

QUESTIONS AND ETHICS

Applying the Gospel to Tough Situations

RUSSELL D. MOORE

Contents

Culture	3
Addictive Substances	10
Family	15
Christian Sexual Ethics	25
Life Issues	38
Politics	45
Church	51
Race	58

Culture



Can America be considered a Christian nation?

According to a 2012 study by the Pew Forum, Protestants are, for the first time in history, not a majority in the United States of America. I don't think that's anything for evangelical Protestants, or anyone else, to panic about.

Several years ago, I pointed out that studies were showing a declining Protestant majority, and projections were being made for this very reality. Now the survey says we have a 48 percent plurality of Protestants. I wasn't frantic about that several years ago, and I'm still not.

When working toward our “God and Country” badges, my childhood Boy Scout troop was shuttled over to the neighborhood United Methodist church for sessions with the pastor about being good Christians and good citizens. I remember my Southern Baptist sensibilities being shocked when the pastor said, in response to a question, that he didn't believe in angels or demons. The reigning cultural presence of mainline Protestantism served the same purpose as the “God and country” badge. Give us enough Christianity to fight the communists and save the Republic, they said, but let's remember not to take it all too seriously.

That culture is over.

Frankly, we should be more concerned about the loss of a Christian majority in the Protestant churches than about the loss of a Protestant majority in the United States. Most of the old-line Protestant denominations are held captive to every theological fad that has blown through their divinity schools in the past thirty years—from crypto-Marxist liberation ideologies, to sexual identity politics, to a neo-pagan vision of God—complete with gender neutralized liturgies.

Should we lament the fact that the Riverside Avenue Protestant establishment is now collapsing under the weight of its own bureaucracy?

What we should pay attention to instead may be the fresh wind of orthodox Christianity whistling through the leaves—especially throughout the Third World, and in some unlikely places in North America as well. Sometimes animists, Buddhists, and body-pierced Starbucks employees are more fertile ground for the gospel than the confirmed Episcopalian at the helm of the Rotary Club.

Accordingly, evangelicals will engage the culture much like the apostles did in the first century—not primarily “baptized” pagans on someone's church roll, but those who are hearing something new for the first time. There may be fewer bureaucrats in denominational headquarters, but there might be more authentically Christian churches preaching an authentically Christian gospel. We will be pained to see idolatries springing up where churches once were. In that we will have the

same experience our brother Paul did two millennia ago in Athens (Acts 17:16). But like him, we sometimes find it easier to gain a hearing among people who know they are ignorant (Acts 17:17), than among those who think they know. Paul listened to the pagan poetry about Zeus and showed the Athenian philosophers how not even they could live with the kind of god-concepts they said they believed.

Around us we hear the father-hunger in the hip-hop lyrics blaring down the urban sidewalk. We see the fear of death in the plastic surgery clinics and health clubs springing up in the suburbs. We hear the despondency of sin lamented in the words of a country song playing in a rural gas station. Against all of that, we proclaim the only message that can answer these unconscious longings and these conscious resentments—Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:18). The pagans won't always listen—but they will know that we are saying something new (Acts 17:32).

The American Protestant majority is over, and to that I say, “Good riddance.” Now let's pray for something new—like a global Christian majority, on earth as it is in heaven.



Is gun control a pro-life issue?

As the nation continues to grieve over recent shocking and senseless murders, the conversation turns to how to prevent such violence in the future. Some wonder what role violent media play in motivating twisted killers. Others suggest that stricter gun control is a key step in curtailing such havoc. Some suggest that gun control is not only the only sensible measure, but also the only thing consistent with a pro-life ethic.

In the *Washington Post*, David Gibson of the Religion News Service examined the charges by some religious leaders that it is hypocritical to call oneself “pro-life” and yet not support extensive gun control measures. He asked me if I thought gun violence is a pro-life issue.

Gun violence is clearly a pro-life issue to the extent that murder is evil and is a violation of the dignity of the person and the right to life. That said, what people usually mean by including gun violence as a pro-life issue is not actually about gun violence, directly, but about gun control measures.

I don't own a gun, and I have no desire to do so, but I hold to pretty traditional conservative views about the Second Amendment as a personal and individual right. Like every other constitutional right, it isn't unlimited and all-expansive. But I'm generally suspicious of gun control measures as naive and ineffective, if not counter-productive, preferring to combat gun violence with strict law enforcement of existing laws. Having said that, I hold my Second Amendment views for different reasons and with different conviction than I hold my First and Second Commandment views.

My views on this issue are informed, I hope, by my conscience as a Christian, which is to be shaped by Scripture and the church. But my position on this question is not “Thus saith the Lord.” It's

“Thus thinketh Moore,” and there is a big difference.

Many Christians and other pro-lifers support gun control measures, of course, and some support very extensive measures. But the question of gun control is a different question than the issue of gun violence itself.

The gun control debate isn't between those who support the right to shoot innocent people and those who don't. It's instead a debate about what's prudent, and what's not, in solving the common goal of ending violent criminal behavior. That's why orange-vested NRA members and vegan gun-control advocates can co-exist, as the Body of Christ, in the same church, without excommunicating one another.

The abortion rights question is a different one, both in American political culture and within the structure of Christian life and thought.

Wherever one stands on gun control, no one is denying the personhood of gun victims or their right to be protected from violence. Whatever one thinks about gun control, no one in the American debate today supports selling guns to those who intend to kill.

The question instead is how to prevent guns from being used criminally. Some think gun control measures are a necessary way to do this; others think such laws are averting the real issue altogether, which is about enforcing existing laws not creating new ones. That's a very different debate than the cultural divide over whether life in the womb is worth legal protection at all.

Behind all of this, there's a larger question. I agree that pro-life convictions are about more than just abortion. We ought to be pro-life and whole life. Our convictions about the dignity of women and children harmed by abortion ought to prompt us to stand against criminal violence and dehumanization wherever it is. But we ought not to let the term “pro-life” become so elastic as to lose all meaning. In most cases, the expansion of “pro-life” is a way to divert attention from the question of personhood and human rights.

Gun violence is a pro-life issue in that it is a horrible evil, and it ought to remind us that all persons deserve protection from such violence. That doesn't mean that we're going to agree on all the specifics of how to achieve that goal. The abortion issue isn't about prudential means to a common goal, but about legally protecting those who are subject to lethal violence.

Let's grieve for the victims of gun violence. And let's work to reason together about the best ways to achieve the common good on helping to prevent guns from being used for malevolent ends. Let's allow our pro-life convictions to guide our consciences to work for peace and justice for all persons. But let's see the difference between questions of clear conviction and questions of provisional prudence.



Should Christians engage in boycotts of companies that espouse unbiblical values?

A respected pro-family organization that supports legal protection for traditional marriage launched a “Dump Starbucks” campaign after a national board meeting in which the Seattle-based coffee company mentioned support for same-sex marriage as a core value of the company. Some Christians wondered why the Southern Baptist Convention did not promote the boycott. Here’s why.

A boycott in and of itself is not always evil or wrong. It’s just that, in the case of Starbucks (and many cases like it), a boycott exposes us to all of our worst tendencies. Christians are tempted, again and again, to fight like the devil to please the Lord.

A boycott is a display of power, particularly of economic power. The boycott shows a corporation (or government or service provider) that the aggrieved party can hurt the company by depriving it of revenue. The boycott, if it’s successful, eventually causes the powers that be to yield, conceding that they need the money of the boycott participants more than they need to support whatever cause they were supporting. It is a contest of who has more buying power, and thus is of more value to the company.

We lose that argument.

The argument behind a boycott assumes that the “rightness” of a marriage definition is constituted by a majority with power. Isn’t that precisely what we’re arguing against? Our beliefs about marriage aren’t the way they are because we are in a majority. As a matter of fact, we must concede that we are in a tiny minority in contemporary American society, if we define marriage the way the Bible does, as a sexually-exclusive, permanent, one-flesh union.

Moreover, is this kind of economic power context really how we’re going to engage our neighbors with a discussion about the meaning and mystery of marriage? Do such measures actually persuade at the level such decisions are actually made: the moral imagination? I doubt it.

I’m all for protecting marriage in law and in culture, and I’m for that partly because I believe it is necessary for human flourishing for all people, believers and non-believers alike. But there’s a way to do so that recognizes the resilience of marriage as a creation institution and that rests in the sovereignty of God over His universe.

