

Is Jesus a Republican?

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I. INTRODUCTION

- Here to see if two people stand up when a “Christian Lawyer” is introduced
- After last Mike’s sermon last Sunday in which he got off 3-4 good lawyer jokes, I feel like I need to vindicate the legal profession and set the record straight. Lawyers are good people. In fact, the primary difference between God and a lawyer is that God doesn’t think he’s a lawyer!
- Love Pastor Mike – every time I think of him I’m reminded of the sweet story of the boy, who after the church service told the pastor, "When I grow up, I'm going to give you lots of money." "Well, thank you," the pastor replied, "but why?" The boy replied, "Because my daddy says you're one of the poorest preachers we've ever had."
- Confession: When Mike talked to me about the proposed title, we both agreed that I’d probably not spend 45 minutes making the case Jesus would have lived in a blue or red state.
- The title begs the following question that I want to explore this morning:

What is the Christian’s role in the politics of culture, and how do we exercise and apply our faith in an increasingly resistive society?

- “Resistive society” really understates the condition of culture. The truth is, at times it seems that culture can be hell bent on destroying the values and Biblical principles we believe to be true. At times it seems this country’s “moral deficit” is rising at twice the rate of the national debt and all the church wants to do is to circle our evangelical wagons and pray for rapture.
- 10 years ago, came across a quote by Dante – 14th century Italian poet and political exile wrote “The Divine Comedy” – all allegorical story of a spiritual journey to hell writes (In The Inferno):

“There is a special place in hell for those who declare neutrality in times of moral crisis.”

- The last 10 years I’ve been on a journey to find the answer to the previous question – that’s what I want to share with you this morning.

(PRAYER)

II. THESIS (PROPOSITION) – SERMON IN A SENTENCE

Christians are called to redeem culture (the Cultural Commission) by applying our faith as a world-view to all aspects of our public life, including the politics of our culture. By viewing our faith in terms of a world-view, we can be more effective in the struggle for the hearts and minds of all people.

This is what I believe to be true – this is what I hope to defend

III. OBJECTIONS - OTHER THEOLOGICAL VIEWS - summarize views into two categories

A. The Main Thing

- Belief that our single calling as Christians, is to save souls, not to influence social morality through policy, legislation or the courts. Our only agenda is redemption of man - Evangelism (Great Commission) is the main thing.

- John MacArthur writes: “We are a nation of priests...who have one simple function, to bring people to God. Whether they die under a tyrant or benevolent dictator, it doesn't matter if they end up in hell.”

Response:

1. Great commission (redemption of man) is primary calling.
2. Change of heart is ultimately the key to meaningful change in culture.

Bill Witcherman uses the metaphor of a river – politics (law) is downstream from culture (personal behavior) – I would add that culture is downstream from the headwaters of the human heart. Any real change starts there!

3. Redeeming culture and man don't have to be mutually exclusive! While one may be more important, doesn't mean we can't do both. It makes our methodology very important (which I'll cover later). Can't do one in a manner that hurts the other.

B. Jesus didn't do it

- Because Jesus (and to lesser extent Paul) didn't address issues such as abortion and homosexuality, nor are we. This is somewhat of the same argument as before—we are to be about the souls of man.

Response:

1. There are limits to the “exemplary” (by example) understanding of Jesus' life and ministry while on this earth. Jesus had a unique vocation and purpose which is shared by no other Christian.

Purpose: Jesus came to earth to satisfy the tension between God's glory and his love for sinners. Died for our sins – we can't repeat!

2. Jesus didn't have opportunities of our democratic government – to speak out in the political process may have undermined ministry and mission. In Jesus' time, Tiberous Caesar and later Nero practiced a paranoid and wicked iron fist over all suspected of dissent or treason.

V. WHAT IS THE CULTURAL COMMISSION

A. In his book “How Now Shall We Live,” Chuck Colson identifies the Biblical Commissions the Christian is called to:

1. The Great Commission (redemption of man) – “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...” – Matt. 28:19
2. The Cultural Commission (redemption of culture)

B. What is the Cultural Commission (what does it mean)?

- Call of Christians to redeem culture by restoring all of God’s creation through the application of our faith to all disciplines and aspects of life: marriage, family, economics, education, law, engineering, architecture, science, music, medicine, sports, literature, art, homemaking, public activism and even politics!

