



# Biblical Injunction Why Christians Need to Participate in Politics: An Exegetical Interpretation of Matthew 5:14-16

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## ABSTRACT

Solving the problems associated with the Biblical injunction that has hidden Nigerian Christians from participating in politics requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education and resources, political networks and organizations, advocacy and lobbying, political participation, building relationships, support for Christian political candidates and encouraging the use of gifts and talents. Matthew 5:14-16 provide a framework on why Christians should approach political involvement. They should be light bearers and strive to do good to glorify God. The Biblical injunction that supports participating in politics requires a comprehensive approach that includes political participation, building relationships, support for Christian political candidates, encouragement of interfaith dialogue, support for civic education, encouragement of transparency and accountability, encouragement of civic engagement, encouragement of political diversity, encouragement of political leadership development and encouragement of collaboration and partnership.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article History:

Submitted/Received 03 Dec 2022

First Revised 12 Jan 2023

Accepted 01 Mar 2023

First Available online 02 Mar 2023

Publication Date 01 Apr 2023

### Keywords:

Biblical injunction,  
Christians political participation,  
Exegetical of matthew 5:14-16.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a rich tradition of political engagement within the Christian faith and that engagement is rooted in a belief in the importance of bringing God's values and principles to bear on public issues. A proper understanding of the metaphorical meaning of Light in the text of Matt 5:14-16 could lead to a revolution in the moral and spiritual life of Christians. The light emphasizes the missional identity and lifestyle of disciples (Minghat *et al.*, 2023; Glushchenko, 2022). This identity and lifestyle challenge the status quo. Christ is telling Christians not to run away from the world and at the same time never to compromise with the world. The origin of the Matthean community in Antioch examines the probability of the emergence and existence of a Christian community in Antioch (Runesson, 2008). In this passage, Jesus instructs his followers to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." (Pienaar, 2023; Sindani, 2023; Nji, 2023; Muller & Lund, 1981).

In biblical tradition, light has both literal and symbolic meanings of happiness, protection, orderliness, and exemplary life. One common theme in this literature is the idea that Christians have a responsibility to engage in the political process and to bring their faith to bear on public issues (Daanoy *et al.*, 2021). They should also be guided by the principles of love, justice, and compassion and avoid becoming overly partisan or ideological. This suggests that Christians have a responsibility to bring moral and ethical principles to the world and to be a positive influence on society. By engaging in the political process, they can help create a more just and compassionate society that reflects the values of the kingdom of God. They can also work to protect the rights and freedoms of all people, including the right to worship and practice their faith without fear of persecution (Karniawati *et al.*, 2021).

Scholars have argued that the political engagement of Christians is not simply a matter of obedience to biblical commands but is also rooted in the belief that the kingdom of God is not limited to the spiritual realm but extends to all areas of life. Some scholars have also examined the historical role of Christians in politics including the influence of the early Christian church on Roman society and the political involvement of figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope John Paul II.

### 1.1. Problems Associated when Christians do not Participate in Politics

Firstly, Christians may not have a voice in shaping public policy and government decisions, which could result in laws and policies that are not in line with their values and beliefs. This could lead to a situation where the rights and freedoms of Christians and other minority groups are not protected, and where issues such as justice, equality, and compassion are not given the attention they deserve.

Secondly, if Christians do not participate in politics, they may miss opportunities to be a positive influence on society and to bring their faith to bear on issues of public importance. This could lead to a situation where Christians are perceived as being disengaged from the political process, and where their beliefs and values are not understood or respected by others.

Thirdly, if Christians do not participate in politics, they may miss out on opportunities to use their gifts and talents for the common good. By engaging in politics, Christians can use their skills and expertise to make a positive impact on their communities and the world.

