

Christian Ethics and the Election of Donald Trump

Dear friends,

Consider the following remarks: “It is impossible to square Christian ethics with what our Government is presently doing.” “How can you be a Christian and justify voting for Donald Trump?” I’ve read varying iterations of this statement over the last couple of months, and this letter addresses the question. In doing so I ask readers to consider certain verses from the Bible. What drives me to ask it is the fact that it offends me deeply that certain people supported Trump, while others voting for Trump didn’t bother me at all. The simple answer is that some people don’t know better or genuinely didn’t see anything wrong with doing so, but others should have or did know the difference between right and wrong and chose to be willfully ignorant of values they had previously held and espoused. Which make the real question, how can I justify being angry with some people for voting a certain way while giving others a free pass based on their ignorance or a difference of understanding for casting the same vote? I believe it can be answered by contrasting two ancient perspectives of God and what God expects of us.

If this is a subject that you’re likely to be offended by or just not interested in, then I fully understand your not reading it. I knew this letter would be offensive to some and hoped it might convey enough wisdom to others to justify the risk, but I certainly don’t want to offend anyone for no good reason. Some people don’t believe in right and wrong, or believe that it’s impossible for people to understand a meaningful difference. Others find the idea of judging election choices in terms of a spiritual moral rightness as ludicrous, or even offensive, and to many of these this letter is going to seem like gibberish. But if you believe that you perceive a genuine difference between right and wrong, between good and evil, and you think that there could be understanding to be gained from the Bible and other old ideas, then I invite you to keep reading.

The following verses are Mark:29-34 as found in the King James Bible.

*And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. **And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*** (Emphasis added)

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

This sentiment is repeated in other Gospels including Luke:25-37, which goes on to include the story of the Good Samaritan, also relevant in this analysis.

*And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, **what shall I do to inherit eternal life?***

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

*And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: **this do, and thou shalt live.***

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

For the uninitiated, understand that the Jews in Jesus' audience would have generally been encouraged to think very low of Samaritans and to consider them foreigners. The priest and the Levite, on the other hand, would have been recognized as reputable and highly respected. But Jesus isn't saying here that we should only think of others as our neighbor based on how they've treated us in the past. It is presumed in the example that the audience would recognize the priest and the Levite as their neighbor, and are commanded to love them as they would themselves, but that the loathed foreigner is also their neighbor. Jesus also says do unto others as you *would have* them do unto you, not do unto others as they have done unto you. It's the Golden Rule, and virtually everyone who claims to be a Christian should have reason to know it.

It's worth noting that Jesus not only says that this is a commandment but second only in importance to loving God, and that doing so is the path to eternal life. And this sums up, really, the light of Western religion. Love God, and love others as yourself, not as a good feeling or what works best for you, but as a commandment. And it is worth noting that it isn't a command to self sacrifice generally. You are commanded to love yourself as well as others. You have to respect yourself and your own well being, and it strongly implies that loving yourself is a part of loving others.

The opposite notion is at least as old. It is that the angry God you serve demands sacrifice, and those acting on this impulse don't sacrifice themselves for others, as Jesus did, but instead sacrifice others to improve their own well being and possibly that of people they believe to be like themselves. The powerful burn their enemies at the stake, both foreign and domestic, the priests ritualize it, and the people follow, partly from a dark spiritual joy but mostly driven by self-preservation and fear. It is lost on most people that the ritual sacrifice of animals by the Jews was actually a giant leap forward in the evolution from evil to good in understanding God. Instead of sacrificing other people to appease God they sacrificed their own animals, their own measurement of wealth, ultimately begetting the Lamb of God concept where God sacrifices his own son for love of humanity.

Concerning ritual human sacrifice, you could point back thousands of years to children being thrown into volcanoes or the Mayans beheading their enemies mere hundreds of years ago pleading to their gods for rain, but this dark worship includes the massacre of innocents by Christians in the name of God both told and untold, from the Crusades to colonization of Africa, the Americas and elsewhere. When I have written in the past that people calling themselves Christians have been as culpable as others, people have blown off the notion as preposterous as it applies to the church today. And yet the Christian church led the charge and played the most integral role in getting Donald Trump elected. In fact a larger majority of white Catholics supported Donald Trump than Romney, McCain or the two elections of President Bush.

