

B

The biblical basis for advocacy

Part B starts with a debate on whether Christians should be involved in advocacy. It considers God working out his purpose for the world through the coming of his Kingdom, and the mission of the church within this. Advocacy is explored as part of this mission, along with objections that people may raise and challenges facing the church's involvement. The next section looks at Jesus' approach to power, and then the role of the government and the role of law. Part B ends by considering the options open to Christians to engage with power.

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Should Christians be involved in advocacy work?

Description This section will help participants make connections between the role of Christians and advocacy.

Learning objectives By the end of the section, participants will:

- be aware of the reasons for and against Christian involvement in advocacy work
- be clearer about their own views about when advocacy is appropriate.

Links This theme will be covered in more detail in SECTION B2 (The mission of the church) and SECTION B3 (Jesus the advocate).

EXERCISE 20 **Debate**



Aim To debate reasons for and against Christian involvement in advocacy work.

Methods Debate and discussion

Handout Reasons given against church involvement in advocacy work (SECTION B2)

This debate should occur before the other sections in Part B are studied so that participants use their own experiences and views, rather than simply repeating those they have just heard. People will approach this debate with many different experiences and perspectives. It is important that no experiences are ignored and that all sides of the argument are heard.

B1

Should Christians be involved in advocacy?

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT UNDERSTANDING ADVOCACY

Key points

- The debate can either be broad, considering both involvement in advocacy work by the church as an institution and by individual Christians, or it can be narrowed down to one of these.
- Select two or three people to speak in support of involvement in advocacy work and two or three people to speak against it. It works better if the people selected really believe in what they are arguing for. Debaters need to put their side of the argument forward, and answer the arguments from the other side. Point out that debaters should respect each other at all times, and not accuse or judge each other. We need to listen carefully to fellow Christians who do not think advocacy is a good idea, and try to persuade them. How we do advocacy work is as important as the arguments we put forward.
- Leave some time at the end for questions or additional comments from the audience.
- It is important to have a chairperson and a timekeeper!
- An exercise for addressing the arguments that come out of the debate in more depth is suggested in SECTION B2 (EXERCISE 22).

The mission of the church

Description This section looks at God’s purpose for his world and how it is worked out through the coming of the Kingdom of God. It considers the role of the church in God’s plan. It then helps participants to look at the church in their own context and consider the challenges they face, reasons for lack of involvement in advocacy work, and common objections to church involvement. It provides some examples of advocacy work and a foundation for understanding the biblical basis for involvement.

Learning objectives

By the end of the section, participants will:

- understand that advocacy is an integral part of the church’s mission
- understand God’s heart for justice
- be able to respond to objections to church involvement in advocacy work
- understand some of the challenges the church needs to face as it becomes more involved in advocacy work.

Links

This builds on the debate in SECTION B1 (Should Christians be involved in advocacy work?) and links with the other theology sections such as SECTION B3 (Jesus the advocate) and SECTION B4 (Options for involvement).

EXERCISE 21

The fullness of salvation and the mission of the church



Aim

To understand the fullness of salvation as the coming of the Kingdom of God, and to understand the mission of the church.

Methods

Flash cards, small groups, presentation, Bible study, plenary discussion

Handouts

The fullness of salvation
 God’s heart for justice
 How the church functions on behalf of the poor

There are many ways of delivering this session:

- Brainstorm, onto flash cards or post-it notes, words that come to mind when hearing ‘salvation’, ‘Kingdom of God’ or ‘good news’ or when asked the question: ‘What is God’s purpose for his world?’ Participants feed this back to plenary for discussion.
- Another option is to use Isaiah 1, Luke 4:18-19 and Revelation 21 as a group Bible study to explore salvation and the Kingdom of God, using the handouts as a basis for discussion.
- A third option is to present the material in the handouts ‘The fullness of salvation’ and ‘God’s heart for justice’ and lead a discussion.

After doing any of the exercises above, brainstorm the role of the church in God’s plan to bring about his Kingdom. Participants write ideas on flash cards or post-it notes. Discuss where advocacy or working for justice comes into this role. Use the handouts on ‘God’s heart for justice’ and ‘How the church functions on behalf of the poor’ as a basis for discussion.