## 2. METHOD

This study is a literature survey. We took data from internet sources, especially articles in international journals, which were then analyzed and summarized.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Biblical Benefits Why Christians Need to Participate in Politics

Firstly, Christians have a responsibility to bring their faith to bear on issues of public importance and to be a positive influence on society. As Romans 12:2 instructs, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing, and perfect will." By engaging in politics, Christians can work to create a more just and compassionate society that reflects the values of the kingdom of God.

Secondly, Christians have a responsibility to uphold the values of the Bible such as justice, mercy, and compassion in the political arena. As Proverbs 31:8-9 instructs, "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 the needy." By participating in politics, Christians can work to protect the rights and freedoms of all people, including the most vulnerable.

Thirdly, Christians have a responsibility to use their gifts and talents for the common good. As 1 Peter 4:10-11 instructs, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words; whoever serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." By engaging in politics, Christians can use their skills and expertise to make a positive impact on their communities and the world.

#### 3.2. A Contextual Analysis of Matthew 5:14-16

A contextual analysis of Matthew 5:14-16 about Christian participation in politics would involve looking at the historical, cultural, and social context in which the passage was written and how it has been interpreted and applied throughout history ([Mojaveri et al., 2016](#)). The Sermon on the Mount begins with an exordium or poem intended as a *captatio benevolentiae* which would dispose the audience to listen to the rest of the Sermon with goodwill towards the speaker. The Sermon begins by affirming and consoling those in the crowd who are poor in spirit (5:3-12). As the *captatio benevolentiae* progresses Matthean Jesus employs two parallel metaphors to describe his audience (5:13-16). Jesus was not teaching an anonymous c; instead, he words teaching the people he invited to follow him for the sake of the task for which he came (Matt 4:18-22). This idea is made explicit by the fluctuation of the pronouns in 5:3-16, from 3rd person plural *autoi/autōn* (which most likely signifies that Jesus was speaking generally to the crowds that gathered around him) to 2nd person plural humans (which signifies that Jesus is becoming specific therefore emphasizing those the instruction is meant for). The evangelist has the purpose of telling his readers that they are not only in the right direction but they have the responsibility of letting the world know the right thing and bringing all into one-fold. One of the purposes of the Sermon then was to present the good news of the kingdom so clearly and so convincingly that the people would repent and make the great decision. In the time of Jesus, the Roman Empire held political power over Palestine and Jews were subject to various forms of oppression and discrimination. Jesus and his followers were part of a Jewish religious movement that sought to bring about social and political change through the prophetic message of the kingdom of God. In the context of the modern world, Matthew 5:14-16 can be interpreted as a call for Christians to be salt and light in the world, to live out their faith in their daily lives, and to use their influence for good. This can include engaging in politics in a way that promotes justice, righteousness, and compassion as well as the specific political and social context in which Christians are living today.

