

Soteria Church, November 23, 2008  
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### **A Christian's Public Response to Private Conviction**

(I have borrowed some of what I want to say today from a book entitled, A Public Faith: Bringing personal Faith to Public Issues by Charles Drew)

Questions I struggle over:

1. What is my criteria to be when evaluating candidates in an election season?
2. How do I voice my displeasure over laws, amendments and social trends I do not agree with?
3. How can we as Christians be "salt and light" in a society where opinions on social issues are so deeply divided, even within churches?
4. How can I interact with unsaved people who may be polarized by what the media says all Christians think about specific issues?
5. How can we represent Jesus and His gospel to our city and world when Christianity in some ways has been marginalized in our own society?

Two things I have had to repent of:

"Statism" – my tendency to expect the government to bring about needed change in our society

"Privatism" – believing that my faith in Jesus and my place in this society are somehow separate, meaning like the theologian Os Guinness said, "American spirituality is personally engaging but socially irrelevant,"

Here is a biblical reality: God has placed us in this world at this time in history, and he intends for us to bring glory to him by exerting all the influence we can in a spirit of love to make it a better place. We are stewards of our world, and God holds us accountable.

And the challenge is not just in deciding what to do, but also in how we choose to do it

How do we do that well?

**Psalm 97** *The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD. For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!*

Seek God's glory first, above all things. God is in complete control

Don't panic

Elected officials are only elected for a term or more  
God has been and forever will be on the throne

Politics can divide people, even people within the church

Some of you are happy how the elections turned out  
Some of you are sad

But now that the elections are over, how should we all as Christians respond?

**1 Timothy 2:1-6** *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

Do we know who we're "praying for"? (Keep standing if you know...)

Elected officials:

President George W. Bush  
President-Elect Barak Obama  
US Senator Maria Cantwell  
US Senator Patty Murray  
US Representative (our "Congressman") Rick Larsen

Governor Chris Gregoire  
State Senator Jean Berkey  
State Representative John McCoy (Pos.1)  
State Representative Mike Sells (Pos.2)

County Executive Aaron Reardon  
County Council Member (Dist.2) Brian Sullivan

Mayor of Everett Ray Stephanson  
City Council Members: Shannon Affholter, Ron Gibson, Arlan Hatloe, Drew  
Nielson, Mark Olson, Paul Roberts and Brenda Stonecipher

**1 Peter 2:11-17** *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by*

*him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

Honor the government God has set us under. Obey the laws and the rules. This is integrity that makes us great ambassadors for Jesus. Being model citizens is an essential part of our witness.

But, it is essential that we make a mental distinction between two governments: God's government and human government

**Mark 12:13-17** *13 And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.*

(By the way, the inscription on one side of that Roman denarius said, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus" and on the other side had a picture of Pax the Roman goddess of peace with the words "High Priest")

This means we cannot possibly hope for a theodicy where we envision an earthly society as the location of God's exclusive interest and blessing

It's been tried before, many times. All failed.

The Old Testament nation of Israel was a theodicy, and God took that away

The Maccabean Revolt of the first and second centuries BC didn't last

In Constantine's Roman government the "Christianized Roman army" used to march conquered people through rivers and then pronounced them baptized. Bet it didn't stick.

The Crusades didn't work, and are now viewed as an ill-intentioned failure

Oliver Cromwell's government experiment in England failed

A Reformed city in Holland tried it, and it ended up being very temporary

Modern Islamic states try it now but it produces fear not willing uniformity

Jesus effectively abolished the idea of a theodicy in how He answered the question about paying taxes.

But...this calls us to be both passionate Christians and good Americans

And...it forces us to choose priorities if one is in opposition to the other

So how does that apply to war? 3 responses:

Positivists – in honoring the government you do whatever you're called to do

Pacifists – non violent political resistance even in the face of oppression  
Normativists – when human government fails to live up to its God-given  
responsibility then it may be legitimately resisted from within  
(by revolution) or from without (by war)

In answering questions like this we each have to be prayerful in evaluating our response,  
and recognize that some of us may (after much prayer) end up with different conclusions.

What about issues of morality?

Everyone, Christian or not legislates morality in their own mind  
Some of our laws are illustrative of our society's shared morality  
Laws against murder, theft, drunk driving, child abuse, affirmative action,  
and environmental protection to name only a few

Some other laws may not be true of our own morality, but they are certainly true  
of someone else's

what is taught in public school classrooms  
rights given to homosexuals  
even whether it is right or not right to bail out the auto makers

We are not citizens of a Christian nation. We are Christian citizens of this nation  
It's time for us to care about Everett...and the rest of the world too!

So how do we make a difference in Jesus' Name?

See ourselves as Christians, but also as American citizens and as world citizens  
God cares about all people and all nations. "God does not love America best!"  
God is not an American  
God is not a Republican, or a Democrat

There are many avenues an individual Christian can pursue  
The point is, pursue social justice (saving people from injustice) as part of  
pursuing the salvation of people from sin and eternal damnation.  
Serving our society and culture is a necessary part of evangelism

People are always more important than the cause. Respect shown to others is a part  
of evangelism too, especially toward those people we disagree with.  
Our own humility is a part of evangelism

Respect fosters cooperation

Finding and starting with common ground is always better than starting  
with disagreements

Cooperation honors diversity

None of us are the same  
We have different skills, different gifts, and different passions

Find your public calling

What are the issues that attract your interest?

I have become more interested in the environment

What opportunities has God set before me in the areas I have some interest?

Small and personal is good. It all adds up, and God can take our small and personal and

Make it bigger and far-reaching

The Food Ministry here at North Middle School is an example

So is cleaning up trash that the wind blew into your neighbor's yard

Hear how Job related his faith in God to how he lived his life in his world:

**Job 31:7-10, 13-14, 19, 21-22, 26-28, 33-34, 38-40** *If my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out.*

Robbery

*If my heart has been enticed toward a woman and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, then let my wife grind for another and let others bow down to her.*

Infidelity

*If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, what shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?*

Mistreatment of employees

*If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing or the needy without covering,*

Neglecting the poor

*If I have raised my hand against the fatherless because I saw my help at the gate, then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder and let my arm be broken from its socket*

Abuse of the less fortunate

*If I have looked at the sun when it shone or the moon moving in splendor and my heart has been secretly enticed and my mouth has kidded my hand this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.*

Chasing after false idols

*If I have concealed my transgressions as other do by hiding my iniquity in my bosom because I stood in great fear of the multitude and the contempt of families terrified me, so that I kept silence and did not go out of doors*

Trying to hide my own sins

*if my land has cried out against me and its furrows have wept together, if I have eaten its yield without payment and made its owners breathe their last, let thorns grow instead of wheat and foul weeds instead of barley*

Taking from but not caring for the environment, God's Creation

Our Christian life is not just a part of our lives, it is our whole life:

Our private life with God

Our life in as part of our church

Our public life as citizens of our country and world

Pray for our government. Pray against injustice. Repent of the injustice we have knowingly or unknowingly participated in.

Praise God that He is on the throne of heaven and earth.

Ask God to give you a broken heart for the less fortunate around us and throughout the world

Ask God to give you a passion to serve and ideas for how to pursue that passion

Do something positive. Do it with humility before people and in dependence before God

Do it as part of our church

Do it as a representative and ambassador of the Kingdom of God