Key points

- Salvation enables people to become citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- Salvation is about ‘putting things right’ and restoring how God wants things to be: for us as individuals, as a community of believers and for the whole society.
- The fullness of salvation will only occur in the future, but the message of salvation is a present hope for all people.
- We are involved in advocacy work and working for justice out of obedience to God, compassion for others and as a way of pointing people towards Christ. A passion for involvement can only come through God’s Spirit.
- Compassion for the poor and a desire for justice are part of God’s character and plan, and are therefore important in the mission of the church.
- The church has the responsibility to fulfil its whole mission. Some parts of the church need to be involved in advocacy work. All need to be involved in prayer for God to intervene.

EXERCISE 22

Objections to church involvement in advocacy work



Aim To understand and answer objections to church involvement in advocacy work.

Methods Group brainstorm, flash cards, small groups, presentation, plenary discussion

Handout Reasons given against church involvement in advocacy work

If people are not convinced that advocacy is biblical or that it is important for the church, they are unlikely to become involved, even if they are shown many practical reasons for doing so. This exercise builds on the debate in SECTION B1 and starts to address some of

the main concerns participants may have about the church or Christians becoming involved in advocacy work.

Either list the main arguments given against church involvement in advocacy work from the debate in SECTION B1, or brainstorm these objections in plenary at the start of the session. Participants split into groups and each group discusses ways to answer two or three of the objections, using the Bible where relevant. Feed back for wider group discussion and use the handout to add anything that has not been covered.

It is important to give time at the end for participants to talk about their own experiences. They may have already heard many of these arguments in their work. It may also be good to have a time of prayer to support participants in what they are trying to do in their community or organisation.

EXERCISE 23 **Challenges facing church involvement in advocacy work**



Aim To understand and address the challenges facing church involvement in advocacy work.

Methods Small groups, presentation, case studies, plenary discussion

Handouts Reasons given against church involvement in advocacy work
Issues for the church to address before advocacy involvement

This exercise puts the importance of church involvement in advocacy work in the specific contexts and experiences of participants. It places the advocacy activities of the church in the context of its overall mission.

Two or three participants present case studies on church involvement or lack of involvement in advocacy work. Discuss some of the challenges that the church faced in that particular context, and what they might have done differently if the issue arose again.

Participants split into groups and answer the following questions and feed back their answers to the plenary:

- What issues is the church or local community facing for which advocacy can be appropriate?
- What internal issues does your church need to address in order to become involved in advocacy work?
- What are the consequences if the church does not engage in advocacy work?

Develop key priorities for change as a group.

HANDOUT **The fullness of salvation**

Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Messiah to bring salvation. He is concerned about the salvation of nations (Israel first and then all nations) but knows that this salvation will come through one man. Isaiah chapter 1 shows that sin has social (v15-17), environmental (v19-20) and political (v23) consequences. The root of sin is a broken relationship with God (v2-4), which leads to broken relationships at all other levels. Salvation is ‘putting things right’ and reversing the effects of sin, bringing healing at all levels: individual, societal and political. Salvation is, therefore, the restoration of the earth and its people to the glory and joy that God intended from the beginning. The Bible contains a number of pictures of this glory that is to come (Isaiah 11:1-9; 25:1-8; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 21).

The Kingdom of God

The fullness of salvation is expressed as the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is to be found wherever God reigns – in people’s hearts, relationships, systems and structures. It was prophesied in the Old Testament and brought about by Jesus.

- The Kingdom has come but we wait for its fulfilment (Mark 1:15).
- The Kingdom will put things right, bring redemption and reconciliation (Colossians 1:20, 2 Corinthians 5:19) and is good news to the poor (Luke 4:18-19).
- There will be opposition to the Kingdom because it is in conflict with the current world.

The good news of the Kingdom

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus explains his mission by quoting from Isaiah 61: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’ (Luke 4:18-19). This good news is the fullness of salvation and includes:

- reconciliation with God – the call to repent and believe is for individuals to come back to God and live in peace with him and each other
- freedom from oppression, which includes political as well as individual liberation (as in the Exodus from Egypt), because Jesus has brought all powers under his control
- personal and collective blessing from God
- good news for the poor – salvation is particularly good news for the poor because God values them as much as he values everyone else. This is different from the world’s attitude towards them, which often makes them feel like secondary citizens. The Kingdom of God turns the world’s values the right way round.

This focus of good news for the poor is at the heart of Tearfund’s mission.

