

“John 8 is a Condemnation of Capital Punishment!”

In your commentary on capital punishment you completely miss the point of John 8:1-11. This passage is a condemnation of capital punishment and the hypocrisy that is inherent in it. You say, “Since He did teach that a stone be thrown (John 8:7), this is not an abolition of the death penalty.” Jesus knew that none of them were without sin, just as none of us are without sin. Jesus knew that his answer would lead to no stones being thrown, just as he intends for us (today) to not throw stones. An example of “throwing stones” today, is sitting on a jury and sentencing someone to death (since we don’t stone criminals today). You seem to think this passage is in the Bible simply to illustrate Jesus’ craftiness at conflict avoidance.

Thank you for writing about my radio program on capital punishment. Although I taped that radio program back in 1992, it amazes me that I still receive e-mails about the transcript posted on the Probe website.

I believe this is the first time I have received a response to my passing comment on John 8. When you are doing a radio program with a set time limit, words are at a premium. So I welcome the opportunity to elaborate on my very short comment in the midst of a week of radio programs devoted to the issue of capital punishment.

First, I should point out that this passage in John 8 is a disputed text. There are very few disputed texts in the New Testament. This is one of them. The passage is not found in any of the important Greek texts. So I think it would be fair to say that most Bible scholars do not believe it was in the original.

Whether you believe it was or was not in the original, I think you would have to admit that it is a disputed text. And a basic principle of biblical exegesis is to never build a doctrine on a disputed text. In other words, I wouldn’t use this passage in John 8 to argue for or against capital punishment.

Second, I only mentioned the passage in passing because there are a number of opponents of capital punishment who have tried to use this biblical passage to argue against capital punishment. It does not. In fact, you can make the point (as I did) that it argues just the opposite.

Third, I am not the first person to point out that Jesus did not set aside capital punishment in this passage since “He did teach that a stone be thrown.” In one of his early books on ethics, Dr. Charles Ryrie makes a similar point. He argued that since Jesus said a stone should be thrown, he was not forbidding the Old Testament practice of capital punishment. Dr. Ryrie is the author of the *Ryrie Study Bible* and former professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. I think it is safe to say that Dr. Ryrie knows more about New Testament theology and exegesis than both of us combined.

Finally, the Pharisees were indeed trying to trap Jesus between the Roman law and the Mosaic law. If Jesus said that they should stone her, He would break the Roman law. If He refused to allow them to stone her, He would break the Mosaic law. I don’t believe that the passage is (to use your words) about “Jesus’ craftiness at conflict avoidance.” But I do believe it shows His response to a deliberate trap set by His enemies.

This passage does not forbid capital punishment, despite what some opponents might try to make it

say. Since it is a disputed passage in the Bible, I would not base a doctrine on it anyway. But even if you accept its authenticity, the passage doesn't teach what you say it does.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“Does Capital Punishment Take Away a Person's Chance to Be Saved?”

I have a question concerning your article “Capital Punishment,” in which you discussed the biblical perspective on the death punishment. My question is, does capital punishment take away a person's chance to be saved? Don't we all have the time to accept Christ until we die, and doesn't the death punishment cut short that chance? I'd appreciate your comment on that. I'm currently looking into the issue of capital punishment, and your article has helped a great deal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you for your e-mail about capital punishment.

I believe that the overriding concern with capital punishment is whether it is just, whether it is biblical, and whether it is a deterrent. I believe I addressed those issues in my essay.

Your question is an interesting one, but maybe not central to a person's belief in or against capital punishment. However, let me address it, if I can.

I have heard some argue that the prospect of being put to death focuses a criminal's attention on what he or she did and how that might affect their eternal destiny. A person on death row usually knows when he or she will be put to death—something that the person they murdered didn't know. Perhaps that would cause them to accept Christ. I know of many examples of murderers on death row accepting Christ. I wonder how many of them would have done so if they weren't on death row.

The death penalty might cut short their life, but I don't think it would necessarily cut short their opportunity to accept Christ. In fact, it may actually force many criminals to make a decision they might have otherwise postponed.

Again, I don't think this would be a compelling argument against the death penalty. It's an interesting question, and I hope I helped you think through it a little bit better.

Thank you for writing.

Kerby Anderson
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“I Have Some Questions on the Separation of Church and State”

Mr. Anderson,

I read your article on the Separation of Church and State and have a few questions for you. At the end of your article you wrote of an “open public square’ (where government neither censors nor sponsors religion but accommodates religion).” First of all, I’m curious as to whether you feel that the architects of the First Amendment intended for the protection of religion in general (as in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.), or for the protection of strictly Christianity, as many of them were Christians, or at least claimed to be Christians? In addition to the latter part of that question, do you feel it was added more to prevent the rights, morals, etc. of Christians from being infringed on by a future non-Christian president, or do you feel it was added in order that a Christian president did not infringe on the beliefs of those of other faiths? Secondly, I am wondering as to the purpose of an “open public square” in the context of religions other than Christianity. Ideally, how would you see something like that functioning?

Thank you for your questions about the separation of church and state. Let me try to answer them in order.

1. *Did the architects of the First Amendment intend to protect religion in general?*

Although the primary religious faith in the 18th century was Christianity, it certainly appears that the framers intended the First Amendment to be inclusive of all religious faiths. For example, in James Madison’s *Memorial and Remonstrance*, he says:

Because we hold it for a fundamental and undeniable truth, that religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.

He seems to be defining religion as the duty we owe to our Creator. I would take that to apply to nearly any religion, not just the Christian religion.

