

# Voting and Christian Citizenship

*Applying a biblical worldview to your voting choices is an important part of your role as a citizen. Byron Barlowe looks at how Christians should exercise their right to vote and make biblically informed decisions in the voting booth.*

## Summary

It is both a sacred duty and privilege for Christians to serve as citizens who salt (preserve) and light (illuminate) our culture. Americans have inherited a government system based solidly on a biblical worldview, but one that also tolerates and protects other viewpoints. Truly humble, tolerant political engagement does not equal spiritual compromise. Christians found out how seductive political power can be in the 1980s and need to resist the pull of compromise. God doesn't take sides; we need to make sure we're on His side.



Although a strongly biblical candidate may be ideal, that's not often a realistic option. Instead, we must use our sanctified minds to prayerfully choose between imperfect candidates—who are *not*, after all, seeking *pastoral* positions. Believers have a duty to vote our values. How else would we vote? Our calling: not to force those values on others in a free society, but to honor the privileges of citizenship, including legitimate political influence, and to vote our convictions.

# Christian Citizenship: A Duty and Privilege

One pundit wrote fifteen months before the 2008 election, “If you’re not already weary of the 2008 presidential campaign . . . you must be living in a cave... The campaign began the day after the 2004 election, making this the first non-stop presidential campaign in history. The media, desperate to sustain interest in the horse race, pursue such earth-shattering stories as: ‘Which candidate owns the most pets?’”[\[1\]](#)

Then, a new kind of Internet-age debate featured Democratic presidential candidates responding to home-grown videos posted to *YouTube.com* by members of the public. Among them: two Tennesseans dressed like hillbillies and a snowman, ostensibly concerned about global warming!

Hard to take politics seriously given all of the theater, isn’t it? But political engagement—including voting—is a God-given, blood-bought right that Christians must take seriously. We are called by the Lord Jesus to be preserving salt and illuminating light in our culture. And it’s not just presidential races that matter.

Kerby Anderson, in an article entitled “Politics and Religion,” wrote, “Christian obedience goes beyond calling for spiritual renewal. We have often failed to ask the question, ‘What do we do if hearts are not changed?’ Because government is ordained of God, we need to consider ways to legitimately use governmental power. Christians have a high stake in making sure government acts justly and makes decisions that provide maximum freedom for the furtherance of the gospel.”[\[2\]](#) Some believe we have a *cultural mandate* to redeem not only men’s souls, but the works of culture including politics.

Yet, Christians remain on the sidelines in alarming numbers.

According to one poll before the 2004 elections, “only a third of evangelical Christians—those who ought to be most concerned with moral values—[said they would] actually vote.” But the Bible says a lot about believers’ duties as citizens. “When Moses commanded the Israelites to appoint God-fearing leaders, he wasn’t just talking to a handful of citizens who felt like getting involved... And modern Christians are under the same obligation to choose leaders who love justice... Today, in our modern democracy, free citizens act as God’s agents for choosing leaders, and we do it by voting.”{3}

As believers, we’re citizens of two kingdoms: one temporal and earthly, the other eternal and heavenly. We are called to participate in both the culture and politics of The City of Man, as this world was called by Augustine, while primarily focusing on the Kingdom of God.

The longevity and value of these dual kingdoms ought to serve as crucial guides to how invested we become in them. Eternal issues matter more than temporal ones. To allow politics and social issues to overtake our commitments to the everlasting is to risk idolatry, while losing ground in both realms.

Flipping the usual focus of candidates’ qualifications onto the electorate, one Christian columnist wrote, “Those who make critical decisions for America (its voters, I mean) should come up to some minimal standards before leaving the house on Election Day. Voters should be able to tell the difference between worldviews... Voters should be free of regionalism and other types of ‘group-think’... Vocations, unions, ethnic groups and age groups that vote in lockstep are not behaving as free people. Citizens whose consciences are ruled by others should not govern a free nation... Voters should value their vote, but not sell it.” {4}

It didn’t take Albert Einstein to say it, but he did say “It is the duty of every citizen according to his best capacities to give validity to his convictions in political affairs.”{5}

Chuck Colson, convicted Watergate felon, said, “All you have to do is lose the right to vote once, and you would never again find any excuse for not going into the voting booth.... Be a good citizen: Exercise the greatest right a free people have [sic].”[\[6\]](#)

God’s will and Kingdom will not be thwarted, and we cannot ultimately control outcomes, even as a voting bloc. As Christian citizens in America, we need to offer due diligence in voting and other political activities, trust God with the results, and keep spiritual concerns first.

## **Puritan Roots, Pluralism & Practical Politics**

In 2007, for the first time a Hindu priest opened Senate deliberations with prayer. I asked a group of Christian homeschool parents gathered to discuss America’s political system if they could justify forbidding this, and no one could answer satisfactorily. Pluralism—when a culture supports various ethnic backgrounds, religions and political views—is a practical and, understood correctly, appropriate reality.

Americans—believers and non-believers alike—have inherited a system of governance based solidly on the Bible, but allowing for a plurality of beliefs or even unbelief. The Puritans who first colonized this land “saw themselves as the new Israel, an elect people.”[\[7\]](#)

The architects of our political arrangement, many of them professing Christians, were deeply influenced by the Puritan’s positive cultural impact and the Scriptures to which they appealed. Daniel Webster said, “Our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment.”[\[8\]](#) John Quincy Adams said, “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the

principles of Christianity.” George Washington, a devoted Christian, left room for others: “While just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords to government its surest support.”{9}

Probe’s *Mind Games* curriculum points out the realism of the founders in mitigating the imperfections of people even as they self-rule. “Again, we can see the genius of the American system. Madison and others realized the futility of trying to remove passions (human sinfulness) from the population. Therefore, he proposed that human nature be set against human nature. This was done by separating various institutional power structures.”{10} This was based on a biblical understanding of man, a proper anthropology.

So, how can such a firmly entrenched Judeo-Christian political heritage be reconciled with a culture increasingly full of Mormons, Hindus, Muslims, humanists, and other unbelievers living alongside Christians?

The Constitution and Bill of Rights justly allows for religious and political diversity. Nineteenth-century theologian Charles Hodge of Princeton regarding immigrants said:

All are welcomed; all are admitted to equal rights and privileges. All are allowed to acquire property, whatever their religious feelings, and to vote in every election, made eligible to all offices and invested with equal influence in all public affairs. All are allowed to worship as they please, or not to worship at all, if they see fit... No man is required to profess any form of faith... More than this cannot reasonably be demanded.{11}

Theologian Richard J. Mouw explored the possibility of evangelical politics that doesn’t compromise and at the same is time highly tolerant of other views. Not “anything-goes relativism,” but rather confidence that comes from God’s

guidebook for life, tempered by fair-minded ways of dealing with people. He wrote, "This humility does not exclude Christians advocating social and political policies that conflict with the views and practices of others. It does mean we should do so in a way that encourages reasonable dialogue and mutual respect."[\[12\]](#)

Believers need to consider the words of Bernard Crick: "Politics is a way of ruling in divided societies without undue violence.... Politics is not just a necessary evil; it is a realistic good." Kenyans victimized by recent mob killings that erupted after disputed elections could testify that when the political process fails it can be devastating.

The founders, even as they envisioned pluralism, did not themselves have to deal deeply with it. It requires a keen worldview for voting and activism in today's truly pluralistic America. Our nation is based on an unmistakable Christian foundation, but that of course doesn't mean you *have to* be a Christian or even believe in God to participate.

## **Political Might and the Religious Right: Does God Take Sides?**

Ever since Jimmy Carter ran for President based partly on his evangelical faith in the 1970s, and then the Moral Majority took the nation by storm in the '80s, there has been a non-stop discussion in America surrounding faith and politics.

Political power's seduction blinded believers, claim former movers and shakers like Ed Dobson. "One of the dangers," he said, "of mixing politics and religion is that you begin to think the only way to transform culture is by passing another law. Most of what we did in the Moral Majority was aimed at getting the right people elected so that we would have enough votes to pass the right laws."[\[13\]](#)

In those days, Christians seemed to believe they could legislate and administrate God's kingdom into full flower. However, core issues like gay unions and abortion remain largely unchanged or even worse today.

"History has shown us we can't rely totally on laws," continued Dobson.[{14}](#) A good example is Prohibition. The harder the government cracked down on alcohol, the more ways people found to get around the law. One result was increased crime. Laws don't change hearts; they are meant to restrain evil.

Sidling up to political power brokers even for commendable causes can prove disillusioning. Recently, conservative Christians hoped for fair and full consideration from the administration of the boldly evangelical George Bush. According to former White House deputy director for faith-based initiatives David Kuo, administration operators used and mocked evangelicals who were trying to do compassionate work partly funded through the government. But as Kuo asks, "What did they expect from politicians?" Good question for all of us. Jeremiah the prophet warned, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man."[{15}](#) That would seem to include man's politics.

Committed evangelical Bill Armstrong shared prophetically as a Senator back in 1983, "There is a danger when believers get deeply involved in political activity that they will try to put the mantle of Christ on their cause . . . to deify that cause and say, 'Because I'm motivated to run for office for reasons [of] faith, a vote for me is a vote for Jesus'."[{16}](#)

Ed Dobson often joked about God not being a Democrat or Republican—but *certainly not* a Democrat. But, he asked, "Is God the God of the religious and political left with its emphasis on the environment and the poor, or is he the God of the religious and political right with its emphasis on the unborn and the family? Both groups claim to speak for God."[{17}](#)

The Lord appeared to Joshua before a battle. He discovered that the issue wasn't whether God was on his side or his enemy's, but whether the people were on *God's* side. The religious and political Left casts itself as champion of the poor and the environment while the Right emphasizes the unborn and the family. Both say they speak for God. Seeking God's priorities and using His wisdom for our particular times is critical. However, "God's side" is not always easy to find.

So what's a Christian citizen's role? Armstrong and others believe Christians have been commanded by Christ to be involved. "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" means more than paying taxes. Some basic biblical principles:

- *All political power comes from God;*
- *Government has a God-ordained role to play in society;*
- *Christians have a God-ordained responsibility to that government: to pray, submit to and honor government leaders and, of course, to pay our taxes.*[\*{18}\*](#)

The late Christian political activist, pastor, and author D. James Kennedy warned in the heady early days of "the Reagan Revolution" not to trust in the man Ronald Reagan but in God. "After victory," he writes, "many people give up the struggle and later discover they had won only a battle, not the war. Are you working less, praying less, giving less, trusting less? Maybe there is a bit of the humanist in all of us."[\*{19}\*](#) He continues, "The government . . . should be a means to godly ends. Ronald Reagan is but a stone in the sling, and you do not trust in stones; you trust in the living rock, Jesus Christ."[\*{20}\*](#)

Thus, voters, campaigners *and* officeholders need to heed the humility of experience in a fallen world and the understanding of the Founders that power corrupts and should be divided up, placing final trust in the Almighty.

# Should We Elect a Christian When Given the Chance?

Talk show host Larry King asked pastor and author Max Lucado if religion should matter in an election campaign. I love his answer: “Well, genuine religion has to matter. We elect character. We elect a person’s worldview. Faith can define that worldview.... [Within the] American population 85 percent of us say that religion matters to us. 72 percent of us say that the religion of a president matters.”[\[21\]](#) Polls show that Americans would sooner elect a Muslim or homosexual than an acknowledged atheist.[\[22\]](#)

Philosopher and early church father Augustine dealt with a culture war among the Romans. In his classic book *The City of God* he taught that “The City of Man is populated by those who love themselves and hold God in contempt, while the City of God is populated by those who love God and hold themselves in contempt. Augustine hoped to show that the citizens of the City of God were more beneficial to the interests of Rome than those who inhabit the City of Man.”[\[23\]](#) Of course, a Christian will want to vote for a citizen of God’s city if there is a clear choice between him and a rank sinner. That choice is seldom so clear in elections. But understanding this dual citizenship of the Christian voter herself in the City of Man and The City of God is essential to dissecting complicated, sometimes competing priorities.