HANDOUT **God's heart for justice**

As human beings we are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). All human beings have equal value and should have equal respect. God loves all people and has a special concern for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed, because they often experience suffering and injustice. His concern for the poor and oppressed, and his desire for justice are part of his character. This is shown throughout the Bible in his actions, laws and commands.

The most significant example of God working for justice is the liberation of his people from oppression in Egypt, as part of his plan to bring them to the promised land. This involved physical liberation from slavery, political liberation from an oppressive regime and spiritual liberation so that they could worship God freely. The Exodus shows us God's compassion and his desire for justice and freedom. Compassion and justice are often found together in God's actions and commands: *'The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land."*' (Exodus 3:7-8) The Exodus was a foretaste of the Kingdom of God that Jesus would bring.

God's commands and laws are a reflection of his character and a guide to how he wants us to live. There is a special concern for protecting those on the edge of society:

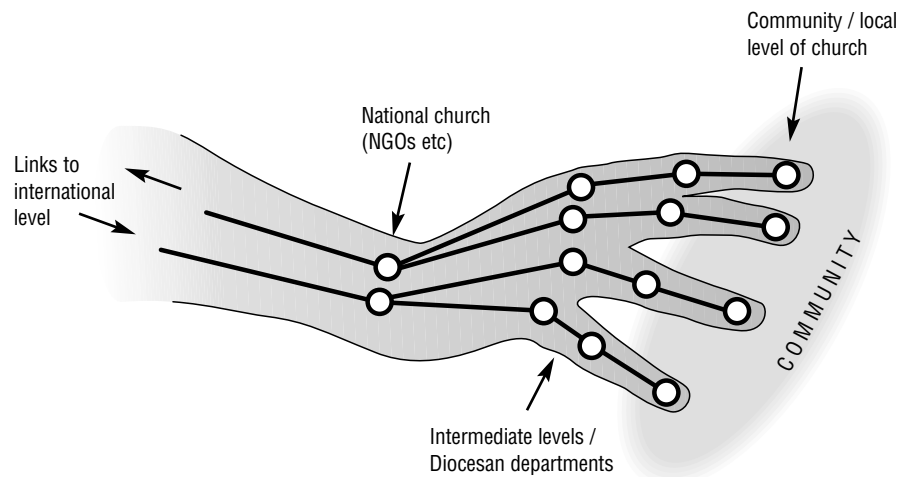
- In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded to walk in the way of God. This includes recognising that he *'defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing'* (10:18).
- Isaiah speaks of true obedience to God: *'Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?'* (Isaiah 58:6-7).
- Other key Old Testament passages which show God's desire for justice and mercy for his people are Leviticus 25, Amos 5:11-15 and Micah 6:8.

Concern for the poor and justice are also found in the New Testament:

- Jesus shows this concern in his actions (see handout: Jesus the advocate).
- Jesus teaches that the most important commandment is to love God and love your neighbour. Loving God with all our heart means being changed to become more like him and to have his heart. Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to show what this love looks like in practice (Luke 10:25-37).
- The Pharisees are told off for neglecting justice: *'Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone'* (Luke 11:42).
- James teaches Christians to treat all people equally, in particular, not to insult the poor or ignore their needs (James 2:1-26).

HANDOUT How the church functions on behalf of the poor

Some expressions of ‘church’ involve a congregation or denomination. Others include Christian development organisations, while others focus simply on a group of Christians who have come together to make a difference. Others focus on Christians who are in positions of power. A strength of the church is that it operates at all different levels and can influence all levels of society. It is vital that each expression of the church is connected to the wider body of believers for support and accountability and that they work together to extend God’s Kingdom. The diagram of a hand below shows the levels at which the church operates and that the levels are interconnected. It is vital that the parts of the church further up the ‘knuckles’ are in contact with those at the ‘fingertips’, so that they keep a concern for the poor and marginalised.



Specific functions of the church

The church should carry out many activities in its role of bringing good news to all people. A few are listed below. If we neglect any of these activities, we are giving God fewer opportunities to use us to extend his Kingdom and to bring blessing.