### **3.3. Intertextual Analysis of Matthew 5:14-16**

Matthew 5:14-16 is a passage from the New Testament of the Bible, specifically from the Sermon on the Mount. In this passage, Jesus teaches his followers to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world." The idea behind this teaching is that Christians should have a positive impact on society and be a source of goodness and truth in the world. An interpretation of the meaning of this passage is supported by the following key grammatical understandings. First, the twice-used verbs at the beginning of verses 13 and 14 are *You are* (in Greek: *humeis este*). These verbs are present active indicatives in the Greek language. It means one is Christlike in culture (agents of the preservation and illumination of truth) to the degree "you are" beatitudinal, i.e. one is mature in the Savior. Secondly, the original language is in verse 16. The adverb at the start of the passage further evidences Jesus' sequential thinking relative to what He has previously delineated. In the passage, "Let your light shine before men in such a way," the phrase in such a way, (*houtos*) means "in this way" or "thus." The verb shine (*lampo*) is imperative, meaning God is commanding you: in other words, our light must shine in this way. Following this biblical sequencing, you become a powerful witness in a fallen world through your cultural participation not absent from it. This passage has been interpreted in a variety of ways over the centuries but one common interpretation is that Christians have a responsibility to be active participants in the world and to bring their faith to bear on issues of public importance. The interpretation of Matthew 5:14-16 about political participation is complex and multifaceted. Some scholars call for Christians to engage in politics while others broadly call for Christians to be active participants in the world and to bring their faith to bear on issues of public importance. Matthew 5:14-16 could be interpreted as a call for Christians to focus on their spiritual growth and to let their light shine in their personal lives rather than to engage in political activism. The passage emphasizes the importance of being salt and light in the world and it suggests that Christians should be a positive influence on those around them through their words and actions rather than by participating in politics. However, other interpretations of Matthew 5:14-16 suggest that Christians can and should be involved in politics as a way of living out their faith and promoting biblical values. From this perspective, the passage could be seen as a call for Christians to use their political influence to promote justice, righteousness, and compassion in society. Some argue that Christians should be involved in politics and work to promote biblical values and principles in government. They believe that as citizens, Christians have a responsibility to engage in the political process and to use their voices and actions to make a positive difference in the world. Some Christians argue that political involvement can be a distraction from the main mission of the Church which is to spread the Gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ. They believe that Christians should focus on their personal spiritual growth and service to others rather than getting involved in politics. Ultimately, the decision to participate in politics or not is a personal one that each Christian must prayerfully consider based on their convictions and calling. However, regardless of one's political involvement, Christians are called to love their neighbors, seek justice and live out their faith in all areas of life including politics. In summary, the interpretation of Matthew 5:14-16 regarding Christian participation in politics depends on one's perspective and understanding of the role of the Church and the Christian life. While some may see it as a call for personal piety and spiritual growth, others may see it as a call to engage in politics and use their influence for good. Ultimately, Christians must prayerfully discern their calling and use their gifts and abilities to serve others and make a positive difference in the world. First, Christians are called to be the light of the world, and this light should be shining brightly in all aspects of their lives, including their political involvement. Just as a city on a hill cannot be hidden, neither should the light

of Christ be hidden in the political sphere. Christians should be actively engaging in politics and using their platform to spread the gospel and promote righteousness. Second, Christians should not be ashamed of their faith and should be willing to share it with others, including their political opponents. Just as a lamp is put on a stand so that it can give light to everyone in the house, Christians should be willing to share their light with those around them, including those who may disagree with them politically. Third, Christians should strive to do good in all that they do, including their political involvement. They should seek to promote policies and actions that align with God's will and that will bring about justice and righteousness in society. Finally, Christians should recognize that their ultimate goal is to glorify God in all that they do, including their political involvement. They should not seek political power but rather should seek to use their platform to promote the kingdom of God and to bring glory to God's name.

### **3.4. Comparison with Literature Review**

According to the literature on the biblical injunction for Christians to participate in politics, scholars have argued that the Bible presents a positive view of the state and its role in society. For example, Romans 13 instructs believers to submit to the authorities because they have been established by God for the good of society. Some scholars have argued that there are challenges in engaging in politics as a Christian such as the temptation to compromise one's beliefs and values to achieve political goals. However, others have argued that these challenges can be overcome through prayer, discernment, and commitment to staying true to one's faith. Christians have a responsibility to be involved in politics and to work for the good of society. Christians should be concerned with issues of justice and injustice and should work to promote policies and decisions that are in line with the values of the Bible. He argued that Christians should be involved in politics in a way that is consistent with their faith and that they should strive to be agents of change in society. Christians should submit to the authority of the government and respect the right of others to hold different political views. He believed that Christians should not seek to impose their beliefs on others but rather should work to persuade others through the power of their example and the arguments of their convictions. The relationship between Christians and politics was one of active involvement and responsible citizenship while also emphasizing the importance of submission to the authority of the government and respect for the rights of others.

