

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
Fighting Fraud or Foisting Favoritism? (20–25 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

Students analyze the U.S. Congress’s power to “regulate commerce” and compare the Biblical standards on the proper functions of government.

Instructions

1. Put students into pairs or groups of three.
2. Give students 10–12 minutes to answer the handout questions.
3. Review the Bible verse fill-in-the-blanks questions and trade scenarios as a class.

Key

1. Punishing a merchant who sells *within a single state* for using scales that make it appear that a buyer has bought more of a product by weight than he actually did
Legit function according to the Bible, but NOT a U.S. Congress power, since the action occurred within a single state (the Constitution says Congress may only regulate trade “among” the states)
2. Preventing a seller who sells to all states from lying about a drug’s side effects
Legit function according to the Bible AND for the U.S. Congress
3. Congress deciding how many computers that a multi-state company may produce over a single year
NOT a legit function according to the Bible, and shouldn’t be a power of the U.S. Congress...but of course, that depends upon who’s “interpreting” the Constitution!
4. Punishing counterfeit money schemes
Legit function according to the Bible AND for the U.S. Congress
5. Stopping interstate fraud
Legit function according to the Bible AND for the U.S. Congress
6. Congress deciding what the price of chickens bought at a company selling in Texas should be
NOT a legit function according to the Bible, and shouldn’t be a power of the U.S. Congress
7. Requiring federal permission before opening a bakery
NOT a legit function according to the Bible, and shouldn’t be a power of the U.S. Congress...but, again, some powerful-government supporters might say, “Well, if the baker sells to different states, then the U.S. Congress has the right to regulate it!”
8. Punishing contract theft between a company in Miami, Florida and a company in Orlando, Florida
Legit function according to the Bible, but NOT a U.S. Congress power, since the action occurred within a single state
9. Congress placing a tax (tariff) upon shoes imported from England, to make them more expensive—and more likely that American shoe buyers will buy shoes from American shoe manufacturers instead
NOT a legit function according to the Bible, but arguably a power of the U.S. Congress, since it is allowed to “regulate commerce with foreign nations” (see “Debrief” below)

How do you think that powerful-government supporters generally “interpret” the “Commerce Clause”?

AWV, but certainly they “interpret” it to give the U.S. government as much power as they can get away with as far as regulating trade/commerce. (Some of these claims for power go to ridiculous heights; we’ll review some later this year.)

Given your answer to the above question, do you think it was a good idea to give this power to the U.S. Congress? Why or why not?

AWV, but this is a dangerous power to grant to a centralized government. It gives that government potentially unlimited powers over buying and selling, depending upon how it is “interpreted.” Students might recall how George Mason, in his “Objections to the Constitution,” pointed out that if the Congress and Presidency are won by a certain faction, they can pass trade laws that benefit one “side”/geographical area of the nation at the expense of the other. (This is exactly what happened with protective tariffs, and it is THE major reason for the North/South War—more on that later.)

Debrief

- Ask students: “If you had to state in one sentence what the Bible’s guidelines would be for trade, based on the verses we’ve reviewed over and over, what would it be?” *AWV, but it should be something like “The government has the legitimate right to prevent or punish fraud [spoil/theft] among companies, or companies that harm others.”*
- What serious and unjust situations could a government put states/individuals/sellers/buyers in by placing a tariff on an item, like the last example? *AWV, but putting a tariff on an imported item to protect an American maker from having to compete with the imported item’s price or quality is unfair to those who want to buy the imported item. It also invites corruption, because who knows which items it would be “fair” to add tariffs to? Any American business could always say, “We HAVE to have a tariff on imported [product here]! Americans will LOSE JOBS if we don’t, since buyers will buy the imported product! (Those companies, of course, are looking out for their own interests, not the interests of the sellers.) This has historically led to situations in which companies bribe lawmakers to induce them to place tariffs on certain items.*

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First, fill in the blanks of the below verses, which list government's legitimate functions:

- To be a “terror” to “_____” [harm] (Romans 13:3).
- To “remove _____ and _____” (Ezekiel 45:9).
- To “deliver the _____ out of the hand of the _____” (Jeremiah 22:3).
- “[F]or the punishment of _____” (1 Peter 2:14).

The Constitution's Article I, Section 8 says, “The Congress shall have power...to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes....” **Which of the following actions are legitimate powers of the U.S. Congress? Which qualify as a legitimate government function according to the Bible's standards?**

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2. Preventing a seller who sells to all states from lying about a drug's side effects
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How do you think that powerful-government supporters generally “interpret” the “Commerce Clause”?

Given your answer to the above question, do you think it was a good idea to give this power to the U.S. Congress? Why or why not?