2. *Was it added to prevent the rights and moral of Christians from being infringed?*

Some who ratified the Constitution did not even want a Bill of Rights, but others would not ratify the Constitution unless there were specific protections to prevent the encroachment of the newly formed federal government. The framers clearly stated that Congress shall make no law meaning that the federal government can’t tell citizens what to pray, what to read, what to think, or even where to assemble. These protections apply to all citizens, not just to Christians.

3. *What is the purpose of an open public square?*

As I mentioned in my article, I believe that this would be a world in which all religious perspectives would be given an opportunity to express themselves in the public square. Although we supposedly live in a society dedicated to tolerance and civility (see my article on this topic), religious values are often stripped from the public square. This naked public square only seems to permit secular ideas

and values rather than all ideas and values.

A good example of an open public square would be the Equal Access Act passed by Congress in 1984. Religious students should have the same equal access to school facilities as non-religious students. If a school allows the debate club or the Spanish club to utilize the school facilities after school, they should also allow students who want to start a Bible club to have the same privileges.

Kerby Anderson

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“Should Our Kids to Be Required to Study Islam and Recite Islamic Prayers in School?”

I recently stole a look into my nephew’s high school history book. It has three chapters on Islam but only one mention of Jesus. Some parents are concerned that these kids are required to read Islamic doctrine and recite Islamic prayers, which the teachers consider “education.” Yet Christianity is not taught because it violates the supposed separation of church and state. Is this not contrary to court decisions?

And since my nephew and my children attend church every Sunday and we are making every effort to raise our kids to be good Christians, is the school not violating our civil rights if they are required to recite Islamic prayers?

Actually the courts have supported teaching about religion as long as no proselytizing occurs. However, I am not aware of any laws that mandate equal time for the different faith systems. It would be helpful if the fans of multiculturalism promoted giving equal attention to the major world religions, but Christianity seems to be the only faith that often does not get a fair hearing.

Reciting prayers is definitely over the line; I would gently inform the teacher or administrator in charge that while you do not mind your child learning about other faith systems (preferably with Christianity getting equal time), forcing a child to pray definitely violates the restrictions established by the Supreme Court on prayer in school.

For Him,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

“How Should a Christian View Civil Disobedience?”

How should a Christian view civil disobedience? Doesn't Paul's command to submit to governmental authority in Romans 13 preclude civil disobedience?

As I have said in my article on the subject, we are to obey government (Romans 13). But that is NOT an absolute command. If there was never a time when we would disobey government, then government would be God.

So the key question is *when* do we disobey government. I believe that the Scriptures teach that we obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29) when there is a direct, specific command given by government that would force us to disobey a direct command of Scripture. The Bible provides cases of this in the Old Testament (Hebrew midwives, many instances in the book of Daniel, etc.) and the New Testament (Acts 5).

The historical cases of Corrie Ten Boom, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King would all fit as examples. Erwin Lutzer (*Measuring Morality*) and Norman Geisler (*Christian Ethics*) deal with the issue of civil disobedience and obedience to Scripture in their books, if you would like to read more on the subject.

Your question about Romans 13 is more difficult. I take it that the Apostle Paul is giving a general principle rather than a universal pronouncement. Usually it is the case that “rulers hold no terror for those who do right.” But that is not always the case. There certainly are (and have been) tyrannical leaders.

It's instructive, though, that Paul says this at a time when a corrupt leader (Nero) was in office. If nothing else it should remind us how much worse government leaders can be. Nevertheless, we are to obey those in authority (Romans 13) and pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2). Just as there are exceptions to total obedience (civil disobedience), so there are exceptions to leaders who “hold no terror.”

I might also encourage you to revisit my article on the Probe web site and a recent Breakpoint commentary by Chuck Colson on “Caesar and Christ” (www.breakpoint.org). I hope this helped a bit. God bless you.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“What is a Christian Perspective on War?”

Is there anywhere in the Bible where God or Jesus speaks or justifies the Christian needing to go to war? I know we are to obey those who are in control of the government, unless the demands go against biblical principles. I also have read the various passages concerning

loving our enemies and blessing those who persecute us. But what of war? What about the issues of defending our homes for the cause of freedom, right to worship, or when others infringe on the rights of those living in other countries?

There are essentially three Christian views concerning war:

Activism — it is always right to participate in war.

Pacifism — it is never right to participate in war.

Selectivism — it is right to participate in some wars.

Most Christians generally hold to the third position. This led to the development of what has come to be known as the just war criteria.

A just war would include the following elements:

- Just cause (defensive war)
- Just intention (just peace)
- Last resort (negotiations)
- Formal declaration
- Limited objectives
- Proportionate means
- Noncombatant immunity

There are a number of books that have been written on this subject of war and the Christian. Here is a short list of books that you might find helpful.

- Clouse, Robert. *War: Four Christian Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, revised 1991.
- Holmes, Arthur, ed. *War: Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, revised 1991.
- Payne, Keith and Payne, Karl. *A Just Defense*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987.
- Schaeffer, Francis; Bukovsky, Vladimir; and Hitchcock, James. *Who Is For Peace?* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983.

Kerby Anderson

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“Where Did The Terms ‘Right Wing’ and ‘Left Wing’ Come From?”

I was reading Ecclesiastes 10:2 (“The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left”) and what struck me right away was this fits our right and left wings.

My question is, how did the political parties get their status of being considered left and right?

It turns out that the historical explanation for the political terms left wing and right wing are based upon the seating arrangement of the first French General Assembly. The proponents of the political ideas inspired by the Enlightenment were seated on the left. Those who supported the old regime were seated at the right hand of the president of the Assembly.

So early on, ideas that were something new and novel were associated with the left, and conservative ideas were associated with the right. Actually, the story is a bit more complicated than that, but to answer your question, the origin of left and right is found in modern politics rather than Ecclesiastes.

Thanks for writing. God bless you.

Kerby Anderson

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