In the tangled vines surrounding campaign messages, it’s not so simple to discern a candidate’s worldview and decide who best matches our own, but that’s what wisdom and good stewardship require (and as recent scandals like Senator Larry Craig’s alleged homosexual improprieties shows, a politician’s stated views and behavior don’t always match). Seems like the Christian citizen’s top priority, then, is to have a biblical worldview to start with (something that Probe can help with greatly).

Given that, how does the average Christian voter decide on parties, platforms, and candidates? They do it based on principles of biblical ethics, godly values, simple logic and a discerning ear.

Remember, America is a republic, not a democracy. And in a republic we are to elect representatives who will rise above the passions of the moment. They are to be men and women of character and virtue, who will act responsibly and even nobly as they carry out the best interests of the people. No, we don't want leaders we can love because they remind us of our own darker side. We want leaders we can look up to and respect. [{24}](#)

Should we elect a person who claims to be a Christian, like former pastor Mike Huckabee? It depends. Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney received a standing ovation when said, "We need a person of faith to lead the country." A contributor to the blog run by Left-wing evangelical Jim Wallis responded, "But that statement is nearly meaningless, for even Sam Harris is a person of faith. Strident, angry, atheistic faith." [{25}](#) Good point: all have faith, but *faith in what or who?*

On the other hand, former Senator Bill Armstrong states, "God was able to make sons of Abraham out of stone. Certainly that means he can make a good legislator out of somebody who isn't necessarily a member of our church or maybe not even a Christian or maybe an atheist. So I don't think we ought to limit God by saying 'only Christians' deserve our support politically." [{26}](#)

The politically influential Dr. James Dobson caused a stir when he critiqued one candidate for not regularly attending church. Dr. Richard Land responded that this is not a deciding factor for him. He said that as a Baptist minister he would never have voted for the church-attending Jimmy Carter but did vote twice for the non-attending Ronald Reagan. This, like so

many others, seems to be an issue of individual conscience for voters.

Evangelical Mark DeMoss writes in support of Romney, a devout Mormon. “For years, evangelicals have been keenly interested to know whether a candidate shared their faith. I am now more interested in knowing that a president represents my values than I am that he or she shares my theology.”[\[27\]](#) After all, we’ve worked together on issues like abortion, pornography, and gambling. Can’t we be governed well by someone who shares most of our values, he reasons? As columnist Cal Thomas says, I care less about where the ambulance driver worships than if he knows where the hospital is.

Taking the high road of choosing good candidates, not necessarily ones whose theology one agrees with all down the line, makes voting and party affiliation complex for believers. We’d prefer a clean, easy set of choices. But, it appears that even voting and civic engagement is under the “sweat of the brow” curse of Genesis—nothing comes easy.

Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias reminds us that we’re NOT electing a minister or church elder. He said:

I think as we elect, we go before God and [choose] out of the candidates who will be the best ones to represent [sanctity of life] values and at the same time be a good leader . . . whose first responsibility [is] to protect citizens.

What we want is a politician who will understand the basic Judeo-Christian worldview, and on the basis of that the moral laws of this nation are framed, and then run this country with the excellence of that which is recognized in a pluralistic society: the freedom to believe or to disbelieve, and the moral framework with which this was conducted: the sanctity of every individual life.[\[28\]](#)

Vote your conscience. Many issues are disputable matters, as

the Apostle Paul put it. Avoid the temptation to *unreflectively* limit your view to a few pet issues. If over time you prayerfully believe that stewardship of the environment is critical, balanced against all considerations, vote accordingly. If sanctity of life issues like abortion and stem cell research are paramount to you, by all means vote that way. However, realize that trade-offs are inevitable; there won't be a perfect candidate who falls in line on all our values and priorities.

## Politics, Religion, and Values

As the old saw goes, "never talk about politics and religion." That may be wise advice when Uncle Harry is over for Thanksgiving dinner. But as a rule of life, it breeds ignorance and passivity in self-government. "Only if we allow a biblical worldview and a biblically balanced agenda guide our concrete political work can we significantly improve the political order," according to a statement by the National Association of Evangelicals.[\[29\]](#) That means dialogue, and that's not easy.

Some prefer a public square where anything goes *but* religion. That would be wrong. Likewise, a so-called "sacred public square," with religious values imposed on everyone, would be unfair. Christians should support a "*civil* public square" with open, respectful debate.[\[30\]](#)

But, you often hear people make statements like, "Christians shouldn't try to legislate morality." They might simply mean you can't make people good by passing laws. Fair enough. But *all* law, divine and civil, involves imposing right and wrong. Prohibitions against murder and rape are judgments on good and bad. The question is not whether we *should* legislate morality but rather, "*What kind* of morality we should legislate?"[\[31\]](#)

Yet tragically, as *iVoteValues.com* discovered, "many believers

don't even consider their values when voting," often choosing candidates whose positions are at odds with their own beliefs, convictions, and values. A Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study found that *nearly two-thirds* of Americans say their faith has little to do with their voting decisions!{32} Many believers are missing a chance to be salt and light to the watching world.

What about when the field of candidates offers only "the lesser of two evils"? Like when only one candidate is anti-abortion yet she holds to other troubling positions? That requires thoughtful distinctions. If the reason you vote for candidate X is only to avoid the graver consequences of voting for candidate Y, you're not formally cooperating with evil. In this case, whatever evil comes from the anti-abortion candidate you helped elect due to your convictions would be unintended. Same as if you were a bank teller and the robber demanded, "Give me all the money or I'll blow this guy's brains out." You cooperate to avoid the greater evil, but your intent was not to enable the robbery.{33} It's hard to argue against this reasoning in a fallen world where even God allows evil for greater purposes.

What about cases when the field of candidates offers only "the lesser of two evils"? For instance, you can't decide between the more pro-abortion candidate who's otherwise highly qualified *and* the anti-abortion person who has some real flaws.

Some believe that if you vote for the pro-abortion person for other important reasons, then you are not responsible for abortions that might result, as briefly illustrated above. Others see a necessary connection—vote for a "pro-abort" and you are guilty. Study and pray hard on such issues as God gives freedom of conscience.

Sometimes it comes down to choices we'd rather not make. Only rarely, perhaps, can we say that to abstain from voting is the

only way. Notable Christian author Mark Noll believes this is such a time for him.[\[34\]](#)

Others warn that this only helps elect the candidates with unbiblical values. One commentator wrote, “Voters should not spend their franchise on empty gestures... No successful politician is as strong on every issue as we would like. Our own pastors and parents can’t pass this test in their much smaller contexts. Rather than striking a blow for purity, we risk giving up our influence altogether when we follow a man with only one or two ‘perfect’ ideas.”[\[35\]](#)

Hold this kind of issue with an open hand. Many change their minds as they age and lose unrealistic youthful idealism. But if God gives a clear conviction, again, stick with that value or candidate. Only seek the difference between legalism and God’s leading.

Some more left-leaning evangelicals like Ron Sider and Jim Wallis value helping the poor and dispossessed through government, while critics claim that as the Church’s exclusive role. The retort: the Church is failing in its duty and it’s a fulfillment of the Church’s duty to advocate for government intervention. Others focus on sanctity of life issues not only as a higher priority, but as part of the government’s biblically mandated task of protecting its citizenry. What is your conviction? Best be deciding if you don’t know yet.

The purple ink-stained fingers of Iraqi citizens who voted at their own risk for the first time in decades testify to the precious privilege of voting in a free society. Americans gave blood and treasure to free them. Don’t let the same sacrifice made by our ancestors on our behalf go to waste. Inform yourself. “Study to show yourself approved” not only regarding Scripture, but as a citizen of The Cities of Man and of God.

## Notes

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# Amazing Grace Movie: Lessons for Today's Politicians

## "How Sweet the Sound"

Are you familiar with the classic song *Amazing Grace*? You probably are. Do you know the inspiring story behind its songwriter? Maybe like I did, you *think* you know the real story, but you don't.

John Newton was an eighteenth century British slave trader who had a dramatic faith experience during a storm at sea. He gave his life to God, left the slave trade, became a pastor, and

wrote hymns. “Amazing Grace! (how sweet the sound),” Newton wrote, “That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.”[\[1\]](#) He played a significant role in the movement to abolish the slave trade.

Newton’s song and story have inspired millions. *Amazing Grace* has been played at countless funerals and memorial services, sung at civil rights events and in churches, and even hit pop music charts when Judy Collins recorded it. It’s loved the world over. In South Korea, a local audience asked a coworker and me to sing them the English version; they responded by singing it back to us in Korean.

Newton wrote the lyrics, but the tune we know today did not become linked with them until about 1835, after his death.[\[2\]](#) My university roommate and I used to try to see how many different tunes would fit the *Amazing Grace* lyrics. My favorites were *Joy to the World* (the Christmas carol), *Ghost Riders in the Sky*, and *House of the Rising Sun*. Try them sometime. They work!

Jonathan Aitken has written a biography titled *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace*.[\[3\]](#) Aitken sees some parallels between his own life and his subject’s. Aitken was once a prominent British parliamentarian and Cabinet member, but perjury landed him in prison where his life took a spiritual turn. He’s now active in prison ministry and Christian outreach.

John Newton’s journey from slave trader to pastor and hymn writer is stirring. But it has some surprising twists. You see, Newton only became a slave-ship captain *after* he placed his faith in Christ. And he left the slave trade not because of his spiritual convictions, but for health reasons.

## Lost and Found

Newton was the prototypical “bad boy.” His devout Christian mother, who hoped he would become a minister, died when he was six. He says that through much of his youth and life at sea, “I loved sin and was unwilling to forsake it.”<sup>{4}</sup> At times, “I pretended to talk of virtue,” he wrote, “yet my delight and habitual practice was wickedness.”<sup>{5}</sup> He espoused a “freethinking” rationalist philosophy and renounced the Christian faith.<sup>{6}</sup>

Flogged and demoted by the Navy for desertion, he became depressed, considered suicide, and thought of murdering his captain.<sup>{7}</sup> Traded to work on a slave ship, Newton says, “I was exceedingly wretched. . . . I not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion.”<sup>{8}</sup>

In West Africa he partnered with a slave trader and negotiated with African chiefs to obtain slaves.<sup>{9}</sup> Life was good, he recalled. “We lived as we pleased, business flourished, and our employer was satisfied.”<sup>{10}</sup> Aitken, the biographer, says Newton engaged in sexual relations with female slaves.<sup>{11}</sup>

One day on another ship, Newton was reading—casually, “to pass away the time”—an edition of Thomas à Kempis’ classic, *On the Imitation of Christ*. He wondered, “What if these things were true?” Dismayed, he “shut the book quickly.”<sup>{12}</sup> Newton called himself a terrible “blasphemer” who had rejected God completely.<sup>{13}</sup> But then, as Forrest Gump might say, God showed up.

That night, a violent storm flooded the ship with water. Fearing for his life, Newton surprised himself by saying, “The Lord have mercy on us!” Spending long hours at the ship’s helm, he reflected on his life and rejection of God. At first, he thought his shortcomings too great to be forgiven. Then, he says, “I . . . began to think of . . . Jesus whom I had so

often derided . . . of His life and of His death . . . for sins not His own, but for those who in their distress should put their trust in Him.”[{14}](#)

In coming days, the New Testament story of the prodigal son (Luke 15) particularly impressed him. He became convinced of the truth of Jesus’ message and his own need for it. “I was no longer an atheist,” he writes. “I was sincerely touched with a sense of undeserved mercy in being brought safe through so many dangers. . . . I was a new man.”[{15}](#)

Newton discovered that the “new man” would not become perfect. Maturation would be a process, as we’ll see.