Those who are scared of losing something are those who seem frantic or shrill or outraged.

Those who are fearful resort to Gentile tactics of lording over others with political majorities or economic power. The winners, on the other hand, are able to take a longer view. We’re able to grieve when our neighbors seek to copy marriage without the most basic thing that makes mar-

riage work: the mystery of male and female as one flesh.

But we don't persuade our neighbors by mimicking their angry protests. We persuade them by holding fast to the gospel, by explaining our increasingly odd view of marriage, and by serving the world and our neighbors around us, as our Lord does, with a towel and a foot bucket. We won't win this argument by bringing corporations to the ground in surrender.

We'll engage this argument, first of all, by prompting our friends and neighbors to wonder why we don't divorce each other, and why we don't split up when a spouse loses his job or loses her health. We'll engage this argument when we have a more exalted, and more mysterious, view of sexuality than those who see human persons as animals or machines. And, most of all, we'll engage this argument when we proclaim the meaning behind marriage: the covenant union of Christ and His church.

Fear can lead us to cower and to hide a view of marriage that seems archaic and antiquated. That's why so many evangelical Christians have already surrendered, in their own lives, on such questions as round-the-clock daycare or a therapeutic view of divorce. But fear also can lead us to a kind of enraged impotence, where our boycotts and campaigns are really just one more way of saying, "I'm important. Listen to me." Marriage is too important for that.

A Roman governor thought Jesus was weak when He refused to use imperial means of resistance. But Jesus' refusal to fight meant just the opposite of what Pilate assumed. "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting," Jesus said (Jn. 18:36).

Let others fight mammon with mammon. Let's struggle against principalities and powers with the one thing they fear: a word of faithful witness that doesn't blink before power, but doesn't seek to imitate it either.

With the confidence of those who have been vindicated by the resurrection of Christ, we don't need to be vindicated by the culture. That ought to free us to speak openly about what we believe, but with the gentleness of those who have nothing to prove. Let's not boycott our neighbors. Let's not picket or scream or bellow. Let's offer a cup of cold water, or maybe even a grande skinny vanilla latte, in Jesus' name.



What should Christians think about cremation?

The Bible always speaks of intentionally burning the body as an act of disgrace and disrespect, and cremation was always held by the Christian church to be pagan and anti-Christian.

It came to America in the nineteenth century through Freethinkers, pagans who wanted to make a statement against the resurrection of the body. In the Bible, the act of burial is not just a means of disposing of a dead body, you are committing a body to the ground

and making a statement that it will be called out of the grave and restored. This does not mean that your loved ones who have been cremated will not be resurrected from the dead. Jesus is able to call together ashes into a body in the same way He is able to restore limbs lost to amputation, war, an auto accident or a shark bite.

The question here is the message we are sending in the way we deal with our dead.

Unfortunately, we've been living for so long in a Christian culture that thinks the Christian life is all about escaping from the body and getting to heaven where we will sit on a cloud and play a harp while we look at a bright light. In reality, the biblical promise is resurrection from the dead.

You shouldn't go to a funeral and say, "This isn't Aunt Flossie. This is just Aunt Flossie's shell. She's graduated up to heaven, and this is just the container she left behind." That's an ancient heresy called Gnosticism. Yes, Aunt Flossie's soul is with God in heaven, but that body is Aunt Flossie too. And her ultimate salvation is to be reunited, body and soul, in the resurrection of the dead.

I once heard a very wise man say, "Flee from any religion that views the body as Tupperware."



How should Christians think about the “war on Christmas”?

Flipping through a magazine one day before Christmas, I found myself sighing with irritation. An advertisement for Budweiser was tagged with the headline, “Silent Nights are Overrated.” A few minutes later, in a second magazine, I saw an ad for a high-end outdoor grill, which read: “Who says it’s better to give than to receive?”

My first reaction was one that I’ve critiqued in others, to take some sort of personal, or at least tribal, offense: “Would they advertise in Turkey during Ramadan with the line, ‘Fasting is Overrated?’ or by asking in India, ‘Who says everything is one with the universe?’”

I was missing the point—and that matters.

Every year there’s a lot of hubbub about a “war on Christmas.” In some instances, there are legitimate questions of religious liberty involved and complicated church/state questions that ought to concern us. More commonly, though, the outrage is directed toward the commercial marketplace, for replacing “Merry Christmas” with “Happy Holidays” and so on.

As Christians, we ought to recognize that a militant pull toward what Richard John Neuhaus called a “naked public square” is bad for people of any and all religious traditions. But there’s a difference between, for instance, standing against a school system penalizing a child for writing “Merry Christmas” on her “holiday card” and the kind of huffing and puffing we do when commercial marketers don’t “get” our Christian commitments.

I should have thought about the fact that the advertising agencies behind this beer company and this grill corporation are trying to sell products, not to offend constituencies. Taking shots at any group's religious beliefs isn't good economics, and that's just the point. I'm willing to bet whoever dreamed up these ad campaigns didn't "get" at all that they might be making fun of Jesus Christ.

Madison Avenue probably didn't think through that the song "Silent Night" is about the holy awe of the dawning Incarnation in Bethlehem. It's just a Christmas song, part of the background music to our culture the last two months of the year. Saying it's overrated probably didn't feel any more "insensitive" to these copywriters than making a joke about, say, decking the halls or reindeer games.

And they probably never thought about the fact that the statement "It is better to give than to receive" is a quotation from Jesus (Acts 20:35). It probably just seems like a Benjamin Franklin-style aphorism. It's the same kind of thing that happens when someone says "scarlet letter" without recognizing Hawthorne or "to be or not to be" while not knowing the difference between Hamlet and Shrek.

We ought not to be outraged by all that, as though we were some protected class of victims. We ought to instead see the ways that our culture is less and less connected with the roots of basic knowledge about Christianity. Many, especially in the culture-making wing of American life, see Christmas in the same way they see Hanukkah. They know about menorahs and dreidels, but not about the Maccabean Revolt.

That ought not make us angry. It ought to instead give us an opportunity to understand how we look to our neighbors. They see us more in terms of our trivialities than in terms of the depths of meaning of Incarnation and blood atonement and the kingdom of Christ. They know something about "Silent Night," just as they know something about "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer." What they don't recognize is the cosmos-shifting mystery of Immanuel as God with Us.

All that means is that we need to spend more time lovingly engaging our neighbors with the sort of news that shocks angels and redirects stargazers and knocks sheep herders to the ground. That it seems increasingly strange is all the better—because it is strange. A gospel safe enough to sell beer and barbecue grills is a gospel too safe to make blessings flow, far as the curse is found.

Christmas, then, isn't about a fight for our right to party. It's a reminder that we, like every generation before us, live in a "land of deep darkness" (Isa. 9:2). The darkness isn't overcome by sarcasm or personal offense or retaliatory insults. The light of Bethlehem shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not, cannot, will not overcome it.

And that's enough.

Addictive Substances



Is medical marijuana OK for Christians?

The question of medical marijuana is one that I hear a lot because there are so many states around the country that are legalizing marijuana for legal purposes; the state of Colorado is essentially legalizing marijuana for any purpose.

This seems to be a trend that is going to continue to happen in this country, really because of two influences, both right and left. On the left there is a progressive acceptance of marijuana use that comes out of the counterculture. On the right there is a libertarian understanding of decreasing law of personal autonomy, individual autonomy, and those sorts of things. Those two things come together to make marijuana legalization more and more likely in this country. So even if you are not addressing this where you live, you probably will be soon.

There are all sorts of mind-altering drugs that are given to severely ill people in order to correct their illness and sometimes even to put them out of consciousness. I would think of Morphine, for example. I think it is ethically all right because the scripture tells us, for instance in Proverbs 31, that even the mind-altering aspects of alcohol are being given to someone who is dying and in severe distress. So there is a medicinal use of alcohol in a way that doesn't seem permissible elsewhere.

Let's bracket for a moment whether or not alcohol is ever acceptable for Christians.

The mind-altering aspect of drunkenness is clearly forbidden in scripture, and every branch of Christianity affirms that. So, I think there is a sense in which we do make a distinction between recreational use of drugs and something that is genuinely, medically treating somebody.

