"The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help."
RONALD REAGAN, Former U.S. President

"Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."
WINSTON CHURCHILL, former Prime Minister

"The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all."
G.K. CHESTERTON, Author and apologist

"Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice."
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., Civil rights activist and minister

"The Church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool."
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., Civil rights activist and minister

"We fear God, we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates."
EDMUND BURKE, Philosopher and politician

"A private religion of personal salvation that did not challenge the public ideology was perfectly safe under Roman law, as it is safe under ours... But the authentic gospel cannot accept this kind of relegation. The sovereign rule of God requires that the state acknowledge its responsibility to reflect in all its ordering of society the justice of God"
LESSLIE NEWBIGIN, British theologian and missionary

"Christianity has not, and does not profess to have, a detailed political programme for applying 'Do as you would be done by' to a particular society at a particular moment. It could not have. It is meant for all men at all times and the particular programme which suited one place or time would not suit another. And, anyhow, that is not how Christianity works. When it tells you to feed the hungry it does not give you lessons in cookery."
C.S. LEWIS, Scholar and author

"Most of us are not really approaching the subject [of politics] in order to find out what Christianity says: we are approaching it in the hope of finding support from Christianity for the views of our own party. We are looking for an ally where we are offered either a Master or—a Judge."
C.S. LEWIS, Scholar and author

"The whole system of my politics is summed up in this one verse, 'The Lord reigns! Let the nations tremble!'"
JOHN NEWTON, Minister and abolitionist

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"
ABRAHAM KUYPER, Dutch theologian and politician

"I often hear it said, 'Do not bring religion into politics.' This is precisely where it ought to be brought and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick! I would have the Cabinet and the Members of Parliament do the work of the nation as before the Lord and I would have the nation, either in making war or peace, consider the matter by the light of righteousness."
CHARLES SPURGEON, Baptist preacher

Key Stats

Parliament in the UK

- The House of Commons first met in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey in 1352
- The number of seats in the House of Commons has varied between 630 and 707 over the years since 1832. There are currently 650 seats, with one MP for each constituency in the UK.
- Women have been able to stand for election as MPs since 1918. The first woman to be elected as an MP was Constance Markievicz who was elected for Sinn Féin in December 1918. In accordance with her party's policy, she did not take her seat. The first female MP to sit in the Commons was Nancy Astor in 1919.
- The House of Lords consists of 838 Peers of which 26 are Bishops or Archbishops.
- The UK has had 59 Prime Ministers since Sir Robert Walpole in 1721. There have been seven Prime Ministers since the Brexit vote in 2016.
- Around 2,000 people work in the House of Commons, and over 400 in the House of Lords. Over 3,000 people work for MPs and 560 staff work for Peers.

Parliament's work

- The House of Commons meets on Mondays to Thursdays, and some Fridays, when Parliament is in session, allowing some time for MPs to be in their constituencies. The Commons sometimes sits past midnight, but it is rare for a sitting to last more than 24 hours. This has only happened 18 times since 1900, with the longest sitting lasting over 34 hours.
- In non-election years, the Commons has sat on average for 179 days in each session since World War II.
- The number of written questions answered each day in Parliament has been increasing,

from 205 in 1991 to 331 in 2012. The greatest number was 457 in 2006.

- The number of Acts passed by Parliament has been slowly decreasing from 98 in 1964 to 23 in 2012. However, the combined lengths of the acts increased from 1,340 pages in 1965 to 2,630 pages in 2010.
- Just under 32,000 petitions were started in the 2015 Parliament, and about two-thirds were rejected. 480 received a Government response and 56 were debated in the House of Commons. The petition attracting the highest support gained more that 4 million signatures.

Trust in government

- 45% of people say they 'almost never' trust governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party. This dropped to 23% during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 58% of the public say they 'almost never' trust 'politicians of any party in Britain to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner', up from 39% during the pandemic.
- 79% of people in the UK say the system of governing Britain could be improved 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal'.