## **From Slave-Ship Captain to Pastor**

After his dramatic experience at sea, Newton saw changes in his life. He attended church, read spiritual books, prayed, and spoke outwardly of his commitment. But his faith and behavior would take many twists on the road toward maturity.[{16}](#)

Newton set sail again on a slave ship, seeing no conflict between slaving and his new beliefs. Later he led three voyages as a slave-ship captain. Newton studied the Bible. He held Sunday worship services for his crew on board ship.[{17}](#)

Church services on a slave ship? This seems absolutely disgusting today. How could a dedicated Christian participate in slave trading? Newton, like many of his contemporaries, was still a work-in-progress. Slavery was generally accepted in his world as a pillar of British economy; few yet spoke against it. As Aitken points out, this cultural disconnect doesn’t excuse Christian slave trading, but it does help explain it.

During my youth in the US south, I was appalled by racism I observed, more so when church members practiced it. [I](#)

[concluded](#) that some merely masqueraded as followers of Jesus. Others had genuine faith but—by choice or confusion—did not faithfully follow God. It takes years for some to change. Others never do. Aitken observes that in 1751, Newton's spiritual conscience "was at least twenty years away from waking up to the realization that the Christian gospel and human slavery were irreconcilable."[\[18\]](#)

Two days before he was to embark on his fourth slave-trading voyage as ship's captain, a mysterious illness temporarily paralyzed Newton. His doctors advised him not to sail. The replacement captain was later murdered in a shipboard slave uprising.[\[19\]](#)

Out of the slave trade, Newton became a prominent public official in Liverpool. He attended Christian meetings and grew in his faith. The prominent speaker George Whitfield encouraged him.[\[20\]](#) Life still brought temptations. Newton engaged in the common practice of accepting kickbacks until a business ethics pamphlet by Methodism founder John Wesley prompted him to stop, at significant loss of income.[\[21\]](#)

Eventually, Newton sought to become an ordained minister, but opposing church leaders prevented this for six years. Intervention by the Earl of Dartmouth—benefactor of Dartmouth College in the US—helped launch his formal ministry.[\[22\]](#) Newton was to significantly impact a young Member of Parliament who would help rescue an oppressed people and a nation's character.

## **Newton and Wilberforce: Faith in Action**

William Wilberforce was a rising star in Parliament and seemed destined for political greatness. As a child he had often heard John Newton speak but later rejected the faith. As an adult, conversations with a Cambridge professor had helped lead him to God. He considered leaving Parliament and entering

the ministry. In 1785, he sought the advice of his old pastor, Newton.

Newton advised Wilberforce not to leave politics. "I hope the Lord will make him a blessing, both as a Christian and as a statesman," Newton later explained.[{23}](#) His advice proved pivotal. Wilberforce began attending Newton's church and spending time with him privately. Newton became his mentor.[{24}](#)

Perhaps you've seen the motion picture *Amazing Grace* that portrays Wilberforce's twenty-year parliamentary struggle to outlaw the trading of slaves. If you missed it in theaters, I encourage you see it on DVD. It was after spending a day with Newton that Wilberforce recorded in his diary his decision to focus on abolishing the slave trade.[{25}](#) During [the arduous abolition campaign](#), Wilberforce sometimes considered giving up and quitting Parliament. Newton encouraged him to persist, reminding him of another public figure, the biblical Daniel, who, Newton said, "trusted in the Lord, was faithful . . . and . . . though he had enemies they could not prevail against him."[{26}](#)

Newton's biblical worldview had matured to the point that he became active in the abolition movement. In 1788, he published a widely circulated pamphlet, *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*. "I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me," he wrote, "that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."[{27}](#) His pamphlet detailed horrors of the slave trade and argued against it on moral and practical grounds.

Abolitionists sent a copy to every member of both Houses of Parliament. Newton testified before important parliamentary committees. He described chains, overcrowded quarters, separated families, sexual exploitation, flogging, beating, butchering. The Christian slave-ship captain who once was blind to his own moral hypocrisy now could see.[{28}](#) Jonathan

Aitken says, "Newton's testimony was of vital importance in converting public opinion to the abolitionist cause."[{29}](#)

Wilberforce and his colleagues finally prevailed. In early 1807 Britain outlawed the slave trade. On December 21 of that year, grace finally led John Newton home to his Maker.

## Lessons from a Life of Amazing Grace

John Newton encountered "many dangers, toils, and snares" on his life's voyage from slaver to pastor, hymn writer, mentor, and abolitionist. What lessons does his life hold? Here are a few.

*Moral maturation can take time.* Newton the morally corrupt slave trader embraced faith in Jesus, then continued slave trading. Only years later did his moral and spiritual conscience catch up on this issue with the high principles of the One he followed. We should hold hypocrites accountable, but realize that blinders don't always come off quickly. One bumper sticker I like reads, "Please be patient; God is not finished with me yet."

*Humility became a hallmark of Newton's approach to life.* He learned to recognize his shortcomings. While revising some of his letters for publication, he noted in his diary his failures to follow his own advice: "What cause have I for humiliation!" he exclaimed. "Alas! . . . How defective [I am] in observing myself the rules and cautions I propose to others!"[{30}](#) Near the end of his life, Newton told a visitor, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior."[{31}](#)

*Newton related Jesus' message to current events and everyday life.* For him, faith was not some dull, dusty, irrelevant relic but a living relationship with God, having immense personal and social relevance. He grew to see its import in fighting the slave trade. He used both the Bible and

friendship to encourage Wilberforce. He tied his teaching to the news of the day, seeking to connect people's thoughts with the beliefs that had changed his life.{32}

*Newton was grateful for what he saw as God's providence. Surviving the storm at sea that helped point him to faith was a prime example, but there were many others. As a child, he was nearly impaled in a riding accident.{33} Several times he narrowly missed possible drowning.{34} A shooting accident that could have killed him merely burned part of his hat.{35}* He often expressed gratitude to God.

Have you ever considered writing your own epitaph? What will it say? Here's part of what Newton wrote for his epitaph. It's inscribed on his tomb: "John Newton. Once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy." {36}

## Notes

1. From *Olney Hymns*, 1779; in John Newton, *Out of the Depths, "Revised and Updated for Today's Readers by Dennis R. Hillman"* (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2003), 9. Newton's autobiography was originally published in 1764 as *An Authentic Narrative*, a collection of letters between an anonymous writer (Newton) and a pastor. Newton was not yet ordained when he wrote the letters.
2. Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 233.
3. Aitken, op. cit.
4. Newton, op. cit., 24.
5. Ibid., 33.
6. Ibid., 34.
7. Ibid., 34-37; 40-41.
8. Ibid., 44-45.
9. Ibid., 57-64; Aitken, op. cit., 63-64.

10. Newton, op. cit., 60.
11. Aitken, op. cit., 64.
12. Newton, op. cit., 69.
13. Ibid., 65, 68.
14. Ibid., 69-80; quotations from 71, 75.
15. Newton, op. cit., 82-83.
16. Aitken, op. cit., 85 ff.
17. Ibid., 91, ff.; 106, 107.
18. Ibid., 112.
19. Ibid., 125-126.
20. Ibid., 127-137.
21. Ibid., 140-141.
22. Ibid., 143-177; 193.
23. Ibid., 304.
24. Ibid., 299-308.
25. Ibid., 310 ff.
26. Ibid., 315 for the quote about Daniel; 312-316 for background on Wilberforce's thoughts about quitting.
27. Ibid., 319.
28. Ibid., 319-328.
29. Ibid., 319.
30. Ibid., 243.
31. Ibid., 347.
32. Ibid., 293-296. See also Newton, op. cit., 154.
33. Newton, op. cit., 23.
34. Ibid., 23, 66-67, 94-95.
35. Ibid., 85.
36. Aitken, op. cit., 350, 356.

# William Wilberforce and Abolishing the Slave Trade: How True Christian Values Ended Support of Slavery

*Rusty Wright provides an insightful summary of the journey which led William Wilberforce from unbelief to Christ and to leading the fight to abolish the slave trade in Britain. He clearly shows how true Christian values were key in inspiring Wilberforce's persistent effort to rid Britain of this shameful scourge, the slave trade.*

## Slavery's Scourge

What do you think of slavery? Are you for it or against it?

I suspect most readers would immediately denounce slavery as a scourge on humanity. But in the eighteenth century, much of western society accepted slavery and the slave trade. It took heroic efforts by dedicated leaders to turn the tide.

William Wilberforce, the famous British parliamentarian, helped lead a grueling but bipartisan twenty-year struggle to outlaw the trading of slaves. His inspiring story has many lessons for today's leaders.

Abraham Lincoln acknowledged Wilberforce's significant role in abolition.[\[1\]](#) Nelson Mandela, addressing the British Parliament in 1996 as South Africa's president, declared, "We have returned to the land of William Wilberforce who dared . . . to demand that the slaves in our country should be freed."[\[2\]](#)

The task was formidable. Eighteenth-century Britain led the world in slave trading. A pillar of colonial economy, the

trade was legal, lucrative, and brutal. In one notorious episode, a ship's captain threw 132 slaves overboard, claiming illness and water shortage. British law protected the ship's owners, considering slaves property (like "horses," ruled one judge).{3}

African tribal chiefs, Arab slave dealers, and European traders rounded up Africans, stuffed them into ships' holds, and delivered them to colonial auctions for sale and forced servitude. The "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic was especially horrific. Slaves typically lay horizontal, shackled and chained to each other, packed like sardines. The air was stale and the sanitation putrid.

Olaudah Equiano, a freed slave, said the "stench of the hold," the heat, and the cramped quarters brought sickness and much death. The deceased, Equiano explained, fell "victims to the improvident avarice . . . of their purchasers." He wrote, "The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable." Some slaves, when taken up on deck, jumped overboard, preferring death to their misery.{4}

Enter William Wilberforce, young, silver-tongued, popular, ambitious, seemingly destined for political greatness. Then, a profound change led him on a path that some say cost him the prime ministership, but helped rescue an oppressed people and a nation's character.

## **Wilberforce's "Great Change"**

The transatlantic slave trade was filled with horror stories about human inhumanity. John Newton, a former slave trader, told of a shipmate "who threw a child overboard because it moaned at night in its mother's arms and kept him awake."{5}

William Wilberforce grew up among Britain's privileged, far from these horrors. Heir to a fortune, he was a slacker and

socialite at Cambridge. Sporting an adept sense of humor, he loved partying and playing cards more than schoolwork. His superior intellect frequently covered for his lax academic habits. His keen mind, delightful wit, and charming personality kept many doors open.{6}

At Cambridge, he befriended William Pitt the Younger, who would become Britain's youngest Prime Minister. Both were elected to Parliament in their twenties. Wilberforce became Pitt's bulldog, using his oratorical and relational skills to advance Pitt's legislative agenda.

From 1784 to 1786, what he later called his "Great Change" would forever reshape his life's work. It began innocently enough when he invited his friend, Cambridge professor Isaac Milner, to accompany him on a journey to France. Milner was a brilliant scientist who eventually became vice chancellor of Cambridge. (That's similar to a university president in the U.S.) As they conversed during the trip, Wilberforce was surprised to hear Milner speak favorably of biblical faith. Wilberforce was a skeptic and wanted nothing to do with ardent believers to whom he had been exposed in his youth.

During their travels, Milner and Wilberforce spent long hours discussing faith and the Bible. His doubts receded as Milner answered his objections. Initial intellectual assent to Christian faith morphed into deeper conviction and a personal relationship with God.{7}

Back in England, he reluctantly consulted John Newton, slave trader turned pastor and writer of the well-known hymn, "Amazing Grace." Newton had been Wilberforce's minister for a time during his youth, before his spiritual interest waned. Wilberforce wrote that after his meeting with Newton, "My mind was in a calm, tranquil state, more humbled, looking more devoutly up to God." {8} Newton encouraged Wilberforce that God had raised him up "for the good of the nation." {9}

In time, Wilberforce grew to consider “the suppression of the slave trade” part of his God-given destiny.[{10}](#) At first he thought abolition would come quickly, but he guessed incorrectly, as we will see.

## The Battle in Parliament

When William Wilberforce first introduced anti-slave-trade legislation into Parliament, he had high hopes. He quickly learned that opposition would be fierce.