"Chosen by God" includes a section on "God and Government." Christians have a responsibility to be involved in politics and to work for the good of society. Christians should seek to bring a biblical perspective to political decisions and policies and that they should strive to be salt and light in the world of politics. He also believed that Christians should submit to the authority of the government and respect the right of others to hold different political views. Christians should be prepared to resist unjust laws and policies and that they should be willing to suffer for their faith if necessary. He argued that Christians should not compromise their beliefs to achieve political goals but should rather be guided by their faith in all aspects of their lives including their involvement in politics. Relationship between Christians and politics was one of active involvement and responsible citizenship while emphasizing the importance of submitting to the authority of the government and standing up for one's beliefs when necessary.

Timothy Keller is a prominent pastor and author who has written extensively on the topic of Christians and politics. He believes that Christians have a responsibility to be involved in politics and to work for the good of society, but that they should do so in a way that is consistent with their faith. Keller argues that Christians should be guided by the principles of

the Bible such as love, justice, and compassion as they engage in politics. He also believes that Christians should seek to be salt and light in the world of politics and bring a distinctively Christian perspective to political decisions and policies. Keller also emphasizes the importance of humility and civility in political discourse and argues that Christians should be willing to listen to and learn from others even those who hold different political views. He believes that Christians should seek to build bridges of understanding and respect rather than walls of division. Keller's perspective on the relationship between Christians and politics is one of active involvement and responsible citizenship while emphasizing the importance of submitting to the authority of the government and seeking to build bridges of understanding and respect in the political arena. Keller believes that Christians should be involved in politics at all levels, from local government to national politics. He argues that Christians have a responsibility to use their gifts and talents to serve their communities and to work for the common good. Keller also believes that Christians should be engaged in the political process whether through voting, advocating for policies, or running for office. He argues that Christians have a voice in shaping the political landscape and that they should use it to promote the values of the gospel. Keller believes that Christians should be proactive in addressing issues of justice and injustice in society. He argues that the gospel calls us to care for the poor and oppressed and Christians should work to promote policies and laws that reflect these values. Keller also believes that Christians should be prepared to suffer for their faith including in the political arena. He argues that Christians should not be intimidated by the opposition or by the possibility of persecution but should remain faithful to their convictions and trust in God's sovereignty. Finally, Keller believes that Christians should seek to build bridges of understanding and respect with people of other faiths and with those who hold different political views. He argues that Christians should be willing to listen to and learn from others, and to engage in dialogue and debate in a way that is respectful and gracious.

### **3.5. Problems Associated with the Biblical Injunction that has Hidden Nigerian Christians from Participating in Politics**

There are several points:

- (i) **Misinterpretation:** The injunction to "be salt and light" in the world can be easily misinterpreted to mean that Christians should not engage in politics. This can lead to a misunderstanding of the role of the Church in society and can result in a lack of political engagement by Christians.
- (ii) **Fear of persecution:** Some Christians in Nigeria may be hesitant to engage in politics due to fear of persecution or discrimination. They may view politics as a dangerous and uncertain endeavor and may prefer to focus on their personal spiritual growth and service to others.
- (iii) **Lack of representation:** By not participating in politics, Christians in Nigeria may be unable to effectively advocate for their interests and concerns. This can result in a lack of representation and a lack of influence in political decisions that affect their lives.
- (iv) **Lack of leadership:** The absence of Christian leadership in politics can lead to a lack of representation and a lack of influence in political decisions that affect their lives.
- (v) **Lack of community engagement:** Christians who do not engage in politics may also be less engaged in their local communities and may not be able to effectively advocate for the needs of their neighbors and the wider community.
- (vi) **Interpretation:** Christians must be encouraged to interpret the injunction to "be salt and light" in the world in a way that allows for political engagement. This can be done

