

# Boy Scouts and the ACLU: A War of Worldviews

*Byron Barlowe, an Eagle Scout and Assistant Scoutmaster, assesses the battle with the values of the ACLU from an insider's perspective.*

## Traditional Mainstay As Good Cultural Influence vs. Liberal Legal Activists with Social Engineering Agenda

In a gang-ridden section of Dallas, 13-year-old Jose saw a Boy Scouts recruiting poster. That started Jose's improbable climb to Scouting's highest rank of Eagle and a life of beating the odds. He said this about Scoutmaster Mike Ross: "He was a father figure watching over me, the first time I felt it from someone other than my [single] mom."[\[1\]](#)

In February 2010, the Boy Scouts of America, or BSA, celebrated a century of building traditional values into nearly 100 million youths like Jose through adults like Mr. Ross. The original Boy Scouts began in England in 1907. The Prime Minister said the new movement was "potentially 'the greatest moral force the world has ever known'." Yet surprisingly, there are those who would gut the movement of its culture-shaping distinctives.

In this article we take a look at the warring worldviews of The BSA and its arch-enemy, The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In his book *On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts Are Worth Fighting For*, Texas governor and Eagle Scout Rick Perry writes, "The institutions we saw as bulwarks of stability—such as the Scouts—are under steady attack by groups that seem intent upon remaking (if not replacing) them in pursuit of a very different

[worldview].”{2} In a crusade to elevate the minority viewpoints of girls who want entry, as well as atheists and gay activists, the ACLU’s unending efforts to ensure inclusiveness undermine the very Scout laws and oath that make it strong—commitment to virtues like kindness, helpfulness and trustworthiness. This is no less than a war of worldviews.

I ran through all the ranks from Cub Scouts to Eagle Scout, worked professionally with the BSA, and now serve as Asst. Scoutmaster. I have first-hand, lifelong knowledge of Scouting’s benefits to boys, their families, and society. Nowhere else can young men-in-the-making be exposed to dozens of new interests (which often inspire lasting careers) and gain confidence in everything from leadership to lifesaving to family life. Scouting is good life skills insurance!

The pitched battle between the BSA and the ACLU embodies what many call the Culture Wars—battles that in this case reveal contrasting values like humanism vs. religious faith, politically correct “tolerance” vs. more traditional, absolutist views and radical individual rights vs. group-centered freedoms of speech and association. The contrast is stark.

Conservatives relate most to Scouting. “Of course, the *Boy Scout Handbook* is rarely regarded as being a conservative book. That probably accounts for why the *Handbook* has managed to continuously stay in print since 1910. If it were widely known how masterly the book inculcates conservative values, it would, like Socrates, be charged with corrupting the nation’s youth.”{3}

Scouting is also good for culture. Harris pollsters found that former Scouts agreed in larger numbers than non-Scouts that the following behaviors are “wrong under all circumstances”: to exaggerate one’s education on a resume, lie to the IRS, and steal office supplies for home use. Scouts pull well ahead of non-Scouts on college graduation rates. The “stick-to-it”

mentality that Scouting demands comes into play here and in other findings. Scouting positively affects things like treating co-workers with respect, showing understanding to those less fortunate than you and being successful in a career. "This conclusion is hard to escape: Scouting engenders respect for others, honesty, cooperation, self-confidence and other desirable traits."[\[4\]](#) It also promotes the freedom to exercise a Christian worldview within its program, which provides a venue for transmitting a Christian worldview within the context of the outdoors and community service.

The absolutist morality of Scouting stands in stark relief to the moral relativism of our day and to the ACLU's worldview. Wouldn't you prefer to hire someone with Scouting's values of trustworthiness and honesty?