Financial stakeholders howled. Significant elements of British economy relied on slavery. Businesspersons didn’t want to sacrifice profit. Their elected representatives didn’t want to sacrifice votes. Some claimed slavery benefited slaves since it removed them from barbarous Africa. The Royal Family opposed abolition. Even Admiral Lord Nelson, Britain’s great hero, denounced “the damnable doctrine of Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies.”[{11}](#)

Wilberforce and the Abolitionists repeatedly introduced legislation. Apathy, hostility and parliamentary chicanery dragged out the battle. Once, his opponents distributed free opera tickets to some abolition supporters for the evening of a crucial vote, which the Abolitionists then lost. Enough supporting members of Parliament were at the opera to have reversed the outcome.[{12}](#) Twice West Indian sea captains threatened Wilberforce’s life. His health faltered.[{13}](#)

Buoyed by friends and faith, Wilberforce persisted. He believed God viewed all humans as equal,[{14}](#) citing Acts 17:26, “[God] has made from one blood every nation of men.” Methodism founder John Wesley encouraged perseverance, writing, “If God is with you, who can be against you? . . . Be not weary in well-doing. Go on . . . till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away.”[{15}](#) John Newton wrote and testified in Parliament about his experiences as a

slave trader, “a business at which my heart now shudders,” he explained.[{16}](#)

Finally, in 1807, twenty years after beginning, Wilberforce prevailed. Parliament erupted in cheering as the slave trade abolition bill passed.

Of course, outlawing the British transatlantic slave trade in 1807 did not immediately eradicate the trade. In fact, it continued, practiced illegally for a while by British subjects and for decades among other nations like France, Spain and Portugal. Alas, African tribal chiefs and Arab slave-dealers continued to supply captured Africans for the system.[{17}](#)

But outlawing the slave trade proved the impetus for a host of social improvements, including prison reforms, child labor laws, and abolition of slavery itself in 1833, of which Wilberforce learned only a few days before his death.

## **Wilberforce's Methods: Lessons for Today**

The esteemed historian W.E.H. Lecky ranked the British anti-slavery movement “among the three or four perfectly virtuous pages . . . in the history of nations.”[{18}](#) While, of course, Wilberforce and his Abolitionist colleagues were not perfect, their historic effort left many lessons for today. Consider a few that could enhance your own interaction in the workplace, academia, politics, cross-cultural engagement, in your neighborhood or family.

*The value of friendships and teamwork.* Many of the Abolitionists lived for several years in the same community. They and their families enjoyed one another's friendship and moral support. This camaraderie provided invaluable encouragement, ideas, and correction.

*Bipartisan cooperation* was essential to Wilberforce's success. He set aside differences on certain issues to collaborate for

the greater good. Both political liberals and conservatives joined the abolition cause. Quakers mobilized support. Wilberforce partnered with Jeremy Bentham a founder of Utilitarianism on abolition and prison reform.[\[19\]](#) Utilitarianism, of course, favors the end justifying the means, hardly a biblical value.[\[20\]](#) Yet the two could work together.

*Wilberforce sought to make civil discourse civil.* Biographer Kevin Belmonte notes, “After his Great Change Wilberforce was nearly always able to dissent from the opinions of others with tact and kindness. This trait grew gradually within him; it was not instantaneous, nor did he always act as charitably as he might have wished on some occasions. But he kept trying.”[\[21\]](#) He aimed to disagree without being disagreeable.

*Wilberforce attempted to establish common ground with his opponents.* In his opening speech on abolition before Parliament, he was especially gracious. “I mean not to accuse anyone,” he explained, “but to take the shame upon myself, in common indeed with the whole Parliament of Great Britain, for having suffered this horrid trade to be carried on under their authority. We are all guilty we ought all to plead guilty, and not to exculpate ourselves by throwing the blame on others.”[\[22\]](#)

William Wilberforce was not perfect. He had fears, flaws and foibles like anyone. You likely would not agree with all his political views. But he did possess dedication to principle and to God, close friends of many stripes, a penchant for bipartisan cooperation, and steadfast commitment to right terrible injustice. A fine example for life and work today.

## **Wilberforce's Motivation: Lessons for Today**

Have you ever been tempted by opposition to abandon a good

cause? What motivated William Wilberforce to persevere in pursuing abolition for twenty agonizing years?

After discovering faith, Wilberforce viewed the world through different lenses-biblical lenses. He authored a popular book to explain faith's implications. Famous parliamentarian Edmund Burke, who found solace in it during his last two days of life, said, "If I live, I shall thank Wilberforce for having sent such a book into the world."[{23}](#)

Wilberforce's book, *Real Christianity*,[{24}](#) emphasized personal, life-changing faith, not mere nominal assent. He wrote, "God loved the world so much and felt such tender mercy for us that He gave His only Son Jesus Christ for our redemption."[{25}](#) He felt all humans have an innate flawself-centeredness or sin that inhibits true generosity, "clouds our moral vision and blunts our moral sensitivity."[{26}](#) He called selfishness "the mortal disease of all political communities"[{27}](#) and humbly admitted his own "need and imperfection."[{28}](#)

Wilberforce believed Jesus suffered "death on the cross . . . for our sake" so those accepting His pardon "should come to Him and . . . have life that lasts forever."[{29}](#) Don't get the cart before the horse, he warned. Good behavior doesn't earn God's acceptance; it should be a result of "our reconciliation with God."[{30}](#) Wilberforce encouraged his reader to "Throw yourself completely . . . on [God's] undeserved mercy. He is full of love, and He will never reject you."[{31}](#)

Wilberforce aspired to the Golden Rule: "doing to others as we would have them do to us."[{32}](#) He believed the faith was intellectually credible and advocated teaching its supporting evidences,[{33}](#) but cautioned that "a lack of faith is in general a disease of the heart more than of the mind."[{34}](#)

Wilberforce asked penetrating questions: "Do we love our

enemies? Are we gentle even when we are provoked? Are we ready to forgive and apt to forget injuries? . . . Do we return evil with good . . . ? Can we rejoice in our enemy's good fortune, or sympathize with their distresses?"[\[35\]](#) Sound convicting? Join the club.

An inscribed tribute to Wilberforce at Westminster Abbey where he is buried commends his efforts, "Which, by the blessing of God, removed from England the guilt of the African slave trade, and prepared the way for the abolition of slavery in every colony of the Empire: . . . he relied, not in vain, on God."[\[36\]](#)

Wilberforce's legacy of faith and service persists. What will your legacy be?

\*Parts of this essay are adapted from Rusty Wright, "'[Amazing Grace](#)' Movie: Lessons for Today's Politicians," Copyright Rusty Wright 2007, and are used by permission.

## Notes

1. Abraham Lincoln, Speech fragment concerning the abolition of slavery, c. July 1858. The Gilder Lehrman Collection; [tinyurl.com/2cs99u](http://tinyurl.com/2cs99u), accessed April 6, 2007.
2. "Address of the President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela to the Joint Houses of Parliament of the United Kingdom," 11 July 1996, Issued by: Office of the President, [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1996/sp960711.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1996/sp960711.html), accessed July 23, 2007.
3. Garth Lean, *God's Politician* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1987), 1-6; Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007) 103-107.
4. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of*

*Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, (first published in 1789), Chapter Two; excerpted in Ted Baehr, Susan Wales, Ken Wales, *The Amazing Grace of Freedom: The Inspiring Faith of William Wilberforce, the Slaves' Champion* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2007), 62-63.

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7. Kevin Belmonte, *William Wilberforce: A Hero for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2007), 21, 69-81 ff.; Lean, op. cit., 32-40.

8. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 80.

9. Lean, op. cit., 33-40.

10. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 97.

11. Lean, op. cit., 50-51.

12. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 134.

13. Lean, op. cit., 51, 60, 93.

14. Kevin Belmonte, "William Wilberforce," [www.wilberforce.org/Bio.asp?ID=1016](http://www.wilberforce.org/Bio.asp?ID=1016), accessed April 6, 2007.

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16. Marylynn Rouse, "John Newton: Mentor to William Wilberforce," in Baehr, et al., op. cit., 105-106.

17. William Law Mathieson, *Great Britain and the Slave Trade: 1839-1865* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929) 1, 3, 5, 7-10 ff., 170-171, 185-186 ff.

18. Lean, op. cit., 69.

19. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 95, 164-165, 167, 174.

20. Kerby Anderson, "Utilitarianism: The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number," 2004, [www.probe.org/utilitarianism-the-greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number/](http://www.probe.org/utilitarianism-the-greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number/); accessed April 6, 2007.

21. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 212.

22. Metaxas, op. cit., 133.

23. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 245.

24. *William Wilberforce, Real Christianity*; Abridged and updated by Ellyn Sanna (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 1999). The original was published in 1797 with the ponderous

title, *The Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity*.

25. Ibid., 50.

26. Ibid., 29, 256.

27. Ibid., 243 ff.; 246.

28. Ibid., 256-257.

29. Ibid., 50-51.

30. Ibid., 198-199.

31. Ibid., 269-270.

32. Belmonte 2002, 2007, op. cit., 177; 90-91. Biblical references for the “Golden Rule” are Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12.

33. Wilberforce, op. cit., 18; 221-222; 285-293.

34. Ibid., 289.

35. Ibid., 193.

36. Baehr et al., op. cit., 140.

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## **Marriage, Family, and Political Views**

Does our view of marriage and family affect our worldview? Obviously it does. But most people have probably never thought about the fact that marriage and family also affect voting patterns.

We are a year away from the November 2008 elections, but some trend watchers are starting to see interesting patterns that will affect elections in the next few decades. In particular,

they are finding a marriage gap and a fertility gap.

## Marriage Gap

An article in *USA Today* pointed out how a wedding band could be crucial in future elections. House districts held by Republicans are full of married people. Democratic districts are stacked with people who have never married.[{1}](#)

Consider that before the 2006 Congressional elections, Republicans controlled 49 of the 50 districts with the highest rates of married people. On the other hand, Democrats represented all 50 districts that had the highest rates of adults who have never married.

If you go back to the 2004 presidential election, you see a similar pattern. President George Bush beat Senator John Kerry by 15 percentage points among married people. However, Senator Kerry beat President Bush by 18 percentage points among unmarried people.

Married people not only vote differently from unmarried people, they tend to define words like family differently as well. And they tend to perceive government differently. But an even more significant gap in politics involves not just marriage but fertility.

## Fertility Gap

When you look at the various congressional districts, you not only see a difference in marriage but in fertility. Consider these two extremes. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, a Catholic mother of five from San Francisco, has fewer children in her district than any other member of Congress: 87,727. Rep. Chris Cannon, R-Utah, a Mormon father of eight, represents the most children: 278,398.[{2}](#)

This stark demographic divide illustrates the difference in perspectives found in Congress. Republican members of Congress

represented 39 million children younger than 18. This is 7 million more children than are represented in districts with Democratic members of Congress. And it is also true that children in Democratic districts are far more likely to live in poverty and more likely to have a single parent than children in Republican districts.

This fertility gap explains the differences in worldview and political perspective. When you consider the many political issues before Congress that affect children and families, you can begin to see why there are often stark differences in perspectives on topics ranging from education to welfare to childcare to child health insurance.

## **Future of the Fertility Gap**

So far we have been looking at the past and the present. What about the future? Arthur Brooks wrote about the fertility gap last year in the *Wall Street Journal*. He concluded that liberals have a big baby problem: They're not having enough of them . . . and their pool of potential new voters is suffering as a result.[\[3\]](#)

He noted that, if you picked 100 unrelated politically liberal adults at random, you would find that they had, between them, 147 children. If you picked 100 conservatives, you would find 208 kids. That is a fertility gap of 41 percent.

We know that about 80 percent of people with an identifiable party preference grow up to vote essentially the same way as their parents. This fertility gap translates into lots more little conservatives than little liberals who will vote in future elections.