This critique isn't just about the man Donald Trump represented himself to be and what was learned about him throughout the campaign: cheating employees and contractors, fraudulent universities, "Grab her by the pu-y," bragging about f-cking whatever women he can get his hands on, refusing to disclose his finances like any other president who could have compromising connections, evidence validated of the Russian dictatorship, formerly the Soviet Union, actively intervening to sway the American election in Donald Trump's favor while he conducts business and makes money there. It isn't just about the greed, using the campaign and office to grow his own brand, banning Muslims only from countries he doesn't do business with and not from Saudi Arabia and others responsible for 9/11, putting unqualified friends and family members in charge of important positions and continuing to profit from his office, with taxpayers footing the bill, in ways that no other American president as done. This is about the evil things he said he would do and is in fact doing. He said he was going to keep out Muslims, and he's done it from poor countries that don't play ball with him. People are being harmed. He's intentionally antagonizing our neighbors around the world. No one has been made safer. He said he would build a wall between here and Mexico, and he's doing what he can to make it happen. In what way can building a wall between the United States and Mexico be justified as loving our neighbors as ourselves? Militarizing our border isn't going to make the world safer, and as long as businesses who hire illegal immigrants can go without punishment, the real issue is not being addressed. The tenor of the proponents' position is that it's for the protection of Americans, as though this is part of the war on terror, but our government has kept us safe from any major terror attacks for better than fifteen straight years without these belligerent measures that heighten the tension. A person could legitimately come up with at least hundreds of more likely causes of death in the United States in the last fifteen years than terrorist attack. And of the localized terrorist attacks that have occurred in the United States since 9/11, none would have been prevented by these measures. And now the one American that will most benefit from a major attack is in charge of National Security.

The impact of Trump's decisions so far are arguably of low significance, but they demonstrate his willingness to carry through with his promises. He's promised to pull America out of global climate agreements. 97% of accredited climate scientists are certain that the impact of human activity on global warming exists. If 97% of mechanics told a person that their car was breaking down, anyone who genuinely cared about the continued operation of that vehicle would take the opinion seriously. The strong consensus is that human contribution to global warming is significant and detrimental to the living environment. So if the United States takes the lead in dismantling the few steps that the world has taken forward on this, destroying what little good we've done, the certain impact will be that millions will die, and likely hundreds of millions at least. Ocean levels will increase faster, droughts will become more prevalent. Starvation will increase, and not just in helpless third-world countries. Dismantling these agreements will not make the world safer for your grandchildren, or their grandchildren. Trump's pledged actions will, in fact, hasten the arrival of a world filled with more death and fear than the one you grew up in. And even if you believe that global warming is exaggerated, as some legitimately believe, why is it such a terrible thing in your mind to agree to pollute less, to burn less, to conserve more fossil fuels for the future, should they be needed? It comes back to human sacrifice. Don't love your neighbors as yourselves. Bring about more death, now and in the future, so that you and others you perceive to be like you can have all you can get, and keep all that you have, right now, before death takes you from this world.

Donald Trump and his appointees are avowedly pledged to destroy the offices they seek to hold that were created to protect all Americans. He wants to end the Environmental Protection Agency. If you're, say, a baby boomer, the group from which Donald Trump received the largest bulk of his votes, then you might not see any point in protecting the environment. By the time the Cuyahoga River starts catching fire again, you'll likely be dead. Cleaner air and water are a part of why so many more in their sixties and seventies are around to vote for Donald Trump than would have been only a few decades ago, but allowing companies to pollute at will or frack unregulated the bedrock that underlies our surface may not seem likely to have tangible effects in your lifetime. But, try to think more of the America that you'll be leaving for young people like your grandchildren who will very much be affected by it in their lifetimes. And if you don't have grandchildren, try to love your neighbor as yourself and think about what you're leaving for other people's children. Is it so offensive to have an agency that prevents pollution and protects the environment that you're willing to shut that agency down and replace it with nothing but the hope that the various state governments will take up the slack?

And he'll, "bomb the sh-t out of ISIS," burn their oil and destroy their pipelines. But his tone doesn't sound like he discriminates between terrorists and unidentified Muslims from poor countries generally, and I admit to making an inference here. When I looked up the quote on the internet in preparation for writing this letter, it was with the expectation of finding it on sites condemning Trump. But it instead comes up repeatedly on sites that lead in with things like, God Bless Donald Trump! It's proclaiming murder in the name of God. Human sacrifice. Blood for rain, blood for riches. These aren't people calling out Donald Trump as an evil man but praising him in the name of God. And not so ironically, none of this is going to make the future safer for any of us. It never does.

I perceive that many believe deep down that overpopulation is the problem, and that killing others is the only real solution to protecting what we have. Whether it's by the rising world temperatures that we

continue contributing to and will so much more so if Donald Trump has his way, or bombing the sh-t out of them, or closing the borders of the world and trapping them in the wastelands that we helped create so they can starve to death, maybe you believe murder is the ultimate solution. How is that different than the Mayans, ritually murdering those they perceived to be their enemies to stave off the droughts that they themselves helped to create. But maybe it's what you genuinely believe deep down. The strong kill the weak, so be strong and kill the weak to appease your angry god. It's what Donald Trump believes, and it's gonna be great. If you having such an understanding voted for Donald Trump, as he does exactly what he said he would do, then your name is signed at the bottom of this document for eternity, and this blood is on your hands.