## **The Battles, Including Girls Joining the BSA**

The Boy Scouts of America celebrates its centennial this year, but its long-time nemesis the ACLU isn't celebrating. In fact, they and other litigants have maintained a siege against the BSA in court in order to transform key characteristics including Scouting's "duty to God," the exclusion of openly gay leaders, and Scouting's access to government forums like schools. "In all, the Boy Scouts have been involved in thirty lawsuits since the filing of the [original] case," many brought by the ACLU.[\[5\]](#)

The opening salvo was a string of lawsuits on behalf of girls who wanted membership, many brought by the ACLU. The primary legal issue regarding these kinds of cases is "public accommodation." The BSA's position is that refusing membership to certain individuals like girls and open gays is its right as a private organization. Freedoms of speech and association are at stake for the BSA. Indeed, the definition of freedom of association is "the right guaranteed especially by the First

Amendment . . . to join with others . . . as part of a group usually having a common viewpoint or purpose and often exercising the right to assemble and to free speech.”{6}

In the case of *Mankes vs. the BSA*, the plaintiff claimed that restricting membership to boys amounted to sex discrimination. Yet the court decided against the claim on the basis that “the Boy Scouts did not, in creating its organization to help develop the moral character of young boys, intentionally set out to discriminate against girls.”{7} Even the U.S. Congress chartered separate Scouting organizations, one for girls and one for boys, not one unisex organization.

C.S. “Lewis puts it this way in discussing the crisis of post-Christian humanist education: ‘We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.’”{8} I believe that even the most committed feminist would inwardly hope for brave, virtuous men of integrity. That’s what Boy Scouts is all about: engendering young men with chests.

Underneath these battles lies an aversion to any kind of discrimination of supposed victims. The ACLU’s goals raise ethical concerns: when one individual or a minority seeks rights that are not in the best interest of the community at large, it leads to unintended consequences, like possibly shutting down good institutions like the Scouts.

It’s understandable why some girls would want to participate. However, given gender differences and the right to freedom of association, it seems best to restrict the Boys Scouts to boys.

## **The Battles over Gay Leaders (the Scouts’ Doctrine of “Morally Straight”)**

A very contentious battle between the Boy Scouts of America

and equal rights advocates revolves around disallowing openly gay leaders from joining the organization. "The BSA's position is that a homosexual who makes his sex life a public matter is not an appropriate role model of the Scout Oath and Law for adolescent boys."[{9}](#) Or as Rick Perry puts it, "Tolerance is a two-way street. The Boy Scouts is not the proper intersection for a debate over sexual preference." He continues, "A number of active homosexuals, with the assistance of the ACLU and...various gay activist organizations have challenged the BSA's long-standing policy."[{10}](#)

The landmark Dale case featured a lifelong Scouter who discovered his gay identity only then to realize the Scouts' policy against openly gay leaders. Eventually landing in the U.S. Supreme Court, BSA vs. Dale marked the end of cases in this category. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that state laws may not prohibit the BSA's moral point of view and the right to expressing its own internal leadership.[{11}](#)

Ultimately, gay people could launch their own organization and any good Scout would recognize the right for them to do this. Even the courts have implied this view, again and again upholding the Scout's rights to operate the way they see fit. Why would it be improper for a private organization like the BSA to restrict leadership to those who share its values?

"BSA units do not routinely ask a prospective adult leader about his (or her) sex life," writes Perry.[{12}](#) This approach falls in line with the controversial "Don't ask, don't tell" doctrine of the U.S. military that's currently being challenged in court. Where members of the military may be concerned about the affect of another squad member's sexuality on its rank-and-file members, Scout units are concerned with the even greater influence of adults on the minds and morals of the children they lead.

A biblical worldview recognizes that belief that gay rights supersede traditional moral teachings springs from the

fleshly, fallen state of man's soul. Romans 1 says humans "suppress the truth," and speaks out against unnatural acts in a clear allusion to homosexual unions. People—sometimes believers—fight morality as revealed by God through our conscience and stated moral law. The virtue ethics of the Scouts at least makes room for this morality.