So what could this mean for future presidential elections? Consider the key swing state of Ohio which is currently split 50-50 between left and right. If current patterns continue, Brooks estimates that Ohio will swing to the right. By 2012 it

will be 54 percent to 46 percent. And by 2020, it will be solidly conservative by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent.

Now look at the state of California that tilts in favor of liberals by 55 percent to 45 percent. By the year 2020, it will swing conservative by a percentage of 54 percent to 46 percent. The reason is due to the fertility gap.

Of course most people vote for politicians, personalities, and issues not parties. But the general trend of the fertility gap cannot be ignored. I think we can see the impact that marriage and family have on worldview and political views. And as we can see from these numbers, they will have an even more profound impact in the future.

## Notes

1. Dennis Cauchon, Marriage gap could sway elections, *USA Today*, 27 September 2006.
2. Dennis Cauchon, Fertility gap helps explain political divide, *USA Today*, 27 September 2006.
3. Arthur Brooks, The Fertility Gap, *Wall Street Journal*, 22 August 2006.

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## Veep Logic?

When you're the Vice President of the United States and your office uses farfetched arguments to defend your policies, maybe it's time to review your logic.

Dick Cheney's aides have supported his office's refusal to comply with an executive order because, they've said, the Veep is not part of the government's executive branch. Huh? Seems

his duties as president of the Senate, part of the legislative branch, exempt him from executive orders.

The White House now has backed off Cheney's approach and welcomed him back into the executive branch—but he still doesn't have to comply.

Confused? Amused? Disturbed?

## **Civics Lesson**

I've forgotten more of my early education than I care to admit, but I do remember junior high school civics class: Executive, legislative, and judicial. President and VP are executive branch, Congress is legislative, Supreme Court is judicial.

In 2003, President Bush amended an existing executive order about classified information in light of post-9/11 security concerns. Executive branch entities are to report to an oversight agency about how they handle classified material.

Bush's order applies to executive agencies and any other entity within the executive branch that comes into the possession of classified information. [\[1\]](#) You would think that includes the Office of the Vice President, but Cheney's office has refused since 2003 to comply.

Logical problems with the dual-role argument are legion. Cheney in the past has invoked executive privilege to maintain secrets. Surely having legislative branch duties does not negate one's executive branch status. Can a student disobey school rules because s/he also participates in community service projects?

## **Cheney's Gift to Jon Stewart**

Recently the dual-role logic made headlines. Administration critics howled. Humorists roared. "Cheney's gift to Jon

Stewart," remarked one journalist friend. The Comedy Central's *Daily Show* TV anchor joked that Cheney was establishing himself as the fourth branch of government. [{2}](#)

Congressman Rahm Emanuel of Illinois proposed cutting funding for Cheney's office and home. "He's not part of the executive branch. We're not going to fund something that doesn't exist," said Emanuel according to the *Chicago Tribune*. "I'm following through on the vice president's logic, no matter how ludicrous it might be." [{3}](#) The funding cut narrowly failed in the House.

*The Washington Post* noted that Emanuel also opposed Cheney's participation in the congressional baseball game because "he would remake the rules to his liking." [{4}](#)

Now a White House spokesman says the dual-role argument is not necessary. He says the executive order explicitly gives Cheney the same standing in the matter as Bush, who issued and enforces the order, so the subordinate oversight agency has no authority to investigate Cheney. [{5}](#)

That huge sigh you hear is America relieved that a constitutional crisis has been averted. The internal dispute was passed on to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, who, of course, [has his own critics](#).

## The Question Remains

But the question remains, what are we to make of a high government office that would use such unreasonable reasoning in the first place? Are its leaders naive? Desperate? Covering up something? Blind to the obvious?

The entire episode hints of George Orwell's [Animal Farm](#): All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.

Cheney's distorted logic involves focusing on his lesser

legislative responsibility and minimizing his major executive responsibilities. Another adept social critic, Jesus of Nazareth, once rebuked some legalistic leaders for majoring on the minors and minimizing what's important. "Blind guides!" he called them. "You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel!" {6}

Cheney seems to—or seems to want us to—strain the gnat and swallow the camel. Is it a wonder such tenuous logic makes observers suspicious?

## Notes

1. George W. Bush, Executive Order: Further Amendment to Executive Order 12958, As Amended, Classified National Security Information; The White House, March 25, 2003; 6.1 (b); [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030325-11.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030325-11.html), accessed June 29, 2007.
2. "The Daily Show: Non-Executive Decision," [nynerd.com/jon-stewart-on-dick-cheney/](http://nynerd.com/jon-stewart-on-dick-cheney/), accessed June 29, 2007.
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5. Jim Rutenberg, "White House Drops Vice President's Dual-Role Argument as Moot," The New York Times, June 28, 2007; [www.nytimes.com/2007/06/28/washington/28cheney.html?ref=washington](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/28/washington/28cheney.html?ref=washington); accessed June 29, 2007.
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# God in Our Nation's Capital

## U.S. Capitol Building

In our minds, let's take a walking tour through America's capital city, Washington, DC. What we will be seeing in our minds eye comes from the book *Rediscovering God in America: Reflections on the Role of Faith in Our Nations History and Future*.<sup>{1}</sup> As we consider what religious symbols are found in the buildings and monuments, I think we will gain a fresh appreciation for the role of religion in the public square.

We will begin with the U.S. Capitol Building. No other building in Washington defines the skyline like this one does. It has been the place of formal inaugurations as well as informal and spontaneous events, such as when two hundred members of Congress gathered on the steps on September 12, 2001, to sing God Bless America.

President George Washington laid the cornerstone for the Capitol in 1793. When the north wing was finished in 1800, Congress was able to move in. Construction began again in 1803 under the direction of Benjamin Latrobe. The British invasion of Washington in 1812 resulted in the partial destruction of the Capitol. In 1818, Charles Bulfinch oversaw the completion of the north and south wings (including a chamber for the Supreme Court).<sup>{2}</sup>

Unfortunately, the original design failed to consider that additional states would enter the union, and these additional representatives were crowding the Capitol. President Millard Fillmore chose Thomas Walter to continue the Capitols construction and rehabilitation. Construction halted during the first part of the Civil War, and it wasn't until 1866 that

the canopy fresco in the Rotunda was completed.

The religious imagery in the Rotunda is significant. Eight different historical paintings are on display. The first is the painting *The Landing of Columbus* that depicts the arrival on the shores of America. Second is *The Embarkation of the Pilgrims* that shows the Pilgrims observing a day of prayer and fasting led by William Brewster.

Third is the painting *Discovery of the Mississippi by DeSoto*. Next to DeSoto is a monk who prays as a crucifix is placed in the ground. Finally, there is the painting *Baptism of Pocahontas*.

Throughout the Capitol Building, there are references to God and faith. In the Cox Corridor a line from America the Beautiful is carved in the wall: America! God shed His grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea!{3}

In the House chamber is the inscription, In God We Trust. Also in the House chamber, above the Gallery door, stands a marble relief of Moses, the greatest of the twenty-three law-givers (and the only one full-faced). At the east entrance to the Senate chamber are the words *Annuit Coeptis* which is Latin for God has favored our undertakings. The words In God We Trust are also written over the southern entrance.

In the Capitols Chapel is a stained glass window depicting George Washington in prayer under the inscription In God We Trust. Also, a prayer is inscribed in the window which says, Preserve me, God, for in Thee do I put my trust.{4}

## The Washington Monument

The tallest monument in Washington, DC, is the Washington Monument. From the base of the monument to its aluminum capstone are numerous references to God. This is fitting since

George Washington was a religious man. When he took the oath of office on April 30, 1789, he asked that the Bible be opened to Deuteronomy 28. After the oath, Washington added, So help me God and bent forward and kissed the Bible before him.[\[5\]](#)

Construction of the Washington Monument began in 1848, but by 1854 the Washington National Monument Society was out of money and construction stopped for many years. Mark Twain said it had the forlorn appearance of a hollow, oversized chimney. In 1876, Congress appropriated money for the completion of the monument which took place in 1884. In a ceremony on December 6, the aluminum capstone was placed atop the monument. The east side of the capstone has the Latin phrase *Laus Deo*, which means Praise be to God.

The cornerstone of the Washington Monument includes a Holy Bible, which was a gift from the Bible Society. Along with it are copies of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

If you walk inside the monument you will see a memorial plaque from the Free Press Methodist-Episcopal Church. On the twelfth landing you will see a prayer offered by the city of Baltimore. On the twentieth landing you will see a memorial offered by Chinese Christians. There is also a presentation made by Sunday school children from New York and Philadelphia on the twenty-fourth landing.

The monument is full of carved tribute blocks that say: Holiness to the Lord; Search the Scriptures; The memory of the just is blessed; May Heaven to this union continue its beneficence; In God We Trust; and Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

So what was George Washingtons faith? Historians have long debated the extent of his faith. But Michael Novak points out that Washingtons own step-granddaughter, Nelly Custis, thought his words and actions were so plain and obvious that she could

not understand how anybody failed to see that he had always lived as a serious Christian.{6}

During the first meeting of the Continental Congress in September 1774, George Washington prayed alongside the other delegates. And they recited Psalm 35 together as patriots.

George Washington also proclaimed the first national day of thanksgiving in the United States. In 1795 he said, When we review the calamities which afflict so many other nations, the present condition of the United States affords much matter of consolation and satisfaction. He therefore called for a day of public thanksgiving and prayer. He said, In such a state of things it is in an especial manner our duty as people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude, to acknowledge our many and great obligations to Almighty God and implore Him to continue and confirm the blessings we experience.{7}

## The Lincoln Memorial

The idea of a memorial to the sixteenth president had been discussed almost within days after his assassination, but lack of finances proved to be a major factor. Finally, Congress allocated funds for it during the Taft administration. Architect Henry Bacon wanted to model it after the Greek Parthenon, and work on it was completed in 1922.

Bacon chose the Greek Doric columns in part to symbolize Lincolns fight to preserve democracy during the Civil War.{8} The thirty-six columns represented the thirty-six states that made up the Union at the time of Lincolns death.

Daniel Chester French sculpted the statue of Abraham Lincoln to show his compassionate nature and his resolve in preserving the Union. One of Lincolns hands is tightly clenched (to show his determination) while the other hand is open and relaxed (to show his compassion).

Lincolns speeches are displayed within the memorial. On the left side is the Gettysburg Address (only 267 words long). He said, We here highly resolved that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.

On the right side is Lincolns second inaugural address (only 703 words long). It mentions God fourteen times and quotes the Bible twice. He reflected on the fact that the Civil War was not controlled by man, but by God. He noted that each side looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other.

He concludes with a lament over the destruction caused by the Civil War, and appeals to charity in healing the wounds of the war. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nations wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

It is fitting that one hundred years after Lincolns second inaugural, his memorial was the place where Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his most famous speech, I have a dream. An inscription was added to the memorial in 2003 that was based upon Isaiah 40:4-5: I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

At a White House dinner during the war, a clergyman gave the benediction and closed with the statement that The Lord is on the Unions side. Abraham Lincoln responded: I am not at all concerned about that, for I know that the Lord is always on

the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lords side.[{9}](#)

## The Jefferson Memorial

Thomas Jefferson was Americas third president and the drafter of the Declaration of Independence, so it is surprising that a memorial to him was not built earlier than it was. In 1934, Franklin Delano Roosevelt persuaded Congress to establish a memorial commission to honor Jefferson. After some study the commission decided to honor Pierre L'Enfant's original plan, which called for the placement of five different memorials that would be aligned in a cross-like manner.[{10}](#)

The architect of the memorial proposed a Pantheon-like structure that was modeled after Jefferson's own home which incorporated the Roman architecture that Jefferson admired. The original design was modified, and the memorial was officially dedicated in 1943.

When you enter the Jefferson Memorial you will find many references to God. A quote that runs around the interior dome says, I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the minds of man.