Having said that, I think when it comes to the issue of marijuana, we are dealing with something different than we are dealing with say, Morphine.

I think the issue with medical marijuana is exactly what David Frum wrote about in his CNN opinion piece, "Be afraid of Big Marijuana," about the marijuana industry. One of the points he made, which I think is completely true, is that, "Medical marijuana is a laughable fiction." He says, "In California, the typical user of so-called medical marijuana is a 32-year-old white man with no life-threatening illness but a long record of substance abuse. Under Colorado's medical marijuana regime, only 2 percent of those prescribed marijuana suffered from cancer, and only 1 percent from HIV/AIDS. Some 94 percent cited unspecified 'pain' as the

justification for their pot prescription.”

That certainly seems to be the case wherever medical marijuana is showing up. This is not something that is being given to people with terminal cancer, fighting off in a hospice sort of situation those last stages of pain. It is something that is being given very indiscriminately with a substance that has a long, cultural history in this country of essentially inducing a kind of immediate drunkenness, which of course is prohibited in scripture for a believer. “Be not drunk” (Eph. 5:18).

Again, bracketing for a moment the question of whether or not any use of alcohol is allowable for Christians. Any form of drunkenness is prohibited; we all agree on that. And so the question is, what then happens with medical marijuana?

If I were in a state where medical marijuana was on the ballot, I would vote against it. And it is not because I don’t have compassion for people who are dealing with difficult illnesses, nor would I be saying that some terminally ill person who takes marijuana at a doctor’s order is personally sinning. I don’t think that is the question. I think the question is, “What does the normalization of marijuana usage do to people?”

We already have a tremendous issue of wrecked lives in this country when it comes to alcohol abuse; and we have a tremendous issue in this country of wrecked lives when it comes to prescription pain addiction. Even within the church, prescription pain addiction is everywhere. Wherever we have medical marijuana coming in, we have marijuana usage going up. That is not a good thing. I think that most of us can agree marijuana doesn’t do anything good for a work ethic, or for someone’s life. And the people who tend to get hurt in all of these situations aren’t those who are in the cultural elite who often are the ones normalizing these things culturally.

I saw a commercial not long ago for a fast-food hamburger chain that had someone who was clearly mimicking a marijuana user, getting the munchies and wanting to go eat in the middle of the night. That’s all very fun and something to laugh about at the level of the people who are putting this together. But who gets hurt? The people who are on the bottom sectors of the economic system in this country.

I would vote no on medical marijuana in virtually every sort of ballot initiative that I have ever seen. And I think as Christians we need to recognize what is happening here. Like Frum said, there is a marijuana industry just like the Big Tobacco industry with a cheap product that is able to hook people in. I think the simplistic ideas of, “If we just legalize this, we are going to get rid of the black market, and marijuana usage is going to go down,” don’t bear up in terms of history—either long-term cultural history or in recent history.

So I would say no on medical marijuana for Christians.



How should a Christian think about anti-depressants?

Depression is not just unpleasant; it can be debilitating and dangerous, and it signals that something has gone wrong somewhere.

God created us as whole persons, with body and psyche together. The body affects the psyche. For example, going without food or sleep will change the way one thinks and feels dramatically. And the psyche affects the body. We don't "have" bodies or "have" psyches. We are psychosomatic whole persons, made in the image of God.

It makes sense to me that biological and physiological factors often play a role in persons not seeing reality correctly. Some drugs can "fix" something that's gone wrong. For example, a malfunctioning thyroid can be corrected by synthetic drugs that prompt the body to do what it's designed to do. Most of the anti-depressants you see advertised on television don't "fix" problems, as much as they alleviate symptoms. They rework levels of serotonin or dopamine reception, for instance, so that a person doesn't experience the same levels of sadness or dullness or hopelessness.

Often, even when depression or anxiety is rooted in non-physiological reasons, the symptoms are so debilitating that medication is necessary for the person to start working on the root issues. But, remember that for most people, there is no drug that will bring about psychic flourishing. What the drug is meant to do is to "numb" the person to the pain of depression and anxiety.

Numbing, as part of an overall plan, can be a good thing. When I have a toothache, I want my dentist to give me an anesthetic so that I don't feel that throbbing anymore. Before my tooth can be fixed, someone must "shut down" the agony I'm in, temporarily. But a dentist who simply "treats" my infected tooth with an anesthetic isn't helping me. Ultimately, the tooth must be fixed.

It could be that depression and anxiety are caused by something physiological. If so, medical treatment should be continued, and physiological issues should be looked at. But it could be that there's a reason for the sadness or the anxiety. Maybe the person has recently lost a spouse or a job or a friend. If so, they should grieve over that loss. Maybe they're anxious about a guilty conscience or about an uncertain future. They don't need to just medicalize that anxiety.

Christians must rehearse the gospel we've embraced, and pray, alone and with others, and seek the kind of counsel that can bring about the necessary life-change to cope with whatever seems so hopeless.

Whether depression is ultimately chemical or circumstantial, it is also important to start with a realistic picture of what "normal" is and what the end goal should look like. I know I have trouble seeing this clearly sometimes.

The "normal" human life isn't what is marketed to us by the pharmaceutical industry or by the lives we see projected on movie screens, or, frankly, by a lot of Christian sermons and praise songs. The

normal human life is the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who sums up in himself everything it means to be human (Eph. 1:10). And the life of Christ presented to us in the Gospels is a life of joy, fellowship and celebration, but also of loneliness, profound sadness, lament, grief, anger and suffering, all without sin.

As the Holy Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ, we don't become giddy, or, much less emotionally vacant. Instead, the Bible tells us we "groan" along with the persecuted creation around us (Rom. 8:23). We cry out with Jesus himself, experiencing with Him often the agony of Gethsemane (Gal. 4:6; Mk. 14:36). And, paradoxically, along the way, we join Jesus in joy and peace (Gal. 5:22). A human emotional life is complicated, and a regenerated human emotional life is complicated too.

If your doctors are trying to get you to this kind of emotional holism, good. But if what you're expecting is a kind of all-the-time emotional tranquility, you just might be passing up something that is part of the human condition itself.

There are some Christians who believe any psychiatric drug is a spiritual rejection of the Bible's authority. I'm not one of them. But there are other Christians who seem to think, with the culture around us, that everything is material and can be solved by material means. I don't think that's right either.

Keep working with your doctors to treat your depression. If you're not happy with the treatment or with the side effects, seek some additional medical opinions and listen for wisdom in a multitude of counselors. But spend time too with those who know you and love you, and ask if there's more behind this than just serotonin reception.

God doesn't want you to be simply, in the words of one observer of the current pharmacological utopianism, "comfortably numb." He wants you to be whole.



How should a Christian engage a friend who has unwittingly become addicted to prescription drugs?

Many churches are facing the issue of people who are addicted to prescription pain medications. I find that increasingly, wherever I go. We always hear about loved ones who are addicted to alcohol, illegal drugs, methamphetamine, or cocaine, but increasingly I am hearing about people who are addicted to prescription pain medications.

In some ways this is a more insidious form of addiction because someone who is becoming involved in this typically starts out for very good reasons. Now, there are exceptions of course. There are people who are just out on the black market buying Vicodin or whatever it is they can find in order to abuse it. But most people who become addicted are people who have a legitimate pain issue. The doctor prescribes a prescription pain medication, and then they become unwittingly

hooked and unwittingly addicted to it and wind up making very destructive choices.

Scripture does of course speak to this when it tells us, “Do not become drunk with wine” (Eph. 5:18). This language of drunkenness, of the altering of the mind, is calling us to be sober, to be aware, and also to not allow anything to have mastery over us (1 Cor. 6:12).

This is a moral issue. It is an ethical issue. And I think this situation gets interesting when the person claims Christ, yet is averting accountability. Now, it’s one thing if someone says, “Yeah, I’m on Percocet every morning right before I drink my Old Crow, and that’s none of your business. I’m going to keep doing it until Jesus comes.” Now, that is obvious lack of repentance. But most people, it seems to me, respond saying, “I don’t want to be doing this. I don’t like to be doing this. And God has given me freedom over it. I am healed.” And then it happens again.