Despite all the cases, "evidence of a planned, strategic legal assault on the Scouts didn't arise until the ACLU became involved, with cases that focused Scouts' 'duty to God.'" [\[13\]](#)

## The Battle over "Duty to God"

Boy Scouts and Scout leaders are really into patches for our uniforms. One of the most beautiful I've ever owned is my Duty to God patch earned at the legendary Rocky Mountain Scout adventure ranch known as Philmont. The requirements were minimal: take part in several devotions and lead blessings over the food. Nothing dictated which god to pray to, just a built-in acknowledgement of the Creator. This non-sectarian, undirected acknowledgement of God is classic Scout stuff. The program has long featured specific special awards for all major world religions, including Christianity. Scouting's Creator-consciousness can seem vague or even smack of animistic Native American religion, but troops chartered by Christian organizations like ours simply turn it into a chance to honor the God of the Bible.

This hallmark of Scouting is vilified by atheists and agnostics who would participate in Scouting only minus the nod to God. The ACLU has carried out a culture-wide campaign to cut out all mention of God from the public square, motivated by a warped value of self-determination. [\[14\]](#) Seeking protections from all things religious, the ACLU's activist lawyers have raised human autonomy up as the ultimate good. And the Boy Scouts are a tempting target to further this cause célèbre. From where do the ACLU's motivations spring?

Apparently, from the ideology known as humanism, a philosophical commitment to man as the measure of all things coupled with an atheist anti-supernatural bias. But not even Rousseau, whose political theory emphasized individual freedoms, would likely have gone so far. In his view, the individual was subordinate to the general will of the people—and most people in American society agree that the BSA's values and impact outweighs any individual right "not to hear" anything at all of religion.{15}

When the BSA lays out its broad yet very absolute requirements, the most prominent and controversial are a "duty to God"{16} and a Scout's pledge to be reverent.{17} This in no way dictates which or even what kind of deity one's faith is ascribed to, but it sharply clashes with the ACLU's ideals of secularism and humanism. In effect, the BSA directly challenges the sacred-secular split so prevalent today, where faith is to be kept totally private and godless science serves as the only source of real knowledge. As a result of this worldview mistake, religious commitments and the supernatural are relegated to the personal, subjective, and ultimately meaningless level.

One blogger opines about a duty to God passage in the original 1910 Scout handbook:

*"A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others." Such an earnest and irony-free worldview is naturally antithetical to the South Park-style mock-the-world moronity that pervades the culture. In a society that combines libertarian Me-ism with a liberal nanny state that suckles "men without chests," it is not surprising that the ranks of Boy Scouts are dwindling (Scouting is down 11 percent over the last decade). But we should be cheerful that an institution where self-sacrifice and manly virtues are encouraged manages to survive at all.{18}*



The ACLU was not involved in the first “duty to God” case against the Scouts. Yet by 2007, its “involvement in fourteen cases against the Boy Scouts had covered, cumulatively, more than 100 years of litigation.”[\[19\]](#) The ACLU’s view, according to Governor Perry, “is that if one citizen believes there is no God, they must be protected from public references to or acknowledgement of an Almighty Creator. . . . When they get their way, the ACLU enforces upon us the tyranny of the minority.”[\[20\]](#)

Thank God the courts have not yet allowed this to happen.

## Pluralism Done Right

A fellow in my Sunday school sounded alarmed when I asked the class to pray for a Scouting trip: “Isn’t The Boy Scouts a Mormon outfit?” Since Mormons use Scouts as their official youth program for boys, his experience was skewed. Yet, the BSA is a non-sectarian association that simply requires chartering groups to promote belief in God and requires boys to reflect on reverence according to their family’s chosen religion. *The Boy Scout Handbook*, (11<sup>th</sup> ed.) explains a Scout’s “duty to God” like this: “Your family and religious leaders teach you about God and the ways you can serve. You do your duty to God by following the wisdom of those teachings every day and by respecting and defending the rights of others to practice their own beliefs.” Note the genuine tolerance toward other religions. Even a pack or troop member cannot be forced by that unit to engage in religious observances with which they disagree.[\[21\]](#) This policy is the best way to handle a wide-open boys’ training program in a very pluralistic culture.