The activities shown in **bold type** relate to advocacy:

- Worshipping God
- Discipleship
- Proclaiming the good news
- Caring for the needy and suffering
- Social involvement
- **Speaking out against idolatry and injustice**
- **Modelling an alternative society: how God intended it to be**
- **Confronting authority when it goes against what the Bible teaches**
- Stewardship of creation
- Fellowship and caring for each other
- **Prayer for God to intervene**
- **Bringing peace and reconciliation**
- **Seeking social and economic justice**

HANDOUT

Reasons given against church involvement in advocacy work

Reasons against church involvement

REASON GIVEN	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:4 say that we are to obey the state, not challenge it.	These verses do say that we should obey the state, but only when it does not go against God's law. The state should uphold right, punish those who do wrong and promote human well-being. The church needs to hold the state accountable for fulfilling its God-given role.
Jesus says to love our enemies, turn the other cheek and that 'it is mine to avenge' (Matthew 5).	We are called to love our enemies. The focus of this teaching is not to seek revenge, but to leave that to God.
Jesus says that the 'poor will always be with you' (Mark 14:7).	He continues by saying: 'and you can help them any time you want.' These words are a command rather than an option. The focus of the passage is the anointing with perfume just days before his death and resurrection, showing that the woman had recognised the meaning of what was about to happen.
What really matters is that people are saved, so we need to concentrate on that. Advocacy work does not bring salvation.	Christians are called to seek justice (Micah 6:8), plead the cause of the poor (Proverbs 31:8-9), and stand in the gap for those who are suffering (Ezekiel 22:30).
Jesus did not engage in political activity.	Jesus did not join a political party but he challenged the authorities, eg: cleansing of the temple (John 2:12-16) and he spoke out against injustice and oppression (Luke 11:42). We need to seek a Godly response to issues, which might involve advocacy work.
Politics is a dirty game. You should not mix religion and politics.	It is true that power can corrupt, but by choosing not to be involved in politics, Christians leave it to others to make decisions that affect everyone's lives. We therefore fail to take our responsibility for stewardship seriously.
Christians have become involved in advocacy work in the past and disgraced the church.	The church has been discredited in the past by its involvement with power, but it has been discredited because of the way it was done, not because it was involved in the first place. We need to learn from the past.
There are two kingdoms – the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world – we live in one and not the other.	There are two kingdoms. Christians are citizens of heaven but we live in the world. We are called to be salt and light and to influence the world. We should not run away from our responsibility.

HANDOUT **Issues for the church to address before advocacy involvement**

There are several issues the church needs to address when considering entering into advocacy work. These are not linked with advocacy alone, but they are likely to become more important as the church becomes more involved in advocacy work. Consider what you are doing or could do in your church, organisation or community to address these issues.

HISTORY What is the history of advocacy involvement? What can be learnt from this?

LEADERSHIP Does the church model servant leadership? Who is able to participate in leadership? What accountability is there?

TEACHING What teaching is there on social ethics? What teaching on injustice? What teaching on wealth and poverty? How much learning is there on these issues?

RESPONSIVENESS How flexible is the church to respond to people in need?

LEGITIMACY What mandate does the church have to speak? Who participates in decision-making? How are decisions made?

UNITY Is the church united? Does it work with other churches or denominations?

VALUES What importance does the church place on inclusiveness, participation, accountability, service and compassion?

POWER How has the church associated with power in the past (missionaries, state, business) and what can be learned?

If the church does not engage in advocacy work

CONSEQUENCE	WHY
The church becomes irrelevant, which reduces its effectiveness in bringing good news to the poor.	The church does not tackle problems that people are facing. It allows structural problems, injustice and poverty to continue.
Judgement and discipline	The church has not been faithful to God's calling.
Sympathy with the oppressor	'For evil to prosper, all it takes is for good men to do nothing.' Edmund Burke
Unjust rulers prosper	The church fails to hold rulers to account in fulfilling their original purpose set by God, so injustice continues.
Compromised message	We say our lives have been changed by the gospel, but we do not take action.

Jesus the advocate

Description This section looks at the attitude and actions of Jesus towards those who are oppressed and broken by sin, and to those who have power. It also considers how he uses his own power.

Learning objectives By the end of the section, participants will:

- understand Jesus' approach to those who are oppressed
- understand Jesus' approach to those with power
- understand how Jesus uses his own power
- be able to apply Jesus' example to their own work.

Links This links with other theology sections such as SECTION B2 (The mission of the church). It also links with SECTION A5 (Understanding politics and power).

EXERCISE 24 **Jesus and power**



Aim To understand Jesus' approach to power.

