



What Does God Think About America's Health Care Debate?

*All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for **every good work**. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, emphasis added)*

“God, do you actually mean that Your Word is relevant to the current work our federal government is doing regarding health care?”

“Well, do you think your government's work on health care is included under ‘every good work?’”

“Hmm... when You put it that way, I guess so...”

“You got it! My Word actually is more important to this subject than all the polls, trends, global norms, statistics, and economic factors you tend to lean on for guidance. As a Christian, it's especially relevant for you so you can know your part in the government's work on health care.”

“Oh... OK. So, what do *You* have to say about it, then?”

“I'm glad you asked!”

God on the Role for Civil Governments in General

God's design for Israel's civil government during the Old Testament era was a theocracy. In this structure, God Himself was King and the church and civil government were intimately intertwined under His leadership to harmoniously fulfill His will. With the first advent of Christ, biblical theocracy as an ordained governmental form ended and the responsibilities and relationship between the civil government and the church changed. In the New Testament era, both the church and the civil government have an interest in the well-being of people. Yet today they operate “as planets moving in concentric orbits.”¹ The church's interest and authority is spiritual, does not include the use of physical force, and is framed directly by the Scriptures. A godly civil government is framed by Scriptural *principles*, human reason and providence, and includes the use of physical force in carrying out these broad mandates:

1. **Restrain evil.**² God gives the civil government the “power of the sword” for the express purpose of restraining evil/evildoers as He defines it/them. A government that uses the sword (physical force up to and including death) to perform, promote, or protect evil/evildoers is itself doing evil in God's sight.
2. **Promote human welfare.**³ While the application of this mandate varies, the overwhelming biblical emphasis points to promoting justice, especially for the defenseless and weak. A government that performs or promotes harm to its citizens (as God defines “harm”), especially the weakest in its midst, is doing evil in God's sight.
3. **Provide freedom.**⁴ Freedom, defined biblically, is the ability to do that which is conforms to God's Word. Though exact methods for carrying this out are not mandated by Scripture, the most God-honoring governments work to foster, not hinder, this type of freedom. A government that curtails freedom or encourages lawlessness (cf. anarchy or relativistic indulgence in individually-defined values) as God defines it is doing evil in His sight.

God on America's National Health Care Initiative in Particular

If the three tenets above are true, then a God-honoring government can and perhaps should be involved in caring for the health of its citizens, at least to some degree. Yet *how* a *godly* government does this must coincide with God's prescriptions, above. If a government's involvement in health care is *godly*, its work must restrain evil, promote human welfare, and provide freedom as God defines



such things in His Word. For example, it is obviously ungodly for a government to “care” for its citizens’ health by allowing harm or directly harming or killing its weakest members.

In this light, how does the present health care legislation being considered by America’s federal government measure up? This question focuses on two federal health care bills backed by President Obama: (1) HR3200 in the Federal House of Representatives, and (2) The Kennedy Bill (named for its sponsor, Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) in the U.S. Senate. It is predicted that these bills will be revised and brought to the floors of their respective houses for a vote in September, 2009. Together, they would create a national government-run health insurance plan often called the “public plan” or the “public option.” These plans will compete with private insurance providers and will be run entirely by the federal government. Enrollees will pay premiums to the federal government which will subsidize the cost of care through taxes.

On the positive side, these 1,017-plus page bills may show that our federal government is seeking justice, welfare, and freedom for its citizens. That is commendable. However, the brand of justice, welfare, and freedom it is seeking is riddled with evil. In fact, while there may be provisions in the present legislation that adhere to Scriptural principles, there are several items which grossly violate God’s mandates for civil government, and are therefore an affront to His character and authority.