Many Christians talk as if any kind of pluralism is anathema, especially the religious kind, as if we should live in a thoroughly Christianized society that, for all intents and purposes, is like church. However, this is unrealistic.



America's Founding Fathers guarded against state-sanctioned religion.

God Himself tacitly acknowledged, even in the theocracy of the Old Testament period that living around His people were those of other religions. Jehovah didn't force people to believe in Him. God was pluralistic in the sense of allowing man's free will.

The Boy Scouts reflects this larger reality and it serves the organization well. It is not seeking to be a church or synagogue or temple. The BSA's Scoutcraft skills and coaching, its citizenship and moral training, remains open to people of all religions. The BSA's vagueness regarding "duty to God" is actually a plus for Christians interested in promoting their own understanding of God and His world. Talk about a platform to pass along a biblical worldview! Think of it: Scouting's genius is that it combines outdoor exploits like regular camping trips and high-adventure activities with moral and religious instruction in the context of boy-run leadership training. Regular and intensive meetings with dedicated adults to review skills and Scouting's ideals provide ample time for what amounts to discipleship. Some of the richest ministry opportunities in my quarter-century as a full-time minister have been during Scoutmaster-to-Scout conferences in the great outdoors.

If you're committed to seeing the next generation of boys walk into adulthood not only as capable young men but with their faith intact, Scouting is one of the best venues out there. Hopefully, the ACLU won't be able to quash that.

## **Notes**

1. *Readers Digest*, May, 2010, 138.
2. Rick Perry, *On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts Are Worth Fighting For* (Macon, GA: Stroud & Hall Publishers, 2008).

3. Carter, Joe, "The Most Influential Conservative Book Ever Produced in America," First Thoughts (the official blog of the journal First Things), posted February 8, 2010: <http://bit.ly/fI8V9Z>.
4. Perry, *On My Honor*, 163.
5. Ibid., 57.
6. Dictionary.com. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law*. Merriam-Webster, Inc. [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/freedom of association](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/freedom%20of%20association) (accessed: April 21, 2010).
7. Perry, *On My Honor*, 59.
8. Lewis, C.S., *The Abolition of Man* (Macmillan Publishing: New York, NY) 1947, p. 34; as quoted by R. J. Snell, "Making Men without Chests: The Intellectual Life and Moral Imagination," First Principles: ISI Web Journal, posted Feb. 25, 2010: [www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=1380](http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=1380).
9. Ibid., 69.
10. Ibid., 71.
11. Ibid., 71-73.
12. Ibid., 69.
13. For a brief list of individual cases, some of which are being brought by the ACLU, see: [www.bsalegal.org/duty-to-god-cases-224.asp](http://www.bsalegal.org/duty-to-god-cases-224.asp).
14. Evans, C. Stephen, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion: 300 Terms & Thinkers Clearly & Concisely Defined* (Intervarsity Press: Downer's Grove, Ill.), 2002, p. 103.
15. The Scout Oath, quoted in reprint of 1910 original *Boy Scouts of America: The Official Handbook for Boys*, Seventeenth Edition p. 32, accessed 1-20-11 <http://bit.ly/gaM50M>. (Note, the table of contents links to page 22, but page 32 is the actual location in this format.)
16. The Scout Law, 33-34.
17. Carter, "The Most Influential Conservative Book Ever Produced in America."
18. Perry, *On My Honor*, 64 and 66.

19. Ibid, 87-88.

20. Bylaws of Boy Scouts of America, art. IX, § 1, cls. 2-4, as quoted on the BSA legal Web site: [www.bsalegal.org/duty-to-god-cases-224.asp](http://www.bsalegal.org/duty-to-god-cases-224.asp).