Methods Small groups, presentation, Bible study, plenary discussion

Handout Jesus the advocate

Extra material Passages to study

If the participants have a reasonable knowledge of the Bible, divide them into groups and ask them the following questions:

- What were the characteristics of Jesus' approach to those who were oppressed, suffering or marginalised?
- What were the characteristics of Jesus' approach to those who had power?
- How did Jesus use his own power?
- What can we learn from his approach?

Alternatively, take a selection of passages, such as John 13:1-17, John 8:1-11 and Matthew 21:12-17, and lead a study, picking out the most relevant points. Follow this with a discussion about what we can learn from Jesus' example.

Key point Jesus' approach to power had the following characteristics:

- **SERVICE** Servant leadership
- **RESPECT** Responsible use of power without the use of force
- **EMPOWERING** Developing others to carry on the work
- **COURAGE** Speaking out for what is true, and challenging injustice
- **INTEGRITY** Modelling what he was advocating
- **MODEL CITIZEN** Observing the law unless it goes against God's law
- **MOTIVATED BY LOVE** Love for enemies and for those who are hated

HANDOUT **Jesus the advocate**

In 1 John 2:1 we are told that Jesus advocates on our behalf when we sin: ‘If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ the Righteous One.’ The examples below give some insight into Jesus’ character as an advocate.

Jesus modelled servant leadership and was prepared to suffer for others

When James and John asked Jesus if one could sit on the right and the other on the left in his Kingdom (Mark 10:37), Jesus replied: ‘For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (v45). He says that the path of his disciples is the same: ‘whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all’ (v42). He demonstrated his servant nature by washing his disciples’ feet, and challenging them to do the same (John 13:14-15).

Jesus gave back dignity and value to those who were hated

Jesus associated with those who were on the edge of society. He accepted the anointing by the ‘sinful woman’ (Luke 7:36-50) and rebuked his disciples when they stopped people bringing children to Jesus (Luke 18:16). He also healed the blind, the sick, the demon-possessed and other ‘outsiders’ such as the man who was chained outside the city and the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Mark 5:1-20, Mark 5:25-34).

Jesus challenged corruption, hypocrisy and injustice amongst Jewish society

When entering the temple in Jerusalem, he drove out the traders and moneylenders (Mark 11:15-17). He warned against the hypocrisy of the ruling Jewish powers: ‘Be on your guard against the yeast [teaching] of the Pharisees and Sadducees’ (Matthew 16:6). He criticised their ignorance of justice and mercy, their use of power for personal gain, and their leading people astray (Luke 11:37-53, Matthew 9:9-13, 12:1-14).

Jesus taught love for enemies

When Jesus was in Israel, the Jewish people hated the Romans. Some of the Zealots killed Roman soldiers, and nearly all people were expecting a Messiah to come and re-establish an earthly kingdom for the Jewish people. However, Jesus taught love for enemies instead of hate: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44), and said ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy’ (5:7). Another example of love and forgiveness was on the cross when Jesus cried out: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34).

Jesus obeyed the law of the land

Jesus obeyed the law of the land where this did not go against God’s law. When questioned about taxes (Mark 12:13-17) he concluded by saying ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’ He encouraged Jews to obey the state. However, the main emphasis of this instruction was to ‘give to God what is God’s.’ This means that his followers must follow God’s will, upholding justice and righteousness for God’s glory.

Jesus modelled how he wanted society to be and encouraged others to fulfil their responsibility

Jesus loved God above everything and was obedient to his will (Luke 22:42, Hebrews 5:7-10), spending time in prayer (Mark 1:35). He loved his neighbour, which was shown in the way he treated outsiders (healing the woman who had been bleeding in Luke 8:40-48). He associated with sinners (Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10), treated women with dignity and respect (Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42) and loved his enemies (Luke 23:34). He also taught others to follow his example (Matthew 5-7, Luke 10:25-37).

EXTRA MATERIAL

Passages to study

John 13:1-17
Jesus washed his disciples' feet

Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem just before the Passover, and he knew that he was about to be killed. His acts and teaching had threatened the power of the Pharisees and Sadducees and they wanted to get rid of him so that their dominant position in Jewish society would remain. Jesus used the opportunity to wash his disciples' feet. Key points are that:

- unlike most of the Jewish leaders, Jesus was motivated by love, not power or position
- he explained his actions and used them to teach and challenge others
- he modelled a lesson in selfless service, showing his followers the path that they are called to take
- he identified with those with a low position in society.