On the first panel, you will see the famous passage from the Declaration of Independence: 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, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

On the second panel is an excerpt from A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, 1777. It was passed by the Virginia Assembly in 1786. It reads: Almighty God hath created the mind free. . . . All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens . . . are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion. . . . No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or

ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions of belief, but all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. I know but one code of morality for men whether acting singly or collectively.

The third panel is taken from Jefferson's 1785 Notes on the State of Virginia. It reads: God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever. Commerce between master and slave is despotism. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free.

## **The Supreme Court**

Of the three branches of government, the Supreme Court was the last to get its own building. In fact, it met in the Capitol building for over a hundred years. During that time, it met in many different rooms of the capitol until it finally settled in the Old Senate Chamber in 1860.

Supreme Court Justice William Howard Taft (who also had served as president) persuaded Congress to authorize funds for the Supreme Court building. It was modeled after Greek and Roman architecture in the familiar Corinthian style and dedicated in 1935.

It is ironic that the Supreme Court has often issued opinions which have stripped religious displays from the public square when these opinions have been read in a building with many religious displays. And it is ironic that public expressions of faith have been limited when all sessions of the court begin with the Courts Marshal announcing: God save the United States and this honorable court.

In a number of cases, the Supreme Court has declared the posting of the Ten Commandments unconstitutional (in public school classrooms and in a local courthouse in Kentucky). But this same Supreme Court has a number of places in its building where there are images of Moses with the Ten Commandments. These can be found at the center of the sculpture over the east portico of the Supreme Court building, inside the actual courtroom, and finally, engraved over the chair of the Chief Justice, and on the bronze doors of the Supreme Court itself.[{11}](#)

Nevertheless, the Supreme Court has often ruled against the very kind of religious expression that can be found in the building that houses the court. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich says in his book *Rediscovering God in America*, that we see a systematic effort . . . to purge all religious expression from American public life. He goes on to say that for the last fifty years the Supreme Court has become a permanent constitutional convention in which the whims of five appointed lawyers have rewritten the meaning of the Constitution. Under this new, all-powerful model of the Court, and by extension the trail-breaking Ninth Circuit Court, the Constitution and the law can be redefined by federal judges unchecked by the other two coequal branches of government.[{12}](#)

This is the state of affairs we find in the twenty-first century. If five justices believe that prayer at a public school graduation is unconstitutional, then it is unconstitutional. If five justices believe that posting the Ten Commandments is unconstitutional, it is unconstitutional.

If the trend continues, one wonders if one day they may rule that religious expression on public monuments is unconstitutional. If that takes place, then you might want to invest in sandblasting companies in the Washington, DC, area. There are lots of buildings and monuments with words about God, faith, and religion. It would take a long time to erase all of these words from public view.

The next time you are in our nations capital, make sure you take a walking tour of the buildings and monuments. They testify to a belief in God and a dynamic faith that today is often under attack from the courts and the culture.

## Notes

1. Newt Gingrich, *Rediscovering God in America: Reflections on the Role of Faith in Our Nation's History and Future* (Nashville, TN: Integrity House, 2006).
2. Ibid., 77.
3. Ibid., 81.
4. Ibid., 2.
5. Ibid., 35.
6. Ibid., 39.
7. Ibid., 40.
8. Ibid., 50.
9. Ibid., 54.
10. Ibid., 44.
11. Ibid., 87.
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# Ten Commandments in America (Radio)

The ongoing debate about the posting the Ten Commandments in public places has certainly been controversial for the last few decades. But as we will see this week, there was a time not so long ago when politicians and citizens alike saw the Ten Commandments as the very foundation of our society.

In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled against the posting of the Ten Commandments in the public schools in the case of *Stone v. Graham*. They ruled that the preeminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature.

The justices even worried what would happen if students were to read the Ten Commandments on their classroom wall: If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause.[{1}](#)

In 2005, the Supreme Court revisited this decision because of cases from Kentucky and Texas. A divided court struck down displays in two Kentucky courthouses, but ruled a Ten Commandments monument on state government land in Texas was acceptable. Anyone looking for a clear line of reasoning that provides guidance for future cases will not find them.

In the Kentucky cases, two counties posted copies of the Ten Commandments on the walls of their courthouse. These framed copies of the Ten Commandments hung alongside documents such as the Bill of Rights, the Star-Spangled Banner, and a version of the Congressional Record declaring 1983 the Year of the Bible. These were considered unconstitutional.

The Texas case involved a six foot granite monument on the grounds of the Texas Capitol. It was deemed acceptable because it is one of seventeen historical displays on the twenty-two-acre lot. Although this was considered constitutional, some justices couldnt even accept that. Justice John Paul Stevens said, The monument is not a work of art and does not refer to any event in the history of the state, he wrote. The message transmitted by Texas chosen display is quite plain: This state endorses the divine code of the Judeo-Christian God.[{2}](#)

Other justices noted that one monument among many others is hardly an endorsement of religion. You can stop to read it, you can ignore it, or you can walk around it. Chief Justice William Rehnquist argued that the monuments placement on the grounds among secular monuments was passive, rather than confrontational. Justice Antonin Scalia listed various ways in which higher beings are invoked in public life, from so help me God in inaugural oaths to the prayer that opens the Supreme Courts sessions. He asked, With all of this reality (and much more) staring it in the face, how can the court possibly assert that the First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality?

The framers of the Constitution didnt try to mandate neutrality. They understood that ultimately law must rest upon a moral foundation. One of those foundations was the Ten Commandments.

## **Ten Commandments in American History**

When we look at the Founding Fathers, we see they were anything but neutral when it came to addressing the influence of the Ten Commandments on our republic. For example, twelve of the original thirteen colonies incorporated the entire Ten Commandments into their civil and criminal codes. {3}

John Quincy Adams stated, The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal as well as a moral and religious code. These are laws essential to the existence of men in society and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws. He added that: Vain indeed would be the search among the writings of [secular history] . . . to find so broad, so complete and so solid a basis of morality as this Decalogue lays down. {4}

John Witherspoon was the president of what later came to be known as Princeton University and was a signer of the

Declaration of Independence. He said that the Ten Commandments are the sum of the moral law.{5}

John Jay was one of the authors of *The Federalist Papers*. He later became the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He said, The moral or natural law, was given by the sovereign of the universe to all mankind.{6}

On September 19, 1796, in his Farewell Address, President George Washington said, Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports.{7}

William Holmes McGuffey, considered the Schoolmaster of the Nation, once said, The Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus are not only basic but plenary.{8}

The founders of this country also wanted to honor Moses as the deliverer of the Ten Commandments. After separating from England, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were responsible for designing a symbol of this newly formed nation. Franklin proposed Moses lifting his wand and dividing the Red Sea.{9}

In the U.S. Capitol, there are displays of the great lawgivers (Hammurabi, Justinian, John Locke, William Blackstone, etc). All are profiles of the lawgivers except for one. The relief of Moses is full faced rather than in profile and looks directly down onto the House Speakers rostrum.

Anyone who enters the National Archives to view the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution must first pass by the Ten Commandments embedded in the entry way of the Archives. Likewise, there are a number of depictions of the Ten Commandments. One is on the entry to the Supreme Court Chamber, where it is engraved on the lower half of the two large oak doors.

Another is engraved in the stone above the head of the Chief

Justice with the great American eagle protecting them. And Moses is included among the great lawgivers in the sculpture relief on the east portico.

Chief Justice Warren Burger noted the irony of this in the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Lynch v. Donnelly*. The very chamber in which oral arguments on this case were heard is decorated with a notable and permanent not seasonal symbol of religion: Moses with the Ten Commandments. [\[10\]](#)

## The Commandments in Civil Law

Let's see how the Ten Commandments were expressed in American civil law. It may surprise you to find out that all of the commandments were written into law in some way. [\[11\]](#)

These illustrations are descriptive, not normative. I am not arguing that we must return to these legal formulations in every case cited. We may certainly disagree to what extent the Ten Commandments should be part of our legal structure. But there should be no disagreement that at one time the Ten Commandments were the very foundation of the civil laws of America.

The Ten Commandments can be summarized in this way: (1) Have no other gods, (2) Have no idols, (3) Honor Gods name, (4) Honor the Sabbath, (5) Honor your parents, (6) Do not murder, (7) Do not commit adultery, (8) Do not steal, (9) Do not commit perjury, (10) Do not covet. The Ten Commandments might be called rules of (1) religion, (2) worship, (3) reverence, (4) time, (5) authority, (6) life, (7) purity, (8) property, (9) tongue, and (10) contentment.

The first commandment is: You shall have no other gods before Me (Ex. 20:3). There were a number of early colonial laws that addressed this command.

A law passed in 1610 in the Virginia colony declared that since

we owe our highest and supreme duty, our greatest and all our allegiance to Him from whom all power and authority is derived . . . I do strictly command and charge all Captains and Officers . . . to have a care that the Almighty God be duly and daily served.{12}

A 1641 Massachusetts law stated: If any man after legal conviction shall have or worship any other god but the Lord God, he shall be put to death. Deut. 13:6,10; Deut 17:2,6; Ex. 22:20.{13}

The second commandment is: You shall not make for yourself an idol (Ex. 20:4). A 1680 New Hampshire law declared: It is enacted by ye ssembly and ye authority thereof, yet if any person having had the knowledge of the true God openly and manifestly have or worship any other gods but the Lord God, he shall be put to death. Ex. 22:20; Deut. 13:6 and 10.{14}

The third commandment is: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Ex. 20:7). Laws to obey this commandment came in two forms. Some were laws prohibiting blasphemy and others were laws against profanity. Noah Webster discussed both of these categories in relation to the third commandment in one of his letters:

*When in obedience to the third commandment of the Decalogue you would avoid profane swearing, you are to remember that this alone is not a full compliance with the prohibition which [also] comprehends all irrelevant words or action and whatever tends to cast contempt on the Supreme Being or on His word and ordinances.{15}*

Nearly all of the colonies had anti-blasphemy laws. This includes Connecticut, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

As Commander-in-Chief, George Washington issued numerous military orders during the American Revolution that prohibited swearing. This is one of his orders issued on July 4, 1775:

*The General most earnestly requires and expects a due observance of those articles of war established for the government of the army which forbid profane cursing, swearing, and drunkenness; and in like manner requires and expects of all officers and soldiers not engaged on actual duty, a punctual attendance on Divine Service to implore the blessings of Heaven upon the means used for our safety and defense.*[{16}](#)

After the Declaration of Independence, George Washington issued similar orders to his troops during the Revolutionary War. And similar prohibitions against blasphemy and profanity were issued throughout the rest of the Eighteenth century and into the Nineteenth century.

The fourth commandment is: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8). Each of the colonies and states had laws dealing with the Sabbath. Even the U.S. Constitution has a provision stipulating that the president has 10 days to sign a law, Sundays excepted. This clause was found in state constitutions and thus incorporated into the U.S. Constitution.

An 1830 New York law declared that: Civil process cannot, by statute, be executed on Sunday, and a service of such process on Sunday is utterly void and subjects the officer to damages.[{17}](#) Many other states had similar laws.

