

In case you haven't picked up on it yet, (and really- how could you? The media is barely covering it) it's an election year. As is often the case during election years, much ado is made over the "Christian" vote, the intersection of faith and politics, and the separation of Church and State. What does this mean for us as individuals and as a church? What are the personal and corporate responsibilities of God's people in dealing with the moral issues in the public square? I am not going to try to provide comprehensive answers to those questions in 1900 words or less. My goal in this article is to help us think well and graciously together.

Those questions are larger than any single policy, position, or issue. But sometimes an actual issue helps frame a conversation that can be too easily divorced from reality, so here is an example "ripped from the headlines" of my life.

A gentleman came into my office the other day and said, "What are we, as a church, willing to do to stop gay marriage?" I know this man. He loves Jesus, he loves the church, he loves people of all kinds, and he wants to honor God. I also know that he wanted Summit to make marriage protection petitions available at the church and to move us toward a more public stance on a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Earlier that same week, I had talked to a young man after a service who wanted to know if, as a gay man, he was "welcomed at Summit?"

See the quandary? Before moving on to the larger discussion, I do not believe homosexual activities are, or can be pleasing to God. However, people with homosexual proclivities are very much loved by God on the same basis that every other fallen creature is. So the answer to the gay man's question is an unequivocal "yes." There are several excellent discussions of the textual force of the Old and New Testaments regarding this issue (Richard Hays' *Moral Vision of the New Testament* case study on Homosexuality, 381-406, is an excellent place to start). As a result, I do not think gay marriage (never mind the philological issue) is something Christians can or should embrace. We must speak honestly, in love, about that even if it causes all sorts of consternation. But should we speak together about it in the moral square?

Remember, we are not talking about moral disagreements or moral equivocations here; we are engaging a question of strategy. The significant thing to recognize is that you can agree on ends and disagree on means. Very good thinkers, who love Jesus very much, have agreed morally and vehemently disagreed on strategy. The means and ways that we uphold a Christian view change according to context and circumstance.

Consider what C.S. Lewis said about marriage and the state in *Mere Christianity*:

*A great many people seem to think that if you are a Christian yourself you should try to make divorce difficult for every one. I do not think that. At least I know I should be very angry if the Mohammedans tried to prevent the rest of us from drinking wine.*

*My own view is that the Churches should frankly recognise that the majority of the British people are not Christians and, therefore, cannot be expected to live Christian lives. There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.*

Brilliant, isn't it? How could anyone disagree with that? But wait, Chuck Colson, president of Prison Fellowship, does.

*I believe it is not only biblical duty but common sense to recognize the natural law and the natural moral order in an effort to protect marriage.*

*Is it discriminatory to give benefits to heterosexual couples not given to homosexual couples? ...We discriminate when we give veterans benefits, farm subsidies, and all sorts of preferences. We do it because those people do something particular from which society benefits.*

*It may sound harsh in today's super-tolerant culture, but preservation of the institution of marriage is indispensable to the right ordering of society. I have seen hundreds of thousands of feral children in prison. They are the products of the family breakdown. Why would any sane and sensible person want to increase this destructive pathology?*

Also brilliant, how could anyone disagree with that? I recognize that one is addressing marriage and divorce and the other same-sex marriage, but the anchor still holds-- they have different views on what the church should expect from the state in regard to marriage. Both of these men are smarter than I am, and both love Jesus a great deal. Chuck has a deep respect for Clive. Don't get lost on this particular issue. The issue is not the point. The point is that two people can completely agree on an issue and disagree on the ideal strategy in order to bring the issue to the forefront.

For what it is worth, those of us who lean toward a federal marriage amendment must consider the following: Is divorce pleasing to God? Is it beneficial or morally acceptable for people to have sex with anyone other than their spouse? Is it wise for people to live together before they are married? Should we legislate against any of those things? Why, or why not? Are they worse or better sins? We cannot target particular issues arbitrarily. As a community of faith, we must be careful not to always move towards constitutional amendments that merely reflect our theological convictions. Does that mean we should do nothing?

No, it simply means we have to think critically about marrying morality and strategy too closely as if any particular strategy is inherently more Christian than the other.

Before anyone gets either too angry or too smug to continue reading, it is balderdash to say that we should not or cannot legislate morality, no law is written without some kind of desired moral effect and some kind of moral underpinning. Even the most seemingly arbitrary laws such as, "don't speed", spring from an ethical foundation. Don't speed. Why? Because you may harm yourself or another. Who cares? Everyone should. Why? Because life is precious. Who says? And so on...

Many laws are more than mere derivatives from moral ideals. Laws are clearly stated moral understandings— don't steal, don't kill, etc... If this is not legislation of morality, then what is it? Every "good" law infringes on individual freedom to keep freedom possible. So don't cower when someone says that you can't legislate morality, indeed it is the only thing that is ever legislated and usually for the better. However, that is very different than saying everything moral should be legislated.

The most cogent argument that I hear from Christians who advocate an active role in the public square is some version of the following: Our faith, if it has any temporal value whatsoever (and it should), must inform our politics. Therefore, we have a God-given responsibility to participate in the civic affairs of our country. If the church can move together politically, shouldn't it?

In other words, if we say that we truly believe that life is sacred because God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, shouldn't that value be reflected in the candidates and policies we support? We must be salt and light in every realm including the political realm by utilizing the opportunities afforded to us through our system of government to stem the tide of sin through every righteous mean possible. If we can vote to save babies, to care for the environment that

cares for us, to clarify who gets to clarify the definition of marriage, aren't we failing to be the men and women that God has called us to be if we don't? My answer is yes.

Now, if that could be the end of the matter then all would be wonderful, but we all know that it is not the end. At best, it provides us with a place to begin.

Let's look at another particular underlying moral reality that the vast majority of Christians would agree with: all life is sacred. Attempting to parse out a fully agreed upon meaning to that reality is not as easy as it seems at first glance. Coming up with a "Christian strategy" to assert that understanding is even more difficult. If all life is sacred, should we strategically move toward outlawing the death penalty? Or if all life is sacred, should we execute those who have taken it? Should we, as a community of faith, be pacifists and protest the war? Or should we adhere to the just war theory and hedge our bets? Should we seek to have abortion outlawed in cases of rape as well as others? These are tough questions. People who really love Jesus can come to some very different conclusions. Of course, the first place to look is Scripture, but an individual appeal to an isolated text is often unhelpful (see the devil in the wilderness for an example).

I have exhausted all of the words that I am allowed here so let me say this. I know passions get enflamed and sometimes should around political issues. Let us remember that Jesus brought a zealot and a tax collector together and said, "Follow me." In our churches, He brings together democrats, republicans, green party members, libertarians, and independents and says the same thing, "Follow me."

Christ followers will always be politically diverse. Following Him alongside people who talk, think, and act differently than you is not optional. If you refuse to do so, then you refuse to pursue Christ. The moment at which you wish to see someone crash and burn because they think differently than you—you have stopped following Jesus. The moment at which hate begins to burn in your heart towards another person, for whom Jesus died, because they disagree with you on policy—you have stopped following Jesus. The moment you stop seeking justice, love, kindness, and a humble walk with God—you have stopped following Jesus. So, we repent when necessary and remember that policy and governance never change the human heart—the Gospel does. The breadth of Christ's good news must fuel our passion and guide our actions in every sphere of life.