



# Christians and the Public Square (NextSunday Studies)

*Lee Canipe, Brett Younger*

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Like it or not, it's election time again in the United States, which means partisan passions are probably already running hot, sometimes to the point of boiling over into angry arguments. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune to this reality. Our church rolls contain Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, as well as members of other political parties. All of these folks love Jesus. They also love their country and have opinions about how it ought to be run. Not surprisingly, these folks don't always agree with each other. Our political differences, however, must never be allowed to trump our Christian fellowship. Politics and faith are tricky areas for Christians to negotiate. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees religious freedom for all Americans. Some have argued through the years this means, in part, that people of faith must keep their religious convictions to themselves when participating in public discourse. Such a position not only ignores the rich history of religiously inspired reform in this country (such as the movements *against* slavery and, a century later, *for* civil rights), it also results in what Richard John Neuhaus once described as a "naked public square," a morally and intellectually impoverished culture stripped bare of all religious influence. The truth is that Christians are neither called by God to be silent in the public square, nor does the law prohibit us from speaking up and speaking out as guided by the Holy Spirit. Yet still, as Christians who are also citizens, questions abound: How do we know when to speak and when to be quiet? How do we distinguish between faithful and unfaithful forms of civic engagement? How do we give Caesar his due while giving our all to God? God's people have long wrestled with these issues. Fortunately, they've left a record of both their questions and their answers. With the Bible as our guide, then, let's plunge ahead into the often-contested public square as citizens and as Christians seeking to do what is good and right in the name of Jesus Christ.

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