During the American Revolution, George Washington issued military orders directing that the Sabbath be observed. Here is his order of May 2, 1778 at Valley Forge:

*The Commander in Chief directs that Divine Service be performed every Sunday at 11 oclock in those brigades to*

*which there are chaplains; those which have none to attend the places of worship nearest to them. It is expected that officers of all ranks will by their attendance set an example to their men.*[\*{18}\*](#)

The fifth commandment is: Honor your father and your mother (Ex. 20:12). A 1642 Connecticut law dealt with this commandment and cited additional verses:

*If any child or children above sixteen years old, and of sufficient understanding shall curse or smite their normal father or mother, he or they shall be put to death; unless it can be sufficiently testified that the parents have been very unchristianly negligent in the education of such children or so provoke them by extreme and cruel correction that they have been forced thereunto to preserve themselves from death [or] maiming. Ex. 21:17, Lev. 20, Ex. 20:15.*[\*{19}\*](#)

The sixth commandment is: You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13). The earliest laws in America illustrate that punishment for murder was rooted in the Ten Commandments. A 1641 Massachusetts law declared:

*4. Ex. 21:12, Numb. 35:13-14, 30-31. If any person commit any willful murder, which is manslaughter committed upon premeditated malice, hatred, or cruelty, not in a mans necessary and just defense nor by mere casualty against his will, he shall be put to death.*

*5. Numb. 25:20-21, Lev. 24:17. If any person slayeth another suddenly in his anger or cruelty of passion, he shall be put to death.*

*6. Ex. 21:14. If any person shall slay another through guile, either by poisoning or other such devilish practice, he shall be put to death.*[\*{20}\*](#)

The seventh commandment is: You shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14). Most colonies and states had laws against adultery. Even in the late Nineteenth century, the highest criminal court in the state of Texas declared that its laws came from the Ten Commandments:

*The accused would insist upon the defense that the female consented. The state would reply that she could not consent. Why? Because the law prohibits, with a penalty, the completed act. Thou shalt not commit adultery is our law as well as the law of the Bible.*[{21}](#)

The eighth commandment is: You shall not steal (Ex. 20:15). All colonies and states had laws against stealing based upon the Ten Commandments. In 1940, the Supreme Court of California acknowledged:

*Defendant did not acknowledge the dominance of a fundamental precept of honesty and fair dealing enjoined by the Decalogue and supported by moral concepts. Thou shalt not steal applies with equal force and propriety to the industrialist of a complex civilization as to the simple herdsman of ancient Israel.*[{22}](#)

The Louisiana Supreme Court in 1951 also acknowledged: In the Ten Commandments, the basic law of all Christian countries, is found the admonition Thou shalt not steal.

The ninth commandment is: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Ex. 20:16). The colonies and states had laws against perjury and bearing false witness. In modern times, the Oregon Supreme Court declared that: No official is above the law. Thou shalt not bear false witness is a command of the Decalogue, and that forbidden act is denounced by statute as a felony.[{23}](#)

The tenth commandment is: You shall not covet (Ex. 20:17).

Many of the founders and framers saw this commandment as a foundation for others. William Penn of Pennsylvania declared that he that covets can no more be a moral man than he that steals since he does so in his mind.{24} John Adams argued that: If Thou shalt not covet and Thou shalt not steal were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free.{25}

## Notes

1. *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980).
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5. John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon* (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1815), 95.
6. John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay* (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 403.
7. George Washington, Farewell Address (Philadelphia), September 17, 1796.
8. William Holmes McGuffey, *Eclectic Reader* in D. James Kennedy, "What's Happening to American Education" in Robert Flood, *The Rebirth of America* (Philadelphia: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986), 122.
9. John Adams, *Letters of John Adams Addressed to His Wife* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1841), 152.
10. *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 677 (1984).
11. The primary document for the following material can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/lkxnv>
12. "Articles, Laws, and Orders, Divine, Politic and Martial for the Colony of Virginia," *Colonial Origins* (1610-1611), 315-316.

13. "Massachusetts Body of Liberties," *Colonial Origins* (1641), 83.
14. "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire, *Colonial Origins* (1680), 6.
15. Noah Webster, *Letters to a Young Gentleman*, 8.
16. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), Vol. III, 309.
17. George C. Edwards, *Treatise of the Powers and Duties of the Justices of the Peace and the Town Officers in the State of New York* (Nashville: J.C. Mitchell and C.C. Norvell, 1834), 38, "General Rules Applicable to a Summons, Warrants of Attachment," Rev. Stat. 675.
18. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. III, 342.
19. "Capital Laws of Connecticut," *Colonial Origins* (1642), 230.
20. Ibid.
21. *Hardin v. State*, 46 S.W. 803, 808 (Tex. Crim. App. 1898).
22. *Hollywood Motion Picture Equipment Co. v. Furer*, 105 P.2d. 299, 301 (Cal. 1940).
23. *Watts v. Gerking*, 228 P. 135, 141 (Oregon 1924).
24. William Penn, *Fruits of Solitude, In Reflections and Maxims Relating To The Conduct of Human Life* (London: James Phillips, 1790), 132.
25. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), Vol. Vi, 9.

# South African Apartheid Leaders Apology for Racial Sins

Could the world use a bit more contrition, forgiveness and reconciliation?

Recent international news reports brought a startling example of contrition by Adriaan Vlok, former Law and Order Minister under South Africa's apartheid regime.

Robert Enright is an educational psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and president of the International Forgiveness Institute. He laments the fact that despite society's conflicts, "almost never do we hear public leaders declaring their belief that forgiveness can bring people together, heal their wounds, and alleviate the bitterness and resentment caused by wrongdoing." [\[1\]](#)

Here's an exception.

During the 1980s, conflict raged between South Africa's white minority Afrikaner government and the black majority opposition. One former African National Congress operative—now a government official—told me over breakfast in Cape Town that his responsibilities back then had been "to create chaos." Mutual hostility and animosity often reigned.

## Bombing Campaign

In 1998, Adriaan Vlok confessed to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission that in 1988 he had engineered the bombing of the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches, a prominent opposition group. The bombing campaign also included movie theaters showing "Cry Freedom," an anti-apartheid film. [\[2\]](#)

I had tickets to see “Cry Freedom” in Pretoria for opening night, but the screening was cancelled. The next morning, a bomb was discovered in the theater I would have attended.

You might imagine my interest when BBC television told of Vlok’s recent attempt to reconcile personally with Rev. Frank Chikane, former head of the South African Council of Churches, the group whose headquarters Vlok had bombed. Chikane, now director general of the South African president’s office, reports that Vlok visited his office and gave him a Bible with these words inscribed: “I have sinned against the Lord and against you, please forgive me (John 13:15).”

## **An Example to Follow?**

That biblical reference is Jesus’ Last Supper admonition that his disciples follow his example and wash one another’s feet. The inscription’s words echo those of the Prodigal Son who in the famous biblical story returns home after squandering his inheritance, hopes his father will accept him as a hired hand, and says, “I have sinned against heaven and against you.” [\[3\]](#) The father rejoices over his return, warmly receives him as son, and throws a welcome celebration.

Chikane tells what Vlok did next: “He picked up a glass of water, opened his bag, pulled out a bowl, put the water in the bowl, took out the towel, said ‘you must allow me to do this’ and washed my feet in my office.” Chikane gratefully accepted the gesture. [\[4\]](#)

Vlok, a born-again Christian, later told BBC television it was time “to go to my neighbor, to the person that I’ve wronged.” He says he and his compatriots should “climb down from the throne on which we have been sitting and say to people, ‘Look, I’m sorry. I regarded myself as better than you are. I think it is time to get rid of my egoism my sense of importance, my sense of superiority.’” [\[5\]](#)

Startling contrition, indeed.

## Forgiveness Components

The late and renowned ethicist Lewis Smedes stressed three components of forgiving others: “First, we surrender our right to get even.... Second, we rediscover the humanity of our wrongdoer...that the person who wronged us is a complex, weak, confused, fragile person, not all that different from us.... And third, we wish our wrongdoer well.” [\[6\]](#)

Former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson has quipped that those in Washington, DC traveling “the high road of humility” won’t encounter “heavy traffic.” [\[7\]](#) Too often the same holds in workplaces, neighborhoods and families. Could Vlok’s example inspire some changes?

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# Christian Discernment

*We are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. We must apply biblical principles to these social and political issues. And we must avoid the pitfalls and logical fallacies that so often accompany these issues.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

Turn on a television or open a newspaper. You are immediately presented with a myriad of ethical issues. Daily we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. Society is awash in controversial issues: abortion, euthanasia, cloning, race, drug abuse, homosexuality, gambling, pornography, and capital punishment. Life may have been simpler in a previous age, but now the rise of technology and the fall of ethical consensus have brought us to a society full of moral dilemmas.

Never has society needed biblical perspectives more to evaluate contemporary moral issues. And yet Christians seem less equipped to address these topics from a biblical perspective. The Barna Research Group conducted a national survey of adults and concluded that only four percent of adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. The survey also discovered that nine percent of born again Christians have such a perspective on life.[\[1\]](#)

It is worth noting that what George Barna defines as a biblical worldview would be considered by most people to be basic Christian doctrine. It doesn't even include aspects of a biblical perspective on social and political issues.

Of even greater concern is the fact that most Christians do not base their beliefs on an absolute moral foundation. Biblical ethics rests on the belief in absolute truth. Yet surveys show that a minority of born again adults (forty-four percent) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (nine percent) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.<sup>{2}</sup> By a three-to-one margin adults say truth is always relative to the person and their situation. This perspective is even more lopsided among teenagers who overwhelmingly believe moral truth depends on the circumstances.<sup>{3}</sup>

Social scientists as well as pollsters have been warning that American society is becoming more and more dominated by moral anarchy. Writing in the early 1990s, James Patterson and Peter Kim said in *The Day America Told the Truth* that there was no moral authority in America. "We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."<sup>{4}</sup> Essentially we live in a world of moral anarchy.

So how do we begin to apply a Christian worldview to the complex social and political issues of the day? And how do we avoid falling for the latest fad or cultural trend that blows in the wind? The following are some key principles to apply and some dangerous pitfalls to avoid.

## **Biblical Principles**

A key biblical principle that applies to the area of bioethics is the sanctity of human life. Such verses as Psalm 139:13-16

show that God's care and concern extend to the womb. Other verses such as Jeremiah 1:5, Judges 13:7-8, Psalm 51:5 and Exodus 21:22-25 give additional perspective and framework to this principle. These principles can be applied to issues ranging from abortion to stem cell research to infanticide.

A related biblical principle involves the equality of human beings. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority (Philippians 2). Believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people (James 2). Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). These principles apply to racial relations and our view of government.

A third principle is a biblical perspective on marriage. Marriage is God's plan and provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). Marriage provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2). These principles can be applied to such diverse issues as artificial reproduction (which often introduces a third party into the pregnancy) and cohabitation (living together).

Another biblical principle involves sexual ethics. The Bible teaches that sex is to be within the bounds of marriage, as a man and the woman become one flesh (Ephesians 5:31). Paul teaches that we should "avoid sexual immorality" and learn to control our own body in a way that is "holy and honorable" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). He admonishes us to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). These principles apply to such issues as premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality.

A final principle concerns government and our obedience to civil authority. Government is ordained by God (Rom.13:1-7). We are to render service and obedience to the government

(Matt. 22:21) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Even though we are to obey government, there may be certain times when we might be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). These principles apply to issues such as war, civil disobedience, politics, and government.

## **Biblical Discernment**

So how do we sort out what is true and what is false? This is a difficult proposition in a world awash in data. It underscores the need for Christians to develop discernment. This is a word that appears fairly often in the Bible (1 Samuel 25:32-33; 1 Kings 3:10-11; 4:29; Psalm 119:66; Proverbs 2:3; Daniel 2:14; Philippians 1:9 [NASB]). And with so many facts, claims, and opinions being tossed about, we all need to be able to sort through what is true and what is false.

Colossians 2:8 says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." We need to develop discernment so that we are not taken captive by false ideas. Here are some things to watch for:

**1. Equivocation** – the use of vague terms. Someone can start off using language we think we understand and then veer off into a new meaning. Most of us are well aware of the fact that religious cults are often guilty of this. A cult member might say that he believes in salvation by grace. But what he really means is that you have to join his cult and work your way toward salvation. Make people define the vague terms they use.

This tactic is used frequently in bioethics. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research often will not acknowledge the distinction between adult stem cells and embryonic stem cells. Those trying to legalize cloning will refer to it as "somatic cell nuclear transfer." Unless you have a scientific

background, you will not know that it is essentially the same thing.

**2. Card stacking** – the selective use of evidence. Don't jump on the latest bandwagon and intellectual fad without checking the evidence. Many advocates are guilty of listing all the points in their favor while ignoring the serious points against it.