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# Culture Wars

## America at (Culture) War

Americans are highly polarized when it comes to issues of morality and social norms. We feel our collective blood pressure rise as we read the daily paper or watch the news on television. We all feel the tension caused by problems like teen pregnancies, abortion, crime, poverty, and political corruption. Factions from across the political spectrum respond with social programs and ideals that, if instituted, they are sure would make America a better place for all to live. However, the problem is that these programs or ideals are often in direct conflict with each other, presupposing very different assumptions about human nature. To highlight these differences, consider the following events.

In the early '90s the American Civil Liberty Union informed members of the California State Assembly's Education Committee that they were opposed to a bill the committee was considering. The bill, which called for traditional values in school curricula, was offensive to the ACLU because it would mandate that students be taught that monogamous, heterosexual relations solely within marriage is a traditional American value. The ACLU argued that this would be an "unconstitutional establishment of a religious doctrine in public schools."<sup>1</sup>

They went on to contend that the bill was an obvious violation of the First Amendment.

More recently, a private school in Georgia asked a student to either change his behavior or leave the school. This, in itself, is not a rare event. However, the student wasn't a discipline problem and he wasn't failing academically. In fact, he was popular and liked by many on campus. The problem was that he was cross-dressing. He dressed and behaved as a woman and was accepted by many students as a female. When the student chose to leave the school instead of changing his attire, the school's drama teacher remarked, "I really think that we all lost something precious that night." {2}

To many Americans, the ACLU's action in the first incident is incomprehensible. It seems reasonable, healthy, and obvious for schools to implement a "traditional values" model for sex education. Those on the side of the ACLU find it just as incomprehensible that anyone would see their position as unreasonable or unusual. Some might find the expulsion of the cross-dressing student to be grossly unfair, while most parents would wonder why the school took so long to act.

Regardless of your perspective, everyone agrees that Americans find themselves with deep differences on a number of fundamental issues that govern our daily affairs. Unfortunately, these deep differences have led some Americans to bomb a government building, shoot abortion doctors, or burn down a mountain top ski resort in order to further their cause.

This article will spotlight the culture war we find ourselves in and consider what a biblical response might be. Although few Christians fail to see the conflict in our society, particularly in our schools, they are far from united as to what our response should be. However, from a historical perspective, times of cultural disruption are often a great opportunity for the church, if it is being all that God

desires it to be.

## Orthodox vs. Progressive

Leaders of all political persuasions have taken note of the culture war that is engulfing our nation. To begin clarifying the issue, we will consider the contribution of two books that have helped to define the conflict for many religious and cultural conservatives: James Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and William Bennett's *The De-Valuing of America*. Bennett argues that the battle over our culture is being fought between what he calls the liberal elite and the rest of society. The elite are "found among academics and intellectuals, in the literary world, in journals of political opinion, in Hollywood, in the artistic community, in mainline religious institutions, and in some quarters of the media."<sup>{3}</sup> He feels that they are more powerful than their numbers would normally allow because they are looked upon as trend setters and opinion makers. Differing from traditional elite groups in American history, Bennett argues that these people reject the traditional bourgeois emphasis on work, frugality, sexual restraint, and self-control."<sup>{4}</sup> As evidence for the existence of this elite, he refers to studies done by Stanley Rothman with Robert and Linda Richter. Their work portrays a media aristocracy that votes as a block for liberal candidates and on issues like abortion, gay rights, and the environment.<sup>{5}</sup>

Bennett adds that this elite is marked by a wholesale rejection of American ideals, a calling into question of what has been known as the American dream.<sup>{6}</sup> Evidence is not as significant as ideology for the elite. Their approach is "one of vindication, not investigation."<sup>{7}</sup> If the middle class and the Republicans are for something, this group will instinctively be against it.

Hunter's approach to defining the warring camps is subtler and, I feel, more accurate. He would argue that there is an

elite on both sides of the culture war. On the one hand is what he calls the "orthodox" group. They have a commitment to an external, definable, and transcendent authority. From an evangelical perspective this is the God of the Bible. He is a consistent and unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity. Hunter would also include Jews and others who hold to a definable, unchanging, absolute authority.