One of the reasons I think this happens is because of the way that we tend to see temptation in the Christian life. We sometimes wrongly tend to see temptation as something that we can remove, that somehow we not only gain victory over temptation by overcoming it and not succumbing to it, but we gain victory over temptation by the absence of temptation. The scripture never promises you the absence of temptation. As a matter of fact, Jesus himself was tempted and was without sin. You are going to face temptation. The power of the Spirit is the overcoming of the temptation. It is not the removal of the temptation.

So an easy sort of fix would be to say, “Oh, I had this key moment in my Bible study this morning where I realized I am not going to be stuffing those Vicodin in my mouth anymore;” “I went to that prayer meeting tonight, and I just decided the Morphine pump is gone, I am not going to use it anymore.” Those are usually very easy fixes and illusory ways that can actually keep us from repenting. So what I would say to a Christian with a friend in this situation is to keep working with this person in your life.

Maybe start adding other people to the conversation. Follow that Matthew 18 process within the local congregation. If you are a member of the same congregation, bring this person toward discipline. And what I would be looking for is not for this person to say, “Yeah, I just don’t want the pain pills anymore.” That may happen, but that is not what repentance is necessarily. What you are looking for is someone who says, “I am willing to get whatever sort of help I need in order to be free from this.” And then work with medical professionals and others in your community to try to get this person the help that he or she needs to get off of those pain pills.

It is a very common sort of trap. It is a serious trap, but it is very common. This doesn’t mean that the addicted person is inordinately evil or inordinately weak. This can happen to anybody. But we need Galatians 6, the stronger to lift up the weaker and to help us along.

Family



How should I deal with family tensions during the holidays?

We tend to idealize holidays, but human depravity doesn't go into hibernation between Thanksgiving and New Year's. One thing that will hit most Christians, sooner or later, is tension within extended families at holiday time. Some of you will visit family members who are contemptuous of the Christian faith and downright hostile to the whole thing.

Others are empty nest couples who now have sons- or daughters-in-law to get adjusted to, maybe even grandchildren who are being reared not exactly the way the grandparents would do it. Still others are young couples who are figuring out how to keep from offending family members who are watching the calendar to see which side of the family gets more time on the ledger. And others are new parents, trying to figure out how to parent their child when it's Mammonpalooza at Aunt Judie's house this year.

And, of course, there's always the kind of thing that happens when sinful people come into contact with one another. Somebody asks, "When is the baby due?" to a woman who is not pregnant, or somebody blasts your favorite political figure, or...well, you know.

Here are a few quick thoughts on what Christians ought to remember, especially if you've got a difficult extended family situation.

1. *Peace.* Yes, Jesus tells us that His gospel brings a sword of division, and that sometimes this splits up families (Matt. 10:34-37). But there's a difference between gospel division and carnal division (see 1 Cor. 1, e.g.). The Spirit brings peace (Gal. 5:22), and the sons of God are peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). Since that's so, we ought to "strive for peace with everyone" (Heb. 12:14).

Often, the divisiveness that happens at extended family dinner tables is not because an unbelieving family member decides to persecute a Christian. It's instead because a Christian decides to sort the wheat from the weeds right now, rather than waiting for Judgment Day (Matt. 13:29-30). Yes, the gospel exposes sin, but the gospel does so strategically, in order to point to Christ. Antagonizing unbelievers at a family dinner table because they think or feel like unbelievers isn't the way of Christ. Your presence should be one of peace and tranquility. The gospel you believe ought to be what disrupts. There's a big difference.

2. *Honor.* The scripture tells us to fear God, to obey the king, and to honor (notice this) everyone (1 Pet. 2:17). If your parents are high priests in the Church of Satan, they are still your parents. If cousin Betty V. does Jell-O shots in her car, just to take the edge off the cocaine, well, she still bears the imprint of the God you adore.

You cannot do the will of God by opposing the will of God. That is, you can't evangelize by dishonoring father and mother, or by disrespecting the image-bearers of God. Pray for God to show you the ways those in your life are worthy of honor, and teach your children to follow you in showing respect and gratitude.

3. *Humility.* Part of the reason some Christians have such difficulty with unbelieving or nominally believing extended family members is right at this point. The frustration often comes not because of how much Christians love their family members, but how much these Christians want to be right. The professional Left and Right cable TV and talk-radio pontificators may value the last word, but we can't. Jesus never seeks to prove He is right, and He was accused of being everything from a wino to a demoniac. He rejects Satan's temptation to force a visible vindication, waiting instead for God to vindicate Him at the empty tomb.

Satan wants to destroy you through his primal flaw, pride (1 Pet. 5:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:6). He doesn't care if that pride comes through looking around the family table and figuring out how much more money you make than your second cousin-in-law or whether it comes by your looking around the table and saying, "Thank you, Lord, that I am not like these publicans." The end result is the same (Prov. 29:23).

Unless you're in an exceptionally sanctified family, you will see failing marriages, parenting crises, and a thousand other shards of the curse. If your response is to puff up as you look at your own situation, there's a Satanist at your family gathering, and you're it.

4. *Maturity.* The scripture tells us that if we follow Jesus we'll follow the path He took: through temptation, to suffering, and ultimately to glory. Often we think these testings are big, monumental things, but they rarely are. More likely, testing will be through those seemingly little places of temptation—like whether you'll love the belching brother-in-law at the other end of the table who wants to talk about how the Cubans killed JFK and how to make \$100,000 a year selling herbal laxatives on the Internet.

Some of the tensions Christians face at holiday time have less to do with outside oppression than internal immaturity on the part of the Christians themselves.

I've had young men tell me they are treated like children when they go home to see their extended families. Sometimes that's because the extended family is particularly obstinate. But sometimes the extended family treats the young man like a child because that's how he acts the rest of the year. Don't live financially and emotionally dependent on your parents or in-laws, passively dithering in your decisions about your family's future, and then expect them to see you as the head of your household.

Be a man (if you are one). Make decisions (including decisions about where, and for how long, you'll spend the holidays). Teach and discipline your children. Your extended family might not like it at first, but they'll come to respect the fact that you're leaving and cleaving, taking responsi-

bility for that which has been entrusted to you.

5. *Perspective.* Remember that you'll give an account at the resurrection for every idle (that means seemingly tiny, insignificant, unmemorable) thought, word, and deed.

At the Judgment Seat of the Lord Christ, you'll be responsible for living out the gospel in every arena to which the Spirit has led you... including Aunt Flossie's dining room table.



How should pastors approach Mother's Day for couples unable to conceive?

Mother's Day is a particularly sensitive time in many congregations, and pastors and church leaders often don't even know it. This is true even in congregations that don't focus the entire service around the event as if it were a feast day on the church's liturgical calendar. Infertile women, and some husbands, still are often grieving in the shadows.

It is good and right to honor mothers. The Bible calls us to do so. Jesus does so with his own mother. We must recognize though, that many infertile women find this day almost unbearable. This is not because these women are (necessarily) bitter or covetous or envious. The day is simply a reminder of unfulfilled longings; longings that are good.

Some pastors, commendably, mention in their sermons and prayers on this day those who want to be mothers but have not had their prayers answered. Some recognize those who are mothers not to children, but to the rest of the congregation as they disciple spiritual daughters in the faith. This is more than a "shout-out" to those who don't have children. It is a call to the congregation to rejoice in those who "mother" the church with wisdom, and it's a call to the church to remember those who long desperately to hear "Mama" directed at them.

What if pastors and church leaders were to set aside a day to pray for children for the infertile?

In too many churches ministry to infertile couples is relegated to support groups that meet in the church basement during the week, under cover of darkness. Now it's true that infertile couples need each other. The time of prayer and counsel with people in similar circumstances can be helpful.

But this alone can contribute to the sense of isolation and even shame experienced by those hurting in this way. Moreover, if the only time one talks about infertility is in a room with those who are currently infertile, one is probably going to frame the situation in rather hopeless terms.

In fact, almost every congregation is filled with previously infertile people, including those who

were told by medical professionals that they would never have children! Most of those (most of us, I should say) who fit into that category don't really talk about it much, because they simply don't think of themselves in those terms. The baby or babies are here, and the pain of the infertility has subsided. Infertile couples need to see others who were once where they are, but who have been granted the blessing they seek.

What if, at the end of a service, the pastor called any person or couple who wanted prayer for children to come forward and then asked others in the congregation to gather around them and pray? Not every person grappling with infertility will do this publicly, and that's all right. But many will. And even those too embarrassed to come forward will be encouraged by a church willing to pray for those hurting this way. The pastor could pray for God's gift of children for these couples, either through biological procreation or through adoption, whichever the Lord should desire in each case.