The major biology textbooks used in high school and college never provide students with evidence against evolution. Jonathan Wells, in his book *Icons of Evolution*, shows that the examples that are used in most textbooks are either wrong or misleading.[\[5\]](#) Some of the examples are known frauds (such as the Haeckel embryos) and continue to show up in textbooks decades after they were shown to be fraudulent.

Another example would be the Y2K fears. Anyone who was concerned about the potential catastrophe in 2000 need only read any of the technical computer journals in the 1990s to see that no computer expert was predicting what the Y2K fear mongers were predicting at the time.

**3. Appeal to authority** – relying on authority to the exclusion of logic and evidence. Just because an expert says it, that doesn't necessarily make it true. We live in a culture that worships experts, but not all experts are right. Hiram's Law says: "If you consult enough experts, you can confirm any opinion."

Those who argue that global warming is caused by human activity often say that "the debate in the scientific community is over." But an Internet search of critics of the theories behind global warming will show that there are many scientists with credentials in climatology or meteorology who have questions about the theory. It is not accurate to say that the debate is over when the debate still seems to be taking place.

**4. Ad hominem** – Latin for “against the man.” People using this tactic attack the person instead of dealing with the validity of their argument. Often the soundness of an argument is inversely proportional to the amount of ad hominem rhetoric. If there is evidence for the position, proponents usually argue the merits of the position. When evidence is lacking, they attack the critics.

Christians who want public libraries to filter pornography from minors are accused of censorship. Citizens who want to define marriage as between one man and one woman are called bigots. Scientists who criticize evolution are subjected to withering attacks on their character and scientific credentials. Scientists who question global warming are compared to holocaust deniers.

**5. Straw man argument** – making your opponent’s argument seem so ridiculous that it is easy to attack and knock down. Liberal commentators say that evangelical Christians want to implement a religious theocracy in America. That’s not true. But the hyperbole works to marginalize Christian activists who believe they have a responsibility to speak to social and political issues within society.

Those who stand for moral principles in the area of bioethics often see this tactic used against them. They hear from proponents of physician assisted suicide that pro-life advocates don’t care about the suffering of the terminally ill. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research level the same charge by saying that pro-life people don’t care that these new medical technologies could alleviate the suffering of many with intractable diseases. Nothing could be further from the truth.

**6. Sidestepping** – dodging the issue by changing the subject. Politicians do this in press conferences by not answering the question asked by the reporter, but instead answering a

question they wish someone had asked. Professors sometimes do that when a student points out an inconsistency or a leap in logic.

Ask a proponent of abortion whether the fetus is human and you are likely to see this tactic in action. He or she might start talking about a woman's right to choose or the right of women to control their own bodies. Perhaps you will hear a discourse on the need to tolerate various viewpoints in a pluralistic society. But you probably won't get a straight answer to an important question.

**7. Red herring** – going off on a tangent (from the practice of luring hunting dogs off the trail with the scent of a herring fish). Proponents of embryonic stem cell research rarely will talk about the morality of destroying human embryos. Instead they will go off on a tangent and talk about the various diseases that could be treated and the thousands of people who could be helped with the research.

Be on the alert when someone in a debate changes the subject. They may want to argue their points on more familiar ground, or they may know they cannot win their argument on the relevant issue at hand.

In conclusion, we have discussed some of the key biblical principles we should apply to our consideration and debate about social and political issues. We have talked about the sanctity of human life and the equality of human beings. We have discussed a biblical perspective on marriage and on sexual ethics. And we have also talked about a biblical perspective on government and civil authority.

We have also spent some time talking about the importance of developing biblical discernment and looked at many of the logical fallacies that are frequently used in arguing against a biblical perspective on many of the social and political issues of our day.

Every day, it seems, we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. As Christians it is important to consider these biblical principles and consistently apply them to these issues. It is also important that we develop discernment and learn to recognize these tactics. We are called to develop discernment as we tear down false arguments raised up against the knowledge of God. By doing this we will learn to take every thought captive to the obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

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# Ethics and Economics

## Introduction

What does the Bible have to say about economics? As we will see, the Bible does provide a firm moral foundation for economics. Previously we have talked about what the Bible has to say about [economics](#).<sup>{1}</sup> In this article we will discuss the

ethical implications of economics, drawing many principles from the book *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves* by John E. Stapleford.[{2}](#)

We should begin by establishing that there is a moral aspect to economics. This question was an important one a few centuries ago, but today economics is usually taught without any real consideration of an ethical component.

Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). He adds that this will enable the people of God to be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). Certainly that would include economic works.

James calls on believers to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers" of the word (James 1:22). This command applies to more than just our church life and family life. This would apply to doing good works in the economic realm.

There are obvious moral implications to issues often discussed in relation to economic issues. For example, in previous radio programs we have talked about the morality of such topics as [drugs](#), [pornography](#), and [gambling](#). We have also talked about the importance of Christians learning to be [good stewards of the environment](#). Each of these topics has an economic component to it, and thus implies that we should apply ethics to economics.

Legalizing drugs has economic consequences, but it also has moral consequences as well.

In previous programs, we have talked about the pornography plague.[{3}](#) The Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). We should, therefore, flee the temptation of pornography (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Tim 2:22).

We have in previous programs also talked about what the Bible

has to say about the subject of gambling.{4} The Bible teaches that we are to work by the sweat of our brow (Gen. 3:19). This is God's command as well as an opportunity. Work can be fulfilling to us as we accomplish a task and is an essential element of human worth and dignity. Gambling undercuts the work ethic by emphasizing greed (Rom. 1:29), materialism, laziness (Prov. 19:15), and covetousness (Ex. 20:17).

## Private Property

What does the Bible say about property, and especially about private property? First, the Bible clearly teaches that everything in the world belongs to the Lord. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

At the same time, the Bible also teaches that we are given dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:28). We are accountable to God for our stewardship of the resources.

Because God owns it all (Ps. 24:1), no one owns property in perpetuity. But the Bible does grant private property rights to individuals. One of the Ten Commandments prohibits stealing, thus approving of private property rights. The book of Exodus establishes the rights of property owners and the liabilities of those who violate those rights.{5} Financial restitution (Ex. 22) must be made to property owners in cases of theft or neglect. Physical force is allowed to protect property (Ex. 22:2). Lost animals are to be returned, even when they belong to an enemy (Ex. 23:4). Removing landmarks that protect property is clearly forbidden (Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2; Prov. 22:28; Hos 5:10).

Some Christians have suggested that the New Testament rejects the idea of private property because the book of Acts teaches that the early Christians held property in common. But this communal sharing in the New Testament was voluntary. Acts

2:44-47 says, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The early Christians did not reject the idea of private property. Notice that they still retained private property rights until they voluntarily gave up those rights to help other believers in Jerusalem. This was a specific leading of the Holy Spirit to meet the increasing needs of the growing New Testament church.

We can see that they retained property rights in the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. Their sin was not that they retained control of some of their property but that they lied about it. Acts 5:4: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Also notice that Paul called for voluntary charity toward believers in Jerusalem when he called New Testament believers to give to the needs of those within the church. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 says, "For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'"

# Work

What is the place of work in economic activity? First, we see that God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to work. God commanded them to work it and take care of it (Gen. 2:15-17). They were given an explicit command to exercise stewardship over the creation.

However, when sin entered the world, God's curse brought toil, sweat, and struggle to work (Gen. 3:17-19). But we still maintain the responsibility to work the land and cultivate it. We are also given the privilege by God of enjoying the earth and deriving profit and benefit from what it might produce (Gen. 9:1-3).

Second, we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27), so we can find work rewarding and empowering. At the same time, we should also be held accountable for the work we do or fail to do. Paul says, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

Third, there is also a satisfaction in work. It not only satisfies a basic human need but it also is a privilege provided by the hand of God. Ecclesiastes 2:24 says, "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God."

Fourth, we are to work unto the Lord. Paul admonishes believers to "work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men" (Col. 3:23). He also says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before

God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

We also learn from Scripture that without God's involvement in our work, human labor is futile. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." God's blessings come to us through our labors.

Finally, with work there should also be rest. The law of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11) and the other Old Testament provisions for feasts and rest demonstrate the importance of rest. In the New Testament also we see that Jesus set a pattern for rest (Mark 6:45-47; Luke 6:12) in His ministry. Believers are to work for the Lord and His Kingdom, but they must also avoid being workaholics and take time to rest.

## Government

What is the role of government in the economic arena? In previous radio programs, we have discussed the role of government in society.[{6}](#)

First, Christians are commanded to obey government (Rom. 13:1) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). We are called to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21). However, we are not to render total submission. There may be a time in which Christians may be called to disobey government leaders who have set themselves in opposition to divine law (Rom. 13:1-5; John 19:11). We are to obey civil authorities (Rom. 13:5) in order to avoid anarchy and chaos, but there may be times when we may be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Second, we understand that because of the fall (Gen. 3), all have a sin nature (Rom. 3:23). Government must therefore administer justice in the political and economic realm. It

must also protect us against aggression as well as provide for public works (1 Kings 10:9).

As we have discussed in previous articles, the reality of sin nature dictates that we not allow a political concentration of power. Governmental power should be limited with appropriate checks and balances. Government also should not be used in a coercive way to attempt to change individuals. We should not accept the idea that the state can transform people from the outside. Only the gospel can change people from the inside and so that they become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

In his book *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves*, John E. Stapleford sets forth many functions of government in the economic realm. Government must ensure justice in the following ways:

- "Weights and scales are to be honest, a full measure (shaken down) is to be given (Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:15; Prov. 20:23; Lk. 6:38), and currency is not be debased by inflationary monetary policy or other means (e.g., mixing lead with silver)."[\[7\]](#)
- Procedural justice requires that contracts and commitments be honored (Lev. 19:13).
- Government must also ensure justice when people are cheated or swindled. In these cases, the cost of restoration should be borne by the guilty or negligent party (Ex. 21:33-36; 22:5-8, 10-15). Government should also deal with those who give a false accusation (Deut. 19:16-19).
- Government should also prevent economic discrimination. This would apply to those of different economic class (James 2:1-4) as well as to those of different sex, race, and religious background (Gal. 3:26-29). Government can exert a great influence on the economy and therefore should use its regulatory power to protect against discrimination.
- That being said, the primary function of government is to

set the rules and provide a means of redress. The free market should be allowed to function with government providing the necessary economic boundaries and protections. Once this is done in the free enterprise system, individuals are free to use their economic choices in a free market.

## Conclusion

What is the connection between economics and ethics? The fact that we even refer to these as separate issues is an indication of the times in which we live. In the past, ethics and economics were interconnected.

Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, addressed economic issues in a moral and theological way. He wouldn't just ask about prices and markets, but also asked the fundamental question, What is a just price?

John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* also devoted whole sections to government and economics. These were issues that he believed Christian theologians should address.

Today if moral questions about economics are discussed at all, they might be discussed in a class on economic theory. While we might hope that such discussions might surface in a seminary, usually those classes focus on theological questions rather than economic questions that deserve a moral reflection.

We have shown that economic issues often have a moral component. You can't just talk about the economic consequences of legalizing drugs, promoting pornography, or promoting gambling without dealing with the moral consequences.

We have also seen that the Bible has a great deal to say about work. Through the creation and the fall, human beings have a right and an obligation to work.

We find that the Bible also warns us of the consequences of idleness. Proverbs 24:30-34 says, "I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest, Then your poverty will come as a robber and your want like an armed man."

People are supposed to work and should be held accountable for the work they do or fail to do. Paul says, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

The Bible also teaches that God has endowed individuals with different gifts and talents (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12). Even within the body of Christ, there are different members even though we are all one body in Christ.

When these differences in gifts and abilities are expressed within a free market, their respective value in terms of supply and demand means that they will receive different remuneration (1 Tim. 5:18). So it is not surprising that there are economic distinctions among individuals. Proverbs 22:2 says, "The rich and the poor have a common bond, The Lord is the maker of them all."

Ethics and economics are related, and Christians would be wise to begin exploring the moral implications of economic behavior and the impact it is having on them and society.

## Notes

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