Opposing this group are the "progressives." Progressives are defined by the ideals of modernism, rationalism, and subjectivism. To these people truth is more a process than a constant authority. It is an unfolding reality rather than an unchanging revelation. What is interesting about the progressives is that they often hold on to the religious heritage of the orthodox, but reinterpret its meaning for modern consumption. For instance, to a gay progressive, Christ came not to free us from the penalty of sin, but to free gays from the constraints of society. Although many progressives discard religion altogether, those who claim the Christian tradition have usually adopted a liberation theology, liberating the individual from any obligation other than to love each other in a very vague sense. To love each other seems to mean allowing people do whatever is expedient in their lives.

The real difference between the "orthodox" and the "progressives" is at the faith level. Whether a person calls himself or herself a Christian or not is not nearly as important as what kind of reality they place their faith in. Hunter believes that the culture war is a war of worldviews, and that these worldviews cause us to see the world differently. How then should a Christian, one who places his faith in the sacrificial death of Christ as an atoning payment for his sins, respond to this culture war?

# The Angry Christian

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the secular world Christians are often seen as angry, intolerant people. At school board meetings, outside abortion clinics, even at the funeral of a homosexual who was murdered because of his lifestyle, Christians are there to angrily condemn sin and its perpetrators. It is almost as if Christians are surprised by sin and feel that their only response is to point people to the law of God. As a result, many outside the church see Christianity as a religion of law, similar to most other world religions. This is a tragedy.

Although understandable, I don't believe that we are called as Christians to respond to the culture war in anger, especially anger directed at people. Although the wrath of God is evident in both the Old and New Testaments, condemnation of human anger is also present in each. Near the very beginning of human culture, God warns Cain about his anger and downcast face. Instead of seeking to do what was right, Cain was angry with God and his situation (Gen. 4:6-7). The wisdom literature of Proverbs teaches us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger," and "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated" (Prov. 14:17, 15:1).

In the New Testament, Paul condemns "hatred" and "fits of rage" immediately before listing the spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. James 1:19-20 is fairly straightforward in arguing that, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." Jesus set an extraordinarily high standard against anger and hatred in His Sermon on the Mount. He taught, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'



But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus is speaking to the root cause of much evil in any society: an angry, unforgiving heart.

Some may respond that righteous indignation, or anger against sin is merely emulating Christ. After all, Jesus cleared the Temple with a whip and violently overturned the moneylender's tables. Are we not allowed the same righteous indignation? I think not, especially if we take seriously God's admonition to let Him be in charge of judgment and vengeance (Rom. 12:19). In fact, Paul tells us to feed our enemy if he is hungry, give him drink if he is thirsty, and to overcome evil by doing good (Rom. 12:20-21). The difference between Jesus' righteous indignation and our anger is that Jesus, being God, has the right to judge, and being perfectly righteous His judgment is perfect. He knows the hearts of men and has no bias other than holiness itself. On the other hand, we are often most angry when our personal comfort is disturbed. To the watching world, Christians become the most interested in politics when their personal wealth or comfort is at stake.

I don't believe that God is calling His people to anger in America. We bring a message of grace to the lost, not a message of law.

## **Apathy**

Many Christians have been active in the culture war since the early '80s. With the rise of conservative politics and the family values movement, Christians joined the Republican party in droves and joined numerous organizations in order to help fight against the moral decline of the nation. Given the popularity of the current Democratic President and what appears, in many ways, to be a rejection of the conservative moral agenda, it is tempting for many to simply retreat from activism all together.

Some Christians never did get engaged in a counter-cultural sense. In fact, an early evangelical leader in culture war activity, Francis Schaeffer, warned that most Christians were more concerned with personal peace and affluence than about having an impact in their society.{8} He was concerned that as the Christian- dominated consensus weakened, these two values would grow in their place. The picture of society we are left with is one in which people's lives are consumed by things, buying two SUV's and a nice big house in the suburbs, with a nice tall fence, color TV (a big color TV), and remote. These people do not want to know about the suffering in our urban ghettos or about the plight of Christians in other countries. They want their lives to be unimpeded by the turmoil experienced by less affluent people.