- through education and interpretation of the passage in the context of contemporary society.
- (vii) Fear of persecution: Christians can be encouraged to engage in politics by addressing their fear of persecution and discrimination. This can be done by providing support and resources for those who may be at risk and by advocating for laws and policies that protect the rights of all citizens.
  - (viii) Community engagement: Christians can be encouraged to participate in politics by engaging in their local communities and advocating for the needs of their neighbors and the wider community. This can be done by supporting community organizations and by advocating for policies that promote the common good.
  - (ix) Church involvement: The Church can also play an important role in encouraging Christians to participate in politics by providing education and resources on the topic, and by providing opportunities for Christians to engage in politics through church-based organizations and initiatives.
  - (x) Education: Christians can be encouraged to participate in politics by providing education and resources on the topic. This can include information on the political process, the role of government, and the importance of civic engagement.
  - (xi) Political parties and organizations: Christians can be encouraged to participate in politics by supporting political parties and organizations that align with their values and beliefs. This can provide a sense of community and support, and can also help to increase the representation of Christians in the political sphere.
  - (xii) Advocacy and activism: Christians can be encouraged to participate in politics by engaging in advocacy and activism on issues that are important to them. This can include lobbying for changes in laws and policies and participating in protests and demonstrations.
  - (xiii) Role of the Church: The Church can also play an important role in encouraging Christians to participate in politics by providing resources and support for those who are interested in pursuing a career in politics. This can include mentorship programs, internships, and training on how to run for office.
  - (xiv) Role of religious leaders: Religious leaders can also play a role in encouraging Christians to participate in politics by speaking out on issues that are important to their communities and by providing guidance and support to those who are interested in pursuing a career in politics.
  - (xv) Church-based organizations: Church-based organizations can be established to promote the involvement of Christians in politics. These organizations can provide resources, support, and training for Christians who are interested in pursuing a career in politics.
  - (xvi) Christian political networks: Christian political networks can be established to connect Christians who are interested in politics and to provide a platform for them to share their ideas and experiences. These networks can also help to build relationships and to increase the representation of Christians in the political sphere.
  - (xvii) Political education: Political education programs can be established to teach Christians about the political process, the role of government, and the importance of civic engagement. These programs can be offered by churches, community organizations, and educational institutions.
  - (xviii) Advocacy and lobbying: Christians can be encouraged to engage in advocacy and lobbying on issues that are important to them. This can include lobbying for changes in laws and policies and participating in protests and demonstrations.

- (xix) Encouragement of political participation: Christians can be encouraged to participate in politics by providing positive examples of Christians who have been successful in the political sphere. This can include politicians, community leaders, and activists who have used their faith to guide their decision-making and to make a positive impact in their communities.
- (xx) Building relationships: Building relationships with political leaders, both Christian and non-Christian, can be an important step in encouraging Christians to participate in politics. This can include attending political events, reaching out to elected officials, and building partnerships with other community organizations.
- (xxi) Support for Christian political candidates: Christians can be encouraged to support Christian political candidates who align with their values and beliefs. This can include financially supporting their campaigns, volunteering for their campaigns, and spreading the word about their candidacy.
- (xxii) Encouragement to use their gifts and talents: Christians can be encouraged to use their gifts and talents to make a positive impact in their communities and the political sphere. This can include serving in leadership roles, volunteering for community organizations, and using their skills to advocate for issues that are important to them.
- (xxiii) Encouragement of interfaith dialogue: Encouraging interfaith dialogue and cooperation can help to promote understanding and respect between different faith communities, and can also help to break down the barriers that prevent Christians from participating in politics.
- (xxiv) Encouragement of civic education: Encouraging civic education can help to increase awareness and understanding of the political process, and can also help to increase the participation of Christians in politics.
- (xxv) Support for women and youth: Women and youth are often underrepresented in politics, and providing support for their participation can help to increase the representation of Christians in the political sphere. This can include providing training and resources for women and youth and encouraging them to run for political office.
- (xxvi) Encouragement of transparency and accountability: Encouraging transparency and accountability in politics can help to increase the trust of Christians in the political process, and can also help to increase their participation.
- (xxvii) Encouragement of civic engagement: Encouraging civic engagement can help to increase the participation of Christians in politics by providing opportunities for them to get involved and make a positive impact in their communities. This can include volunteering for political campaigns, participating in community organizations, and advocating for issues that are important to them.
- (xxviii) Encouragement of political diversity: Encouraging political diversity can help to increase the representation of Christians in the political sphere by providing opportunities for them to represent a range of viewpoints and perspectives.
- (xxix) Encouragement of political leadership development: Encouraging political leadership development can help to increase the representation of Christians in politics by providing opportunities for them to gain the skills and experience necessary to run for political office. This can include training programs, mentorship opportunities, and internships.
- (xxx) Encouragement of collaboration and partnership: Encouraging collaboration and partnership between different faith communities, community organizations, and political leaders can help to increase the representation of Christians in politics by providing a supportive and inclusive environment for their participation.