John 8:1-11
Jesus and the woman who was caught in adultery

The teachers of the law brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught committing adultery. The accusers wanted to humiliate the woman and to trap Jesus. They had arranged for the man, who also committed adultery, to escape. They brought the woman out in public, ready to be stoned. Key points are that:

- Jesus did not jump in, but remained calm and in control of himself
- he did not approve of sin
- although he did not defend the woman's actions, he was willing to stand up to the powerful
- he taught forgiveness, rather than condemnation
- he was motivated by love and desire for reconciliation.

Matthew 21:12-17
Jesus cleared the temple

Just after Jesus entered Jerusalem he went to the temple area and started to turn over the tables of money changers and those selling doves. He also healed the blind and lame, and the children sang praises to him. However, he rebuked the crowd, including the chief priests and teachers of the law, for their lack of faith and for allowing the temple to be corrupted. Key points are that:

- Jesus attacked exploitation of the poor
- he had no formal authority in the temple, but people listened to him because of what he did
- he knew the time to act
- he explained his actions to those around
- he tackled the causes of poverty and suffering, through healing people and challenging the oppressors
- he was willing to challenge cultural customs when they were against God's will.

Options for involvement

Description This section looks at ways in which the church can become involved in advocacy. It builds on an understanding of the role of the church by adding an understanding of government and the role of the law. It helps participants to see that different parts of the church approach advocacy in very different ways, and that the impact of the church in advocacy work is strongest when these different groups work together to complement each other.

Learning objectives By the end of the section, participants will:

- understand the role of the state and the role of law, and know how to influence the law
- be aware of the range of advocacy options available.

Links This links with SECTION A2 (Understanding advocacy), SECTION A3 (Why advocacy?), SECTION A5 (Understanding politics and power), SECTION B2 (The mission of the church), SECTION B3 (Jesus the advocate) and SECTION C4 (Action).

EXERCISE 25 **The role of the law**



Aim To understand the difficulties in applying biblical values and laws to modern situations.

Methods Case study, group work, plenary discussion, presentation

Handouts Biblical values (SECTION A3)
Government and law

This exercise is best done using a case study of someone trying to influence the passage of a proposed change to the law, or trying to bring about a change in law themselves. Using case studies on controversial topics such as teaching religion in schools, treatment of single mothers, or status of AIDS sufferers, will help to bring out the key points. The case study should be short and include the problem being addressed, the existing law and the proposed new law. A case study from South Africa is given below.

Case study:
Abortion,
South Africa

Section 9 of the South African Constitution on non-discrimination has been used by women to argue for greater freedom to have abortions. New proposed legislation makes abortion more available legally by suggesting that it should be available on demand for any pregnancy up to 12 weeks. The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA) was against the new law, so they started a campaign to prevent the proposed legislation being passed in Parliament.

They lobbied Parliament through an e-mail petition and raised awareness of the issue in churches. They also opened shelters for women who wanted to take their pregnancy to full term and then offer the baby for adoption. The church was unsuccessful in preventing the legislation but continues to try to change it by lobbying parliament.

Split the participants into groups and ask them the following questions:

- What is the role of the law in this particular case?
- What biblical values guide this proposal?
- What would you do if you were in TEASA's situation?

Use the handouts and consider a study of Romans 13 to deepen understanding of the issues.

Key points

- The law has a limited role because it cannot change people's hearts.
- There are different ways of interacting with the law.
- We need to be clear about what our values are before trying to change laws.

EXERCISE 26

Understanding power from a biblical perspective



Aim

To understand power from a biblical perspective in order to choose appropriate advocacy options.

Methods

Small-group discussion, plenary, presentation

Split participants into small groups and ask them to answer the question 'What does the Bible say about power?' by looking at the following Bible passages: Colossians 1:16, Luke 11:20, Mark 3:23-27, Colossians 2:15, Ephesians 6:12. Then lead a plenary discussion about powers that exist in the world today.

- Key points**
- Powers are part of God’s creation (Colossians 1:16).
 - The visible faces of power in the world now include the state, business, international institutions, the media, culture and tradition, military, false religions and demonic attack. These can be misused because of the sinful nature of human beings.
 - We are also fighting against the evil forces in the world (Ephesians 6:12).
 - However, Jesus has the supreme authority and final victory over all of these powers (Luke 11:20, Mark 3:23-7) through his death on the cross (Colossians 2:15). We need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus if we are not to be overwhelmed by the rulers of this world.