Regardless of it's done, remember the infertile as the world around us celebrates motherhood. The Proverbs 31 woman needs our attention, but the 1 Samuel 1 woman does too.



How do I honor my in-laws who are overly involved in my young family's life?

The scripture says to honor father and mother. This is one of the Ten Commandments handed down on Mt. Sinai to Moses. It's one of those things that Jesus referred to when he said the religious leaders of his day were refusing to honor father and mother. They were not taking care of their parents, and they were guilty before God for that. The Apostle Paul talks about it, both negatively—sin as resulting in disobedience to parents (Rom. 1:30)—and positively—obedience to father and mother is the first command with a promise about the inheritance and entering into to the land and living that long life before God (Eph. 6:1-3).

So, righteousness before God includes the honoring of father and mother.

One of the problems some people have about understanding what the scripture means by this is some people assume “honor father and mother” means to do everything they say. This is true for children—the obedience of children to their parents in everything, apart from those things that contradict the law of God, the word of God. But the scripture talks about a maturing of people where they move from obedience, to honoring.

Honoring father and mother doesn't mean that your parents come in and superintend and supervise every aspect of your lives. As a matter of fact, it is impossible for you to take the sort of responsibility before God as a mother and as a father, leading your children and leading your family, if you are in reality just being driven along on autopilot by your parents. So, we need to first of all recognize that.

Then we need to say, “What is going on here in our situation?”

It could be that what is happening—and I’ve seen this a lot—is that you are just in the process of what the scripture calls leaving father and mother, cleaving to one’s spouse, and becoming one flesh. Sometimes we assume this leaving is an instantaneous act. I walk out of the house and that means it’s over. It is usually not that clean of a break. It is usually not that at the wedding ceremony, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” is the clean-break leaving of father and mother. Usually it is a process that takes a little while.

And sometimes we assume that it’s all on the part of the couple being married. They are the ones leaving. But there also is a sense in which the parents are giving that responsibility over. They are recognizing this is the formation of a new family that is taking place. So, it could be that your parents are just in this natural sense where they have been taking care of you all of your life. They have been watching out for you, and now they are trying to move to the place where they trust you to take care of yourselves and to be Mom and Dad, rather than to be their child.

If that’s the case, be patient with them. Be understanding and honest with them. Speak and say, “Mom and Dad, I appreciate your wisdom. I appreciate your counsel. You have to let me make my own mistakes here. I am going to make some mistakes.”

So, don’t put yourself up as if you are the parenting expert and your parents are not; especially if your parenting style differs from that of your parents, it is easy for your parents to hear that as a word of judgment—“Oh, well, you are saying that we were bad parents and you are good parents.” No, don’t do that. Just say, “You need to let me try to find my own way here and to be able to make some mistakes. I need your counsel, and I need your wisdom, but we need to do it in a different way, because it is hard for me to hear counsel from you when you do it this way.”

The time to have that conversation is not when you are frustrated and angry, when they come in and are trying to tell you how you really ought to be doing naptime, or how you ought to be doing feeding. It’s when you are in a good situation, you are having a good conversation, and you say, “Hey, Mom and Dad, can I talk to you? There is a way that you can really help me, because I have a difficult time when you give me advice this way. Could you maybe do it this way instead?” And I think most parents are going to respond well to that.

I would also ask you, how much money are you taking from them? Sometimes when I have young couples who say they have parents or in-laws who want to run everything in their lives, it is because that couple is financially dependent upon those parents or upon those in-laws. Now, there are situations where it is necessary in which you have people who are in a state of crisis and they need help from other family members.

But sometimes you have people who are kind of delaying the caring for themselves, because it is easy just to take a monthly check from Mom and Dad, who are quite willing to help. And in that case, often you have in-laws or parents who are saying we ought to be running everything, because

we don't really trust them to be able to take care of themselves. We are taking care of them financially, so we probably also ought to be taking care of them in terms of direction and wisdom.

I would say, how do we, if I'm financially dependent upon them, find a game plan to get financially independent of them, so that we are then able to demonstrate that we can lead and take care of our own household as the scripture tells us to do?

But above all, I would say do this in love. Be patient. It's probably a situation where your parents aren't trying to be bossy; they just don't know what else to do.



Is Russia a “pro-family values” nation?

I have close personal ties to Russia, because two of my sons are Russians, which means not only through the act of adoption have our sons become part of our family and our story, but we also became part of their family and part of their story. We consider ourselves Russians to some degree, because we have a connection with Russia and we love the Russian people. We love the people who gave life to our sons, and so we spend a lot of time in our family thinking about Russian heritage and Russian history.

It really makes my blood boil when I hear Vladimir Putin claiming to be pro-family values. An article from the *Washington Post* talks about the fact that Putin and the Russian government, the Kremlin, and the Russian orthodox church are saying that there have been policies pursued in the West—meaning America—that are anti-family values. They are toward the degradation of the family and toward tearing down God.

Of course, you and I both know that I have a strong concern for ethical Christian principles found in scripture—what the word of God reveals to be the case, including about the makeup of the family. I believe that sexuality is to be expressed only within marriage, and marriage is defined as the union of one man and one woman in a permanent one-flesh union for life. I believe that family stability is in the best interest of everybody, not just of the people who are in those families, but entire society and entire human flourishing.

That said, I have heard over the past couple of years many times, Putin and his regime seeking to lecture America and the rest of the world about family values.

I'm not buying it. I'm not buying a country to be pro-family values that has the sort of rampant abortion rate Russia has. The sort of country with orphanages filled with children, yet not allowing other countries to adopt. There is no real adoption culture happening in Russia. Nothing is being done, that I can see, to encourage an adoption culture within Russia. You have children who are languishing in orphanages, aging out of those orphanages, and then are left to fend for themselves, often in prostitution or substance abuse or even suicide.

Don't tell me that is pro-family values. And that is especially the case when you have someone who was operating as a KGB operative back during the Cold War, and now is using very authoritarian and bullying measures to lead.

Now, we as Christians should not take the stance that the enemy of our opponent is our friend. Just because someone stands up and says, "We think some things that you think are bad are bad too, so we are going to use the power of the state to try and run those people out of here," that is not a Christian ethic. The scripture does not give to us a KGB to seek to maintain biblical, Christian ethics. It gives to us the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That is where I think the Russian government right now is on the other side of what the Word of God teaches.

The Word of God tells us all people are created in the image of God. Scripture tells us that life is infinitely precious. Scripture tells us we ought to be working to support and to keep families together, and what do we have in Russia right now? We have a regime that is fundamentally and constantly seeking to hem in human rights, not only in Russia, but also across the world.

Remember, Russia and the Russians are the ones supporting, behind the scenes, what is happening in Syria—a regime that is gassing children. Don't tell me that is pro-family values. Don't tell me that is pro-traditional values.

You also have a regime that is using many aspects of the Russian Orthodox Church. Now I am not saying anything negative about my Eastern Orthodox friends, and I have many—and many very commendable Eastern Orthodox people, Eastern Orthodox churches, and Russian Orthodox people and Russian Orthodox churches. But, the Russian Orthodox Church has historically often lined itself up with the government. There have been some exceptions where you have some heroic figures in Russian Orthodox life, and I'm going to be the first to admit that if it weren't for some of those heroic Russian Orthodox people during the Cold War, we would have not had the sort of principle opposition to Stalin and to others in that cruel and godless regime. Nonetheless, the Russian Orthodox Church, at the institutional level, has often lined itself up with the government.

As a Baptist, and as a free church Christian, I am very nervous when any government stands up and starts using Christian terms evacuated of Christian content for political purposes. I think that is exactly what Putin's Russia is doing right now.

You can ask Russian Evangelicals what sort of a world they are living in, and it is a very difficult life in which often they are being harassed by people in their culture, both within the government and within the institutional church. That is not freedom. That is not traditional values. That is just an authoritarian state.

What we ought to be listening to is not what sort of rhetoric is coming from this ex-KGB operative in the Kremlin. I think what we ought to be looking for is the sort of society that honors the image of God. The sort of society that honors the family, and honors the family not just in talk, but also in a way that seeks to not only incentivise marriage and family, but also the protection of

children in the womb and in those orphanages. We also ought to be looking for the sort of society that respects and honors human rights. This means not propping up murderous regimes around the world, and not restricting the religious liberties of minority religions, including evangelicals within the regime.