- In the Kennedy Bill at least, medical services deemed as “essential benefits” or as “medically necessary” include elective abortion.⁵
- HR3200’s funding stream does not pass through the Hyde Amendment sieve which would restrict taxpayer funding for abortions. HR3200 allows federal tax funding for abortion.
- The Capps Amendment to HR3200 requires that premiums paid by enrollees for the federal health plan include the cost to cover abortions. There is no provision to opt out of this facet of coverage.
- HR3200 establishes an office called the Health Choices Commissioner that will establish standards for services and providers. Abortion is one of those standards.
- Section 1233 of HR3200 includes provisions for prescribing euthanasia⁶ as an end-of-life treatment.
- There is nothing in these bills that protects a provider’s right of conscience. So, if standards are set by government agencies (e.g. Health Benefits Advisory Committee mandating euthanasia as a “medical necessity”) conflict with a provider’s conscience (e.g. a Christian hospital or medical practitioner whose beliefs disallow providing euthanasia), that provider must either deny his conscience or be denied eligibility under the federal plan.

What Now, God?

Based on the biblical analysis above, the present health care legislation being considered by our federal government violates God’s mandates for civil government. Therefore, it is right and reasonable for Christians to graciously oppose it by remembering these biblical insights:

1. **Reconnect with the gospel.**⁷ Before expressing your opposition, check the gospel in your own heart. Remember that you, too, violate God’s mandates and therefore deserve His wrath. Remember that God graciously saved you from this self-deserved fate by His free mercy in the gospel of Christ. As this gospel washes over your heart, it will diffuse any creeping self-righteousness, condescension or pride that might lead to inflamed, indignant, or disrespectful words and actions on your part. The gospel-filled heart carries no stones to hurl at others, even those caught in evil.



2. **Honor leaders.**⁸ God installs kings and governments Himself, and commands us to honor them at all times *because* He has installed them. In fact, how we treat our leaders directly reveals and reflects how we treat God. We are especially called to pray for our leaders.
3. **Speak the truth in love.**⁹ True “freedom of speech” as God defines it is the ability to say what is biblically edifying in ways that are humble and gracious. Whether it is calling, emailing, writing, or visiting legislators, do it in love... to God’s glory!
4. **Equip Others.** If you are a pastor, a Life Team, or someone others look to for guidance, share this article with them. It is important for Christians in particular to be equipped with a biblical worldview on such important matters in a way that leads to godly action.

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¹ PCA Book of Church Order, 5th edition, 1997, chapter 3, see also Matt. 22:21, John 18:36

² Rom. 13:1-9

³ Ex. 23:6, Deut. 24:17ff, Luke 3:14, Rom. 13:1-9, 2 Pet. 2

⁴ Spiritual freedom – freedom from sin - is in the foreground of Scripture (Rom. 6:14-23, Col. 1:13, John 12:30-33, Gal. 2:4, 4:5, 5:1). Political freedom is not highlighted, but can be deduced from various incidences like God’s delivering Israel from Egypt in Exodus (Ex. 2-14, Isa. 61:1, Luke 4:18), the glory of His Word (Ps. 19, 119) and from His moral character and mandates in general.

⁵ Abortion is the killing of a human being, and therefore blatantly violates God’s imperative to promote human welfare and provide freedom for an entire class of citizens. To enact a plan that condones by paying and legally endorsing/protecting abortionists (e.g. “evildoers” in God’s sight), the civil government is using it’s God-given “power of the sword” in ways totally contrary to Scripture. Condoning abortion is particularly offensive to God because it involves a deadly assault on the weakest of all citizens whom the civil government is called to protect.

⁶ Euthanasia, as defined by Encarta World English Dictionary (1998-2004), is the act or practice of killing somebody who has an incurable illness or injury, or allowing or assisting that person to die. The government’s condoning this practice by listing providers and allowing this act as a “medical treatment” violates all the mandates for godly civil government. Like abortion, condoning euthanasia is particularly offensive to God because it involves a deadly assault on the weakest of all citizens whom the civil government is called to protect.

⁷ John 8, Rom. 5, esp. vv. 1 & 8, Rom. 12, Gal. 6:1-2. Also, consider singing the great hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

⁸ Num. 16:41-50, Josh. 5, Acts 26, 1 Tim. 2, Heb. 13:17, 1 Thes. 5:12-13, also look at Jesus’ ministry in the gospel and how He spoke with people in general and ignorant leaders in particular.

⁹ Ps. 82, Prov. 15:1, 24:11-12, Matt. 5:13ff, John 13:34-35, 1 Cor. 13, Eph. 5:11, James 3, 1 Pet. 1:22