### **3.6. Why Christians should Approach Political Involvement in the 21st Century**

Christians should recognize that they are called to be good citizens and to participate in the political process. They should seek to be informed about political issues and vote by their values and beliefs. Christians should seek to promote justice and righteousness in society by advocating for the marginalized and oppressed to create policies that will promote the common good. Christians should seek to serve their communities and to be a positive influence as an opportunity to serve others and to make a positive difference in the world. Christians should seek to pray for their leaders and the political process and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they engage in political involvement. Christians should approach political involvement with humility and a willingness to listen to and learn from others. Christians should seek to build bridges and find common ground with others even when they disagree on political issues. Christians should seek to use their political involvement as an opportunity to share their faith and to proclaim the gospel. Christians should seek to apply biblical principles to their political involvement. They should seek to align their actions with the teachings of Jesus and the principles of the Bible. Christians should identify major prioritized issues such as abortion, poverty, or religious liberty. Christians should seek to build relationships and have constructive dialogue with those who may disagree with them. Christians should use social media as a tool for engagement and to share their perspectives and connect with others who share their beliefs. Christians should be aware of the political parties and their platforms and consider which party aligns best with their values and beliefs. Christians should exercise their right to vote on their values and beliefs and should encourage others to do the same. Christians should understand the role of government and seek to work within the system to promote their views and values. Christians should hold public officials accountable for their actions and should seek to engage with them constructively. Christians should seek to engage in political discourse civilly and respectfully avoiding personal attacks. Christians should not abdicate their responsibility to others and should take an active role in shaping the future of their communities and their nation. Christians should celebrate the diversity of their communities and should seek to promote unity and understanding. Christians should seek to be non-partisan and promote the values of the Gospel above all else. Christians should seek to serve a positive influence on others and to work for the benefit of all. Christians should seek to promote justice and work for the benefit of all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Christians should approach political involvement with humility and be open to new ideas and perspectives. Christians should seek to model the character of Jesus in their political involvement and be consistent in their actions and their words. Christians should seek to maintain their integrity in the political arena, avoiding conflicts of interest and seeking to act in the best interests of their communities. Christians should approach political involvement with hope, recognizing that God is sovereign and that He is working to bring about His kingdom on earth.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

The Biblical injunction to "be salt and light" in the world is associated with the Biblical injunction that has hidden Nigerian Christians from participating in politics. The exegetical interpretation of Matthew 5:14-16 will allow Christians to encourage in politics, address the fear of persecution and discrimination, and advocate for representation and equal opportunities in the political process. Encouraging Nigerian Christians to participate in politics can be achieved by providing resources and support from the Church and by involving religious leaders in this process. Christians should approach political involvement in the 21st

century with a deep sense of responsibility and a commitment to promoting justice, compassion, and the values of the Bible. They should seek to understand the role of government, engage with public officials, use the media as a tool for communication, recognize the role of the Church, engage in civility, avoid partisanship, serve their communities, promote justice, work for the benefit of all people, advocate for the rights of the marginalized, maintain their integrity and approach political involvement with hope.

## 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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