I think that is what we ought to be looking for at a base-level start. Not just whether or not someone can spout off slogans from the Kremlin.

I think we can see with the 2014 Winter Olympics what we have happening here, and it is something that happens often. You have a government wanting to make itself look good in the eyes of the world, and it wants to try to find some reason to be seen as superior to the rest of the world. They are right now using this language of family values, attempting to say, “We are godly and the rest of the world is godless,” in ways that I think can be very cunningly able to deceive a lot of people. We shouldn’t listen to that. We should instead say, “Where are the results?”

And frankly, this is the sort of Constantinian temptation that we see over and over again in the history of the church; people who want to use the language of Christianity, but without any real concern for the content of Christianity to use as a political tool.

That is not what the gospel of Jesus Christ is about. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, the Apostle Paul tells us, is not a matter of talk of power.

I would say, on the question of “Is Russia pro-family values?” No. There are Russian people who are. There are some Russian families who are. There are some Russian churches who are, but the Russian government? No. I am skeptical of that. I think we need to pray for the day when the Russian people are free. They are free from Communist dictatorship; let’s pray they will be free from this sort of dictatorship as well.



Should my pre-teen child have a personal cell phone or computer?

I just don’t understand the trend among professing Christian families to give their pre-teen children cell phones and tablets and their equivalent devices, with unrestricted Internet access. It’s not as if we don’t have the data to know what happens when sexually-forming minds are exposed to pornography. And it’s not that we don’t know the kind of pull to temptation, especially among young males, that comes with the promise of sexual “fulfillment” with the illusion of anonymity. It’s not that we don’t know, moreover, the way that unsavory characters use the Internet to troll for naive children to exploit.

Why would you put your child in a situation with that kind of peril?

Given what we know about a) sexually developing adolescents and pre-adolescents, and b) the Internet itself, it is impossible to rank unrestricted access to the World Wide Web in a category with watching television or freely roaming the neighborhood. This is more like sending your adolescent male to spend the night in an adult movie theater because you trust him not to look up from his Bible, or allowing your daughter to grow marijuana in her room because she likes the foliage as decoration.

This is astounding, not primarily because it militates against the higher standards of Christian parenting, but because it militates against the natural ordering of human parenting itself.

Jesus, in describing the Fatherhood of God, told the crowd that no one, even being evil, would give his son a serpent when he asked for a fish (Matt. 7:10). Why not? It's because natural affection impels a father to seek to protect his child from something harmful. In this case, we see a culture, even among Christians sometimes, that's quite willing to give a child a serpent, as long as he really wants it, and we think he's trustworthy as a snake charmer.

Don't get me wrong. I think the digital revolution is largely a good thing, and I think children need to be raised up to use technology as a gift for dominion. But there's too much at stake to turn a child loose, with no boundaries, with a technology that could psychically cripple him or her (and his or her future family), for a lifetime and thereafter.



How do I explain the violence of the Easter story to my young children?

Every year parents and churches ponder how to communicate the Easter story to children, as something more than dyed eggs, candy and a bunny. The problem is, of course, that it's impossible to talk about the resurrection of Jesus without talking about death. And, in the case of Jesus, it's really hard to talk about death without talking about crucifixion.

Some churches resolve this tension by deeming the cross as being too violent for kids. They talk instead about Easter meaning that Jesus is our "forever friend." They say that Jesus "went away for a little while, and his friends were sad," but that He soon "came back to see them."

Most Christian churches, thankfully, still speak on Easter of the cross and the resurrection, but in many places this is simply because it's Easter. The story seems particularly strange to the children in such places because "Jesus is my forever friend" is the standard fare the rest of the year.

We need to understand that this temptation isn't just related to children, although we see it perhaps most explicitly there. The temptation that comes to all of us, in every era of the church, is to have Jesus, without seeing ourselves in the gore of His bloody cross and the glory of His empty grave. In the way that we speak of Him to our children, or to skeptics, or to seekers, we sometimes

believe we'll gain more of a hearing if we present Him as a teacher but not as a former corpse. It is too disturbing, we think to ourselves, too weird.

Peter thought that way too. Not the bold preacher of Pentecost, mind you, but the Peter of just a short time before that; the Peter of Caesarea Philippi. Peter certainly knew Jesus as friend, and He had just confessed that He was Messiah and Son of the living God. But when Jesus began to teach that He must "suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised," Peter was outraged (Matt. 16:21).

Peter was no preschooler, but he was disturbed. Matthew tells us that he began to rebuke Jesus. His cognitive development was not yet to the point where he could understand such things. This will never happen, Peter said. Peter loved Jesus. He wanted to be with Jesus. He wanted to stand with Jesus. He just didn't want the Jesus of the cross or the empty tomb. Jesus didn't call this shallow theology. He didn't call it inadequate teaching. He called it Satan (Matt. 16:23).

Our children need to hear the gospel. They need to see Jesus. That means they need to see both sides of the skull plate. That's graphic, sure. It's confusing, of course. And not just for kids. But it is the only message that saves. It's the only message that prepares one for salvation. It is, as Paul says, that which is "of first importance," the message he received from Jesus himself (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is the Gospel. That's the first word. If we cannot speak of that, we would be better off not speaking of Jesus at all, rather than presenting another Christ, one who meditates but does not mediate, who counsels but is not crucified, who is accessible but not triumphant over sin and death.

The apostle Paul told us the word of the cross would be folly to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18). He didn't warn us that it would sometimes also be folly to those who are publishing. No matter. It is still the power of God.

This Easter, preach the gospel...to the senior citizens, to the middle-aged, to the young adults, to the teenagers, to the seekers, to the hardened unbelievers, to the whole world. And, yes, preach the gospel to the preschoolers.

Christian Sexual Ethics



How should we explain same-sex marriage to our children?

After the 2013 Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage, Christian parents have wondered how they ought to explain the situation to their small children. I've faced questions from my children. So how does one teach the controversy about the definition and meaning of marriage, without exposing one's children to more than they can handle?

First of all, you should, I think, talk to your children about this. The Bible isn't nearly as antiseptic as Christians sometimes pretend it to be, and it certainly doesn't shirk back from addressing all the complexities of human life. If we are discipling our children, let's apply the scriptures to all of life. If we refuse to talk to our children about some issue that is clearly before them, our children will assume we are unequipped to speak to it, and they'll eventually search out a worldview that will.

This doesn't mean that we rattle our children with information they aren't developmentally ready to process. We already talk, for instance, about marriage itself, and we give age-appropriate answers to the "Where do babies come from?" query. The same is true here. There is no need to inform small children about all the sexual possibilities in graphic detail in order to get across that Jesus calls us to live as husbands and wives with fidelity and permanence and complementarity.

Some parents believe that teaching their children the controversies about same-sex marriage will promote homosexuality. Christians and non-Christians can agree that sexual orientation doesn't work that way. Moreover, the exact opposite is true. If you don't teach your children about a Christian way of viewing the challenges to a Christian sexual ethic, the ambient culture will fill in your silence with answers of its own.

You can tell your children that people in American culture disagree about what marriage is. You can explain to them what the Bible teaches, from Genesis to Jesus to the apostles, about a man and a woman becoming one flesh. You can explain that as Christians we believe this marital relationship is different than other relationships we have. You can then tell them that some people have relationships they want to be seen as marriages.

You can then explain that you love your neighbors who disagree with you on this. You agree that they ought to be free from mistreatment or harassment. But the church believes government can't define or redefine marriage, but can only recognize what God created and placed in creation. Explain why you think mothers and fathers are different, and why those differences are good. Find examples in your own family of how those differences work together for the common good of the household, and point to examples in Scripture of the same.

Don't ridicule or express hostility toward those who disagree. You might have gay or lesbian family members; be sure to express your love for them to your children, even as you say that you disagree about God's design for marriage. You probably have already had to do that with family members or friends who are divorced or cohabiting or some other situation that falls short of a Christian sexual ethic.

If your children see outrage in you, rather than a measured and Christlike biblical conviction, they eventually will classify your convictions on this in the same category as your clueless opinions about "kids these days and their loud music."

