THE CHURCH & THE STATE

What separation really means—and what it does not mean.

THE SHORT ANSWER

The First Amendment protects the church from government control and protects people of faith from government interference. It does not require Christians—or pastors—to leave biblical convictions at the church door when discussing the public issues those convictions address.

A phrase often used today is "separation of church and state." The phrase can be helpful when it means that government should not establish, control, or coerce religion. It becomes misleading when it is used to suggest that Christians must be silent about public life or that faith has no legitimate place in the public square.

WHAT THE CONSTITUTION ACTUALLY SAYS

The First Amendment says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These two protections work together: government may not establish or compel religion, and government may not prohibit its free exercise. The constitutional principle is religious liberty—not the removal of religious conviction from public life.

WHAT IT DOES MEAN

- Government cannot establish an official religion.
- Government cannot force people to worship or adopt a creed.
- People of faith retain the right to speak, assemble, worship, vote, petition, and participate in civic life.
- Churches retain religious autonomy within constitutional and applicable legal limits.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- Christians must not discuss public issues.
- Pastors must avoid topics that have political consequences.
- Biblical convictions become "political" simply because lawmakers are debating them.
- Government owns the public square while religion is confined to private worship.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights…"

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776

FAITH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

When public questions touch biblical truth, the church does not have to go silent.

FROM THEOLOGICAL TRUTH TO PUBLIC POLICY

Many issues are both theological and political. Politics asks how a community will order public life; theology asks what is true, good, just, and consistent with God's revealed will. When a law touches life, marriage, family, human dignity, justice, education, stewardship, or religious liberty, Christians do not suddenly stop having biblical convictions because the question has entered the political process.

1

THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO SEEK THE GOOD OF ITS CITY

Jeremiah 29:7 calls God's people to seek the welfare of the city where they live. Scripture repeatedly connects faithful discipleship with justice, mercy, stewardship, care for neighbors, and prayer for those in authority. Civic engagement can therefore be an outflow of Christian love—not a substitute for the Gospel.

2

THE CHURCH MUST SPEAK WITH BIBLICAL CLARITY

The church's authority is not a political party, candidate, or government program. Its authority is Scripture. Pastors should teach biblical principles and help believers think carefully about how those principles apply to the world around them. The goal is not to baptize a political platform; it is to form faithful Christians

3

THE CHURCH SHOULD NOT FEAR THE WORD "POLITICAL"

A policy debate can be political without being merely political. The fact that an issue is debated by elected officials does not erase its moral or theological roots. Christians can address public questions while refusing partisan hostility, remembering that every person—including political opponents—is made in the image of God.

A BIBLICAL POSTURE

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you… and pray to the Lord on its behalf." — Jeremiah 29:7

"I exhort…that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made…for kings and all who are in high positions." — 1 Timothy 2:1–2

THE BALANCE

Not a campaign office. Not a silent church.

The church should proclaim Christ, teach Scripture, love neighbors, pray for leaders, and equip believers to live out biblical convictions in the communities God has entrusted to them

WHAT CAN A CHURCH DO?

A practical framework for faithful, wise, and lawful civic engagement.

FIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH CONVICTION AND CLARITY

1	TEACH	Teach what Scripture says about truth, human dignity, justice, authority, family, life, stewardship, and loving our neighbors.
2	CONNECT	Help the congregation understand how biblical principles intersect with real decisions facing their families, communities, and state.
3	PRAY	Pray for leaders and those in authority—even when you disagree with them. Ask God for wisdom, justice, courage, humility, and peace.
4	PARTICIPATE	Encourage lawful civic participation: voting, attending public meetings, contacting elected officials, serving the community, and engaging respectfully.
5	MODEL	Model public discourse that is truthful, charitable, courageous, and free from contempt. Our witness matters as much as our position.

THE GOAL IS FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Christians are not called to withdraw from the world, nor to confuse the Kingdom of God with any earthly political movement. We are called to be faithful—proclaiming the Gospel, loving our neighbors, seeking the welfare of our communities, and bringing biblical truth to every area of life God has entrusted to us.

Sources: U.S. Constitution, First Amendment; National Archives, Declaration of Independence; Congress.gov, Constitution Annotated; IRS guidance on political campaign intervention and lobbying. Educational resource—not legal advice.