Stories

Government does not always work well and there have been high profile examples of where the government has failed. The Poll Tax under Margaret Thatcher's government led to public unrest and eventually to her downfall as Prime Minister, the Windrush scandal where people were wrongfully detained or deported, and Kwasi Kwarteng's 'mini budget' in 2022 which led to market turmoil and the resignation of Liz Truss as Prime Minister after only 49 days. Politicians of all parties make mistakes and need the prayers and influence of Christians to ensure good government.

The Online Safety Act is an example of effective Christian influence in government. CARE campaigned for a decade for age verification laws when it comes to online pornography. It was almost implemented in 2017 with the Digital Economy Act, only for that to be abandoned. CARE persevered with briefings, meetings, letters, polling, and partnerships with other like-minded organisations. This led to age verification being implemented in the Online Safety Act which passed in 2023. Since then there have been further successes by God's grace, with greater parity in laws governing offline and online pornography, and still more to do to ensure laws are strengthened and enforced.

The Morrow Bill in Northern Ireland made it illegal to pay for sexual services, another area that CARE has campaigned for. This change in the law shifts the criminality from the victim to the perpetrator, and allows for greater support for victims of exploitation. This is an example of the way governments can change laws to protect the vulnerable and promote the dignity of people made in the image of God. CARE continues to work for this model to be applied to the rest of the UK. We hope and pray that it will enable more women to exit prostitution and reduce the demand for human trafficking, obeying God's command to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Other examples of good government that improves people's lives are: The Modern Slavery Act passed in 2015 and introduced by Theresa May when she was Home Secretary, which enhanced modern slavery laws and protection for victims of trafficking; introducing a National Minimum Wage, which set a baseline for pay and enabled many people to avoid extreme poverty; and, many projects implemented by local government helping people in need.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an example of a Christian who resisted government from Christian principles. Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran minister in Germany at the rise of the Nazi party in the 1930s. He spoke out against Hitler's government as one of the earliest critics of the regime. He said that the National Socialist government was illegitimate and should be opposed on Christian grounds. He wrote in an influential essay that the church should hold the state responsible for its actions, and help its victims, whatever their faith. He also argued that Christians should "not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself." Bonhoeffer was arrested for his opposition and imprisoned. He was executed in April 1945, just days before the end of the war.

Pastoral Issues

Someone who is disillusioned with government

- We need to remember that government is not God, and governments will get things wrong. Politicians are imperfect human beings and will make mistakes. We should be sad but not be surprised when this happens, and it should spur us on to pray for those in government.
- The news focuses on the 'bad' politicians but the majority of politicians of every party are genuine public servants who want to work for good. Even when we disagree with their party or policies, we should not demonise them.
- The best way to combat disillusionment with government is to get involved with politics! If you feel that politicians are not representing you, or speaking about the issues that are important, it might be God calling you to speak out. Use your vote, write to your MP, sign a petition, or even serve in local or national government.

Someone who thinks the church shouldn't speak about political issues

- Politics is the way in which we live together as human beings who often disagree with one another. We cannot avoid politics when we live alongside others.
- The Bible speaks to all of our lives, including how we do politics. Christians need to understand how Scripture shapes their thinking on policy issues, attitude toward government, and voting intentions.
- Churches do not need to be telling people who to vote for from the pulpit. But churches can give Christians confidence to engage politically as followers of Jesus, and prayerfully use their political voice.

Someone thinking of joining a protest

- As Christians we should submit to, and obey, governments and authorities, so we should avoid joining protests without good reason.
- The government is accountable to God and where it enacts laws or policies that go against Scripture, it is right to speak up.
- Protests can be necessary ways to make governments listen, and some policies have changed as a result of peaceful demonstrations.
- Ask yourself what your motivation is: Is it to complain and enjoy making a nuisance? If so, this is unlikely to be a godly rationale for protest! If you feel that good and effective change can come from it, and you are not going to be caught up in ungodly actions, such as violence, then it could be helpful to participate.