The issues at stake are more important than that. Marriage isn't ultimately about living arrangements or political structures, but about the gospel. When your children ask about the Supreme Court decision, be loving and winsome and honest and convictional and kind.



How should same-sex marriage change the church's witness?

The Supreme Court ruled on two monumental marriage cases, and the legal and cultural landscape changed in this country. The court voted to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act and remand the decision of the Ninth Circuit Court in the Proposition 8 case, holding that California's Proposition 8 defenders didn't have standing.

The Defense of Marriage Act decision used rather sweeping language about equal protection and human dignity as they apply to the recognition of same-sex unions. But what has changed for us, for our churches, and our witness to the gospel?

In one sense, nothing. Jesus of Nazareth is still alive. He is calling the cosmos toward His kingdom, and He will ultimately be Lord indeed. Regardless of what happens with marriage, the gospel doesn't need "family values" to flourish. In fact, it often thrives when it is in sharp contrast to the cultures around it. That's why the gospel rocketed out of the first century from places such as Ephesus and Philippi and Corinth and Rome, which were hardly Mayberry.

In another sense, though, the marginalization of conjugal marriage in American culture has profound implications for our gospel witness. First, marriage isn't incidental to gospel preaching.

There's a reason why persons don't split apart like amoebas. We all were conceived in the union between a man and a woman. Beyond the natural reality, the gospel tells us there's a cosmic mystery (Eph. 5:32).

God designed the one-flesh union of marriage as an embedded icon of the union between Christ and His church. Marriage and sexuality, among the most powerful pulls in human existence, are designed to train humanity to recognize, in the fullness of time, what it means for Jesus to be one

with His church, as a head with a body.

Same-sex marriage is on the march, even apart from these decisions, and is headed to your community, regardless of whether you are in a major city or in a rural hamlet in southwest Georgia or eastern Idaho. This is an opportunity for gospel witness.

For a long time in American culture, we've acted as though we could assume marriage. Even people from what were once called "broken homes" could watch stable marriages on television or movies. Boys and girls mostly assumed they had a wedding in their futures. As marriage is redefined, these assumptions will change. Let's not wring our hands about that.

This gives Christian churches the opportunity to do what Jesus called us to do with our marriages in the first place: to serve as a light in a dark place. Permanent, stable marriages with families with both a mother and a father may well make us seem freakish in twenty-first-century culture. But is there anything more "freakish" than a crucified cosmic ruler? Is there anything more "freakish" than a gospel that can forgive rebels like us and make us sons and daughters? Let's embrace the freakishness, and crucify our illusions of a moral majority.

That means we must repent of our pathetic marriage cultures within the church. For too long, we've refused to discipline a divorce culture that has ravaged our churches. For too long, we've quieted our voices on the biblical witness of the distinctive missions of fathers and mothers in favor of generic messages on "parenting." For too long, we've acted as though the officers of Christ's church were justices of the peace, marrying people who have no accountability to the church, and in many cases were forbidden by scripture to marry. Just because we don't have two brides or two grooms in front of us doesn't mean we've been holding to biblical marriage.

The dangerous winds of religious liberty suppression mean that our nominal Bible Belt marrying parson ways are over. Good riddance. This means we have the opportunity, by God's grace, to take marriage as seriously as the gospel does, in a way that prompts the culture around us to ask why.

The increased attention to the question of marriage also gives us the opportunity to love our gay and lesbian neighbors as Jesus does.

Some will capitulate on a Christian sexual ethic. There are always those professional "dissidents" who make a living espousing mainline Protestant shibboleths to an evangelical market. But the church will stand, and that means the gospel Jesus has handed down through the millennia. As we stand with conviction, we don't look at our gay and lesbian neighbors as our enemies. They are not.

The gay and lesbian people in your community aren't part of some global "gay agenda" conspiracy. They aren't super villains in a cartoon. They are, like all of us, seeking a way that seems right to them. If we believe marriage is as resilient as Jesus says it is (Mk. 10:6-9), it cannot be eradicated by a vote of justices or a vote of a state legislature. Some will be disappointed by what they thought would answer their quest for meaning. Will our churches be ready to answer?

This also means we must change the way we preach.

Those with same-sex attractions, who follow Christ, will be walking away from what their families and friends want for them: wedding cake and married life and the American Dream. Following Jesus will mean taking up a cross and following a hard, narrow way. It always does.

If we're going to preach that sort of gospel, we must make it clear that this cross-bearing, self-denial isn't just for homosexually-tempted Christians. It is for all of us, because that's what the gospel is. If your church has been preaching the American Dream, with eternal life at the end and Jesus as the means you use to get all that, you don't have a gospel that can reach your gay and lesbian neighbors—or anyone else for that matter.

Same-sex marriage is coming to your community. This is no time for fear or outrage or politicizing. It's a time for forgiven sinners, like us, to do what the people of Christ have always done. It's time for us to point beyond our family values and our culture wars to the cross of Christ as we say: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." And that's good news.



Should a Christian provide professional services for a same-sex wedding?

Photographing a same-sex wedding is different from photographing some other event, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the clients' sexual or marital context. The fact that it is a wedding means there's a different moral question for the photographer.

The role as a wedding photographer is also different from an officiating minister, a member of the wedding party, or even an invited guest. All of those people are part of the wedding itself, the assembled witnesses who affirm the lawfulness of the union and pledge to hold the couple accountable for their vows.

If, say, a photojournalist for a news service was there to report on the first same-sex marriage in the state, there would be no issue for his or her conscience. A wedding photographer, though, is in a third place between participant and neutral observer.

A same-sex wedding is different, I think, from other problematic heterosexual marriages, for a couple of reasons.

First, while a biblical view of marriage would see that such people (fornicators, believers to unbelievers, unlawfully divorced, etc.) should not get married, and that the church has no authority to marry them, we also would affirm that such people, when married, actually are married. A pastor who joins a believer to an unbeliever bears an awful responsibility for doing something wrong, but

the end result is an actual marriage.

The same-sex marriage differs not in terms of morality, but in terms of reality. It is not that homosexuality is some sort of wholly different or unforgivable sexual sin. It's that the historic Christian view of marriage means that without sexual complementarity there is no marriage at all.

More than that, the situation of a Christian photographer working a same-sex wedding takes place at a moment of concerted cultural revisionism on the question of marriage as conjugal union. A same-sex wedding service right now is not merely personal, but, whether the couple intends this or not, political, with all sorts of corresponding questions.

I would say that the decisions a Christian photographer will make, generally, as a wedding photographer will correspond often with the Corinthian dilemma of whether to eat meat that had been offered to idols (1 Cor. 8).

The Apostle Paul says, first of all, that the idols don't represent real gods (1 Cor. 8:4), in the same way that you would argue that a wedding without a bride or a groom isn't really a marriage. If something's put before you, the apostle writes, eat it to the glory of God, no questions asked.

But, the apostle says, if the food is advertised as sacrificed to idols, abstain from it for the sake of the consciences of those around you (1 Cor. 8:7-9). This is the difference between investigating a doughnut shop owner's buying habits before eating there and stopping in for doughnuts when the sign out front flashes: "Eat here and support our owner's cocaine and prostitute habit."

As a wedding photographer you need not investigate whether the wedding you are photographing is Christ-honoring. But when there is an obvious deviation from the biblical reality, sacrifice the business for conscience, your own and the ones of those in your orbit who would be confused.

That said, don't be mean.

The couple asking you to do this wedding isn't your enemy (Eph. 6:12). They are made in the image of God and are loved by Him, and so should be loved by us. As orthodox Christians we don't believe this leads to the happiness they're looking for, but we must stand with kindness as well as with conviction.

Tell the couple that you wish them well, but that you have beliefs about marriage that won't allow your conscience to participate in this way. Thank them for asking you but recommend a photographer who can click away with a clear conscience.



Why are so many men hooked on Internet porn and video games?

You know the guy I'm talking about. He spends hours into the night playing video games and surfing for pornography. He fears he's a loser. And he has no idea just how much of a loser he is. For some time now, studies have shown us that porn and gaming can become compulsive and addicting. What we too often don't recognize, though, is why.

In the book, *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It* (Amazon Digital Services, 2012), psychologists Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan say we may lose an entire generation of men to pornography and video gaming addictions. Their concern isn't about morality, but instead about the nature of these addictions in reshaping the pattern of desires necessary for community.