C. How do we achieve redemption of culture (Two Keys to practicing the Culture Commission)

1. Starts with (Change in) Perspective:

a. Our Christian faith is more than a private belief and personal salvation. It is a comprehensive life system (World-view). And this world-view governs every area of life and provides guidance, gives insight and answers all questions:

- How did we get here? (creation)
- How did we get into this mess? (the fall)
- How do we get out? (redemption)

b. Recognition that Christianity is a religion of ideas and principles that apply to all of creation!

c. Useful Metaphors: Lens by which we see world and filter through which we evaluate information about the world.

d. EXAMPLES - (approaching vocations with a Christian W.V.):

1. If you are an Architect - Understand that the importance of the Principle of the Aesthetic Dimension of an Object (man’s need to find beauty in useful objects) – is rooted in the truth that created man bears the image of a creative and poetic Creator.
2. If you are a Doctor - Treat and talk with patients in a way that recognizes that God is sovereign; that there are no random or purposeless maladies and that man is spirit (eternal) as well as physical (temporal). (also consider not making us wait for so long!)
3. If you are a Public School Teacher or Administrator – Understand that there is not a value neutral or ideologically free text book in this country. You are teaching values – the question is whose!
4. If you are a Homemaker (or married to one) – You have the most important job – understand that you are more than a taxi driver, short-order cook, and

referee. Besides raising Godly kids, your task is to build a family of neighborhood reputation and influence.

5. If you are a grandparent – Understand that you are in the unique position of connecting the past with the present. Heritage, traditions, legacy shape who we are – find creative ways to pass them on to your grandkids.

6. If you are a younger student – You know that the unpopular, nerdy “unusual” student – he or she is precisely the one you are called to befriend in the cafeteria and defend on the playground.

7. If you are a lawyer – Recognize that you maintain a unique position in culture by standing in the gap between personal responsibility individuality accountability. Litigation is not evil – our justice system is the mark of a civilized society. But lawsuits are not always the answer. Recovery must be balanced with reconciliation. (and be patient with those who tell lawyer jokes – they were all originally pastor jokes)

8. If you are a single young woman – Understand that true beauty finds its source in virtue and modesty.

9. If you are a young single man – Understand you wear a bull’s-eye - Satan knows you are visually driven when it comes to the female body – be disciplined with your eyes!

10. If you are a pastor – Be very careful who you invite to preach.

e. EXAMPLE – (approaching social issues with Christian W.V.):

Euthanasia (doctor assisted suicide) – logical progression using presumptions (principles) of a Christian worldview – to conclusion:

- There is a Creator
- (therefore) I’m created
- (because I’m created) I have a purpose (of which I may not understand or even appreciate or like at times)
- (as a created being) I bear Creator’s image
- (because I bear my Creator’s image) My life is sacred (which also means my life is not sacred because I am productive, desired (by self or others), or live a healthy and pain free life
- (also because I’m created) Creator has interest in me
- (because Creator has interest in me) my life and body are not my own (1 Cor. 6:19-20 – Jer.10:23)
- Therefore, because I am not autonomous, I have no right to end my life (no

right to die)

2. **(Change in) Application:** (second key/way of practicing culture commission)

- Challenge you to go public with the expression and relevance of our faith.

Heard of PDA? This is PDR – PUBLIC DISPLAY OF RELIGION

VI. MAKING A CASE FOR THE CULTURAL COMMISSION

Two sources of authority:

A. **Scriptural Authority (first and most important source of authority)**

1. Creation Account (God established creational distinctives: (light/dark, land/sea, above/below expanse – day 6 creates man and hands-off creation)

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” - Genesis 1:28:

Nancy Pearcey explains (in her book Total Truth): “The first phrase, “be fruitful and multiply,” means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, “subdue the earth,” means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, and compose music.”

Introduction of sin was destructive to social and natural world, but it didn’t negate our orders to create and maintain order!

2. Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5:13-16:

*“**You are the salt of the earth.** But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. **You are the light of the world.** A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

A. Three underlying general truths of salt and light metaphors (John RW Stott):

- 1) Church (Christians) and the world are distinct communities (salt is not meat – light is not darkness)
- 2) World is progressively deteriorating (moral equivalent of the second law of thermodynamics (universe is coming to a conclusion – running out of usable energy)
- 3) World is inherently dark place with little or no light of its own.

B. SALT - What it means to be salt? (we are salt!)

- 1) Context – look at context of when Jesus spoke words to determine their meaning. - salt was used more as a preservative than a flavor enhancer
- 2) Salt was rubbed into meat to preserve – no refrigeration
- 3) Salt retards the spread of disease producing bacteria in meat by drawing the moisture out of it thereby killing the bacteria
- 4) Distinction (preservative/flavor enhancer) important – Christians are not to merely to sprinkle our faith onto culture thereby adding a “Christian” spice or flare to culture, we are to rub our faith, principles, ideas (ourselves) into the fiber of culture and retard to spread of sin producing behavior!

WE ARE TO BE SALT!

C. LIGHT - What does it mean to be light? (we are light!)

- Two images of types of lights / two types of darkness (we are to illuminate:

a.. City on a hill (image #1)

Light that provides a destination, goal or standard (of conduct) for many to see.

Darkness that is broad and encompassing – effects many at the same time (nation’s blindness to the killing of innocent human life by abortion)

b. A house lamp (image #2)

Light that is more personal, requires intimacy and close proximity to another, maybe extending only to that person’s next step – must enter another’s darkness

Darkness that is personal, maybe only to the person near you – type of darkness that requires the light to enter! (illness and death, addiction, financial pressure, unemployment, divorce or a prodigal child)

- You are an arms length away from personal darkness!

WE ARE TO BE A CITY ON A HILL and A HOUSE LAMP!

B. Historical Authority (second source of authority)

1. Reason to site history of our country is because:

A. I’ve challenged you to live faith out in public (through W.V.)

B. This is opposite of what we hear – What we hear as Christians in this country is the constant reverberation of the beat of secular drums pounding into our heads the rhythm of the false dichotomy (classification) between:

- Secular and Sacred
- Public and Private
- Facts and Values
- Brains and Heart
- Science and Faith
- Wall and Separation

C. Division could not be farther from the truth – as well as our founding!

D. Founders, in undertaking the “Great Experiment” (George Washington) understood what they were up against - the historical failure of every world government that preceded them

E. Their challenge: TO DEFY HISTORY!

F. Studied Polybius – “The Histories” (Greek historian on military and political affairs of ancient Rome born 208 BC)

Recognized there was a natural decay or inevitable course of nature that doomed all governments

-One source of decay was “Corruption of Customs”

“When a commonwealth, after warding off many great dangers, has arrived at a high pitch of prosperity and undisputed power . . . the manner of life of its citizens will become more extravagant; and that the rivalry for office, and in other spheres of activity, will become fiercer than it ought to be. And as this state of things goes on more and more . . . this will prove the beginning of deterioration.”

G. Founders employed concept to combat the Corruption of Customs:

THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE OF FIRST PRINCIPLES (three interlocking ideas)

1. Liberty Requires Virtue

- “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom”

- Benjamin Franklin

- “We have no government armed with powers capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion.”

- John Adams

- Human passion (SIN) in the context of our constitutional freedom must be restrained and checked by public virtue.

2. Virtue Requires Religion

- “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports.”

- George Washington

- Religion (faith) supplies virtue with its substance, content and authority

3. Religion Requires Liberty

- Here Framers were most original

- Understood that religion, particularly Christianity, does not need establishing – it cannot be commanded upon others – arms cannot be twisted, they must be free to catch the truth of God.

- “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.”

freedom for religion!

* The separation of church and state is not a freedom from religion, it is

* Why this history lesson in church?

At a time when the public display of any religious worldview is under relentless attack, we must be reminded that our faith is meant to be made public - and that, my friends, is by the authority of our Heavenly Father and our Founding Fathers!

VII. PRINCIPLES and METHODOLOGIES – APPLYING FAITH AS A WORLDVIEW

- Context of these principles: Great commission but I think they would apply in the cultural commission.