EXERCISE 27 Advocacy options open to Christians



Aim To consider advocacy options.

Methods Flash cards, plenary

Ask what options are open to Christians for engaging with power. It is useful to use examples from participants’ experiences. Take time here to build up a substantial list of options, as a way of encouraging participants that there is a lot they can do, and that they might be doing it anyway.

Some options open to Christians

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ■ prayer | ■ participating in systems and structures |
| ■ raising awareness | ■ bringing things out into the open / exposing evil |
| ■ non-violent direct action | ■ building others’ confidence and identity |
| ■ modelling a different lifestyle | ■ mobilising capacity of the whole church |
| ■ negotiating peace | ■ networking with other groups |
| ■ standing for election | ■ speaking out prophetically |
| ■ research | ■ showing solidarity |

- Key points**
- There are many options open for advocacy work.
 - Different parts of the church will work in different ways.
 - Different options are appropriate for different situations.
 - Those working under oppressive regimes can be encouraged that they can be involved in some activities, even if others are not possible.

HANDOUT **Government and law****The role of government**

Government is good and part of God's plan. God created heaven and earth and appointed human beings as stewards (Genesis 1:28). However, creation, human beings and government are now affected by sin. Although government still has a role, it is limited.

Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 explain that the role of government is to:

- commend what is right (Romans 13:3, 1 Peter 2:14)
- punish those who do wrong (Romans 13:3-4, 1 Peter 2:14)
- promote human well-being (Romans 13:4).

However, in practice the role of government is limited:

MANDATE A government cannot ensure that people truly worship God, or bring about righteousness. It can pass and enforce laws and regulations but it cannot change people.

ESSENCE Although government is good, it is also open to corruption (Revelation 13:1-18). There is a need to have structures in place to guard against this. The church needs to hold it accountable.

The role of law

Any consideration of the role of government has to be closely linked with the role of the law, because this is the main means by which a government will use its authority. We need to start by looking at the main purposes of laws in the Bible, which are to:

- reveal God's character and show us how we should live in a right relationship with him
- protect the vulnerable and ensure social justice
- maintain peace and social order
- highlight evil and punish wrongdoing.

However, although law can limit evil, it cannot change people's hearts, such as get rid of lust and jealousy.

It is also difficult sometimes to apply some biblical laws to modern situations. Problems include the following:

THE FOCUS ON GOD'S PEOPLE The ethical and political laws in the Bible were given to people that had been redeemed by God from slavery in Egypt. While the laws are principles of justice that are relevant to all, it is difficult for people who do not know about God's salvation to appreciate them.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF LAW There are different types of law in the Old Testament, only some of which still apply today. The principles behind the ethical (including social and economic) laws still apply because God does not change his character, although the application may change. However, Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of the ritual or sacrificial law, making it redundant.

HANDOUT **Government and law** (continued)

Principles for interpretation of the Bible

Having outlined some of the problems, it is necessary to develop some principles for interpretation:

- **SOURCE OF TRUTH** The Bible is God’s authoritative and trustworthy word containing relevant truth (2 Timothy 3:15-17), but does not provide every answer for every situation.
- **BIBLE AS A STORY** The Bible is a story where God reveals his character and his will for the world. We need to look at the whole story to see God’s plan for the whole of history.
- **LAW DOES NOT BRING RIGHTEOUSNESS** (Romans 3:28, 31).
- **JESUS IS CENTRAL** To understand how we apply Old Testament law to current situations, we need to look at Jesus’ approach. Whatever he shows as continuing from the Old Testament is clearly relevant for the church and the world today. We can therefore have confidence to apply those principles to our lives and society.

Other points to note

- Challenging the law is only one option to bring about change that God wants. Changing the law should be seen as only part of a response to an issue. Other options should also be considered, such as caring for people and prayer.
- Many societies consist of people with different world-views. Christians may be in a minority, so cannot expect everyone to accept the truth of the Bible and therefore their argument. The challenge is to show that laws based on Christian principles are the best for everyone, and to present advocacy proposals using language that everyone understands.
- Christians should not try to change laws to give Christians an advantage. They should aim for equal treatment of all people, including religious freedom for all people.

Notes

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