But if you really believe yourself a Christian, then I beseech you, I beg you in the most genuine sense, change your mind, and not just about voting for Donald Trump but this way of thinking that has led to his rise to power. God's repentance is always available to you if you mean it and you act on it within your power to do so. Maybe you can't take it back, but change your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself today, or tomorrow. But soon. Please. Because the clock is always ticking. Every next step is damage to the future, to the environment, to peace, to God's world created for us, to our very souls, that will be harder and harder to undo, or to at least remedy. These are not blind servants leading you. They act with full intention, and Jesus would tell them that they follow their father, who is Satan. If you follow them, and you understand the difference between right and wrong, then you have signed your name to the election of a man that you knew was evil, that you knew would intentionally harm others, as he said he would, with malice aforethought.

Our neighbors have murdered, have operated gas chambers and intentionally killed en masse without seeing the victims as individuals, and yet we are commanded to love them. Some don't know better and do what they're told, whether from fear for self or the satisfaction of taking the lives of others, eliminating the competition. Some people don't care about the difference between right and wrong, and some don't believe it exists. Others can see a difference but choose to take the evil path, out of hate or anger, greed or fear, because they reason that their neighbor would treat them the same way if the roles are reversed. We are commanded to love them. When we love them we can only hope, or pray if you'd rather, that they discover the difference, and that when they discover the difference they choose to take the action that serves the good, that encompasses loving their neighbors as themselves. It is the story in movies and books too numerous to count that drives us to tears and that can and does happen in real life; the story that ends in repentance followed by acting with a combination of courage and love for others. Some can't understand and cannot be moved, but some can understand the difference and can choose to love their neighbors as themselves, even if they've chosen otherwise in the past.

If you voted for Donald Trump for what you believed to be religious or spiritual reasons, and you participated and fueled the thinking, the anger and fear, that got him elected, then I pray that you will find repentance in your heart and will have the courage to speak out against where this path is leading. Make it your own. A relatively small number made a tremendous difference in the 2016 election result that so few predicted which put an evil man in charge of the country. It is possible that a relatively small number can ultimately change their hearts and be responsible for turning the tide back.

I realize that I've only ventured half of an answer to the question initially posed. Remaining is the

question of this few who made the wrong difference, who have reason to know and follow Jesus' commandment to us to love our neighbor as ourselves, how could they justify in a spiritual sense the actions that they took? If we're not going to allow the pardon of ignorance from the constant media barrage of falsehoods and deception, climate change denial and taking away your guns, Benghazi and email servers and other insignificant near nonsense, then how can they believe it was justified? I began this letter with two accounts from the Bible that are believed to be the words of Jesus himself. I'll close with three verses from the Gospel of John that church leaders have preached to be the true redemption.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. **He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.***

The mainstream church continues to interpret this quite literally, which is to say that if you believe in the name of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, then you will be saved and taken into heaven, regardless of whether you love God or love your neighbor as yourself. By this interpretation, the commandments are ultimately meaningless, from those given by Moses to loving God and loving thy neighbor as thyself to all of Jesus' other teachings that aren't directly synonymous with accepting Jesus as the only way to God. As you read at the beginning of this letter, Jesus tells the scribe that he has to love God and love his neighbor as himself in order to have eternal life. Priests and scribes have since argued that Jesus said it but knew it to be impossible to truly love your neighbor as yourself, and thus no inconsistency. What I believe and have always taught is that Jesus intended us to love our neighbors as ourselves to the best of our ability, all things considered, and that is the key to life that you might seek. We have hope for them, and to do our best by them, all of them, even if doing so means standing up against some in defense of others, as we would have done to ourselves in the wider understanding of the situations of life. But the interpretation of the church has been that you don't have to obey God, which is what following commandments amounts to, if you merely accept the name of Jesus.

The phraseology of these three often quoted verses from John even call their wisdom into question. Other religions have had a sacrificial Son figure, but the book of John carefully limits the window to heaven to the name of Jesus, because it increases the church's power and influence. It's too petty to be true. But regardless of whether you agree or not, the church's position opens the window to support Donald Trump, or Vladimir Putin, or any other leader or action, no matter how vile, as long as you can convince yourself that you believe three verses from the book of John, regardless of how much you actually understand them. Rather than concern myself with that, I only say to love your neighbor as yourself, reject evil deeds and do to others as you would have them do unto you, and help us to start fixing this terrible mess we're making of things.

So it is.
Bob Young