Is it wrong to have a nice house and cars? No, it isn't. But neither is it the ultimate purpose to which our Lord has called us. Gathering nice things should not be motivating our daily activities. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandments were, He responded that we are to first, love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), and second, love our neighbor as ourselves. For Christians, success in this life should be measured against these two goals. The rest of revelation, both the written Word and the life of Christ, gives us a picture of what this means in both the general culture and within the church. Christ gave us the Great Commission, to go into all nations making disciples and teaching what He taught (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul talks about us being living sacrifices and the renewing of our minds so that we will know the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

To be indifferent about sin is to not love God; this form of apathy is incompatible with true Christian faith. However, to be indifferent about suffering in the world is equally incompatible with our faith. To ignore oppression and hatred reveals a lack of love for our neighbors. Too often Christians only seem to get excited when their rights, whether property

or religious, are threatened. This makes a mockery of our Lord's words when He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). In Romans 12 Paul talks about blessing those who persecute you, and if it is possible, to be at peace with everyone around you.

Hebrews 12 tells us to throw off everything that entangles us, everything that keeps us from running the race marked out for us by Jesus. We are to fix our eyes on Him, who endured the cross because its joyous result would be a redeemed people of God.

## **Ambassadors For Christ**

When thinking about how to respond to the culture war in America, or in any culture, we must ask ourselves, What is it that we are trying to accomplish? In the language of real war, What are our tactical and strategic goals? Some might respond that we are here to fight sin, to rid our society of the evils of abortion, homosexuality, adultery, drug abuse, political corruption, etc. There are Christians who claim that our primary cultural objective is to reinstate the law of Moses by taking control of the government and using its legal authority to impose a moral society on the population. However, this does not appear to be the plan revealed to us in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians chapter five, Paul details the role we are to play in America or in any country we might live in. We are to be Christ's ambassadors, and our message is one of reconciliation with God. There are many religions pushing a message of law; Islam, Judaism, and most Eastern religions all focus on the works people must do in order to please God or the gods. They focus on how humanity must reform itself to gain God's favor. Christianity's message is grace, and as Christ's ambassadors we proclaim that God has reconciled us to

Himself in Christ by making "Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." God is making the righteousness of Christ available to sinners; salvation is the crediting of Christs righteousness to our personal account, thus satisfying the judgment of a holy God against our personal sins.

What about social activism, what about politics? Do we just share the gospel and ignore the problems facing our nation? No, we are to be salt and light in a decaying world. However, our trust is not in politics, which can only change a nations laws and to a lesser degree its peoples behavior. Even if abortion ended tomorrow, if every homosexual became heterosexual, and if drugs and pornography were things of the past, people without Christ would still be lost in their sins.

The role of an ambassador is a complex one. He or she must be intimately familiar with the nature of their sovereign's kingdom. Christians must seek to know God and His message in a way that can be communicated to the culture they live in. Unfortunately, Christians often know the message, but have a difficult time communicating it in a way that the surrounding culture understands, and in a way that answers the questions being asked by that society. Stating the gospel accurately and in a meaningful manner is central to being an effective ambassador for Christ.

If we are to respond to the culture war by being ambassadors for Christ, then the vitality of the church becomes far more important than controlling the White House or Congress. Understanding how to communicate the gospel of Christ becomes infinitely more valuable than having the most potent political strategy. Being faithful to Christ in this way builds Gods kingdom on earth and results in common grace as more and more believers participate in every aspect of our culture.

**Notes**

1. James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 310.
2. *Dallas Morning News*, 30 October 1998, 7A.
3. William J. Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Bennett, 12.
7. Ibid.
8. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How then Shall We Live* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976), 205.

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