A. Six Biblical Principles

1. Remember who the enemy is

- a. If Christians are the salt and culture is the meat – who is the Bacteria? (who/what is causing the cultural decay?)
- b. Who comes to mind? (Michael Moore, Patricia Ireland? Ann Coulter? George Bush? George Tiller? Fred Phelps? Hollywood? Capital Hill? The church across town? The guy in the pulpit?)
- c. Key Principle: Satan is the enemy, everyone else is the prize.

2. Know your audience – Paul in Acts 17

- a. Acts 17:1-9 – Paul in Thessalonica – in synagogue with Jews

1) (Recognized Authority) - Reasoned from Scriptures

2) (Point of Need) - Explaining and proving Christ's death and resurrection

- b. Acts 17:16-31 – Paul in Athens – at the Areopagus with Greeks

1)(Recognized Authority) - Picks a commonly known object of worship – Alter to “unknown God”

2) (Point of Need) - Started message with the God of creation – who was the unknown God

3. Speak truth in love

a. “I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love.” - Philemon 1:8-9

b. "...speaking the truth in love." Ephesians 4:15

1) Frankly the lack of love in our message of truth is the biggest obstacle to the reception of our message of truth

2) With truth comes power, which if not accompanied by love, can manifest itself in arrogance and self-righteous judgment.

3) Truth must always find a companion in discretion and we must learn that sometimes truth is better communicated in a manner more resembling a sunrise than a sledge hammer.

4. Use your mind to reason

a. "Therefore, prepare your minds for action. . ." 1 Peter 1:13

b. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:15

* Experience (stories of faith) must be accompanied by Reason (rational for faith)

5. Don't argue stupid with God's jewelry (combined verses with similar meanings)

a. "Don't have anything to do with stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels." 2 Timothy 2:23

b. "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." Matthew 7:6

Illustrations: I have a fan – sends notes after each commentary – he calls me "coward", says I am "of the anti-Christ's legions", states I am "as religious as Dennis Radar", and I am "as born-again as Satan ever will be."

- I don't engage him – that would be stupid!

- No different than getting into a red-faced argument with a person on the other side of the line holding up an opposition sign at Tiller's clinic and arguing the truth of Scripture

* Gospel is precious! – Know when to use it and when not to.

6. Remember our unique message of grace

a. Phillip Yancy in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace* makes the following observation about the church and politics:

“The church has allowed itself to get so swept up in the political issues, that it plays by the rules of power, which are rules of ungrace. In no other arena is the church at greater risk of losing its calling than in the public square . . . It is difficult, if not impossible, to communicate the message of grace from the corridors of power . . . Moralism apart from grace solves little”

b. Grace is the distinguishing mark of Christianity - all other religions, ideologies and worldviews are based upon merit

c. Capitalism is the mantra of America – the harder the work the greater the reward.

d. But Grace is the Capitalism of Christianity – We cannot work for God, we can’t even serve him – As John Piper relates, workers deserve wages and servants provide benefit, with God, we can be neither. God is only glorified by our act of gift receiving.

e. We are all sinners and the only thing we have to offer God is our need!

f. When we accept this truth about God, as well as ourselves, then we can see those with whom we vehemently disagree as the prize and not the enemy

IX. CONCLUSION

A. Is Jesus a Republican?

B. You want to know what I think only half as bad as I want to know what you think I think!

C. Likes and dislikes about “stated” position of each party:

1. Republican Party

- Like its stance on life issues (abortion, embryonic stem cell), defense of the family and personal responsibility, but would not be happy bent toward greed of corporate America and handling of nation’s finance.

2. Democratic Party

- Like its emphasis on the poor, social justice and the environment, but would not be happy with the constant antagonism toward personal responsibility (as communicated in policies of entitlement mentality), nor its handling of nation’s finances.

D. Would abhor the self-interest and corruption of both parties as well as the process

E. Probably would not endorse either platform – but promoted a different platform – as articulated in that 2,000-year-old sermon on a hill – a platform of a radical counter culture, a Christian Counter Culture.

F. That platform can be summarized in the profound words of Matt. 6:8–**“Do not be like them.”**

G. That is the politics of Jesus –**“Do not be like them.”**

- H. That is Jesus' "political platform." – **"Do not be like them."**
- I. That is the politics of our Christian Counter Culture!
- J. **"Do not be like them."**