If you're addicted to sugar or tequila or heroin you want more and more of that substance. But porn and video games both are built on novelty, on the quest for newer and different experiences. That's why you rarely find a man addicted to a single pornographic image. He's entrapped in an ever-expanding kaleidoscope.

There's a key difference between porn and gaming. Pornography can't be consumed in moderation because it is, by definition, immoral. A video game can be a harmless diversion along the lines of a low-stakes athletic competition. But the compulsive form of gaming shares a key element with porn: both are meant to simulate something, something for which men long.

Pornography promises orgasm without intimacy. Video warfare promises adrenaline without danger. The arousal that makes these so attractive is ultimately spiritual to the core.

Satan isn't a creator but a plagiarist. His power is parasitic, latching on to good impulses and directing them toward his own purpose. God intends a man to feel the wildness of sexuality in the self-giving union with his wife. And a man is meant to, when necessary, fight for his family, his people, for the weak and vulnerable who are being oppressed.

The drive to the ecstasy of just love and to the valor of just war are gospel matters. The sexual union pictures the cosmic mystery of the union of Christ and His church. The call to fight is grounded in a God who protects His people, a Shepherd Christ who grabs His sheep from the jaws of the wolves.

When these drives are directed toward the illusion of ever-expanding novelty, they kill joy. The search for a mate is good, but blessedness isn't in the parade of novelty before Adam. It is in finding the one who is fitted for him, and living with her in the mission of cultivating the next generation. When necessary, it is right to fight.

But God's warfare isn't forever novel. It ends in a supper, and in a perpetual peace.

Moreover, these addictions foster the seemingly opposite vices of passivity and hyper-aggression. The porn addict becomes a lecherous loser, with the one-flesh union supplanted by masturbatory isolation. The video game addict becomes a pugilistic coward, with other-protecting courage supplanted by aggression with no chance of losing one's life. In both cases, one seeks the sensation of being a real lover or a real fighter, but venting one's reproductive or adrenal glands over pixilated images, not flesh and blood for which one is responsible.

Zimbardo and Duncan are right, this is a generation mired in fake love and fake war, and that is dangerous. A man who learns to be a lover through porn will simultaneously love everyone and no one. A man obsessed with violent gaming can learn to fight everyone and no one.

The answer to both addictions is to fight arousal with arousal. Set forth the gospel vision of a Christ who loves His bride and who fights to save her. And then let's train our young men to follow Christ by learning to love a real woman, sometimes by fighting his own desires and the spirit beings who would eat him up. Let's teach our men to make love, and to make war...for real.



When dating, how much should I know about my future spouse's sexual history?

I wrote about this issue several years ago, because I found myself dealing with it over and over again in counseling people in dating relationships and also in premarital counseling. There are several things I think as Christians we ought to consider when it comes to the issue of knowing your future spouse's sexual history.

The first thing is, I really don't think it's a good idea, at the very beginning of a relationship, for a young man to say, "OK, let's put all our cards on the table here and talk about sexual history." "What's your sexual history?" "What's my sexual history?" I think these conversations early on will drive the relationship to a kind of emotional vulnerability and emotional intimacy very quickly.

I think the kinds of questions in the initial phase of courtship and dating ought to be, "Is this the sort of person who is qualified to be married to me?" "Is this a godly person?" "Is this someone that I believe I would like to be married to?" I think it's appropriate, as you move toward considering marriage, to start talking about the types of things you ought to know about one another.

One of the things a young man ought to be looking for in a young woman—and a young woman ought to be looking for in a young man—is whether or not this issue of sexual history is dealt with in a kind of casual disregard. The question of how much you should know about your future spouse's sexual history isn't casual at all. The contemporary way that many people see sex is simply as a biological function of body parts rubbing together. That is not the way the scripture sees sexual intercourse. As a matter of fact, in I Corinthians 6, the Apostle Paul makes the case that sexual

immorality is different in some ways from any other sin, because with sexual immorality it is a sin against one's own body. Later Paul talks about, in the marriage union, how the wife's body belongs to her husband and the husband's body belongs to his wife. There is a one-flesh union that is taking place.

So her sexual history is his sexual history if they marry, and vice versa. This isn't something you can just cordon off and say it's none of your business. The couple is going to be coming together in a one-flesh union. Sexual encounters aren't ever casual in a Christian understanding of reality, because they form a spiritual union. That's why Paul, again in I Corinthians 6, says, "Don't you know that when you join yourself to a prostitute, you have become one flesh with her?" There is a spiritual union that is taking place in a deeply, deeply mysterious sort of way. So this isn't a casual issue at all.

What you want to find out is whether or not this person sees his or her sexual past as just being normal, and something to be disregarded; that is a warning sign. Someone who would say, "Yeah, I had these wild times, I had these relationships, but it's really not that big of a deal." That's a big problem. There are spiritual consequences. There are also psychological consequences. There are sexual scripts being formed that he would need to know about as a potential husband, or that she would need to know about as a potential wife. You want to see whether or not that person is saying this is no big deal.

You also want to see if your future spouse is self-justifying in any sort of way. I think probably one of the most alarming things that one could find is someone who is claiming technical virginity. I had someone not long ago talk to me about someone she had been dating, whose response was always that he had been sexually pure. But later, it came out in a deeper conversation there were all sorts of sexual acts just short of intercourse that had taken place in his life he disregarded because he saw those as being not equivalent to sex, so they weren't worth mentioning.

If you have someone who is able to do this and evade his or her conscience in that way, then this is somebody who, in the fullness of time, is going to be able easily to do the same thing when it comes to an adulterous relationship. "This isn't really sex; it's something else." Or, "This isn't really an affair; it's something else." That's a warning sign that you ought to really look out for in the conversation of sexual history.

The other problem is, sometimes people have remained sexually pure, and they believe that means they ought to only marry someone who has also remained sexually pure. I even had a woman, when I wrote an article about this several years ago, who was very upset and wrote to me asking, "What's the point in my keeping myself sexually pure, if I'm going to marry a man who hasn't?" My response was that the point is obedience to God! The point is fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If what you think is that your sexual purity means God is going to reward you with someone who has also remained sexually pure, that's just another prosperity gospel. That's "name it-claim it," health and wealth, false, heretical Christianity. You are not owed anything. Your obedience does not obligate God in any way to you.

To a couple moving forward in evaluating whether or not they are to be married, when it comes to the question of sexual history, I would say that they are not looking for perfection. They are also not looking for dismissal or casual disregard for past sins.

What they should be looking for is honesty, transparency, and, where needed, repentance. Is this someone with a conscience that knows what it is like to repent? And so that means showing mercy. That also means having a high view of God's justice. But also a high view of God's grace and recognizing that no matter what is happening in any marriage there is always some aspect of brokenness in that marriage. The question is knowing where that brokenness is and how to proceed forward.

I do think the question of sexual history is important, but I would be very careful about how and when to bring this up. I think couples should be very careful about what exactly it is they are looking for. Remember that what you are looking for is someone who understands what the gospel is.



Is unhappiness in marriage a valid reason for divorce?

Divorce isn't about you, and it's not just about your marriage. Divorce is the repudiation of a covenant. It doesn't start anything over again. It instead defaces the icon God has embedded in the creation of the union between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:22-31).

I do believe there are exceptions to Jesus' prohibition against divorce: namely unrepentant sexual immorality or abandonment by a gospel-repudiating spouse. If neither of these is present, the couple does not have reason to divorce.

I would plead with an unhappy couple to reconsider divorce. In some cases pastors and Christian counselors give unbiblical advice on the issue of divorce. With "Christian" pastors and counselors like these, who needs demons? A couple seeking to end their marriage must understand that when they give an account before the Judgment Seat of Christ, these "counselors" will not be present, and their cowardly justifications for sin will ring quite hollow.

Does God want you to be miserable? No. And that's why God has designed marriage as a lifelong covenant signaling the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the long term, God wants you to be deliriously happy. But by long term, I mean the next trillion years, and beyond. In the short term, one often must bear difficulty and, yes, even misery. Remaining faithful to a wife you wish you hadn't married might seem miserable to you, but taking up a cross and following Jesus is "miserable" in the short term. That's why the book of Hebrews presents the life of faith in terms of not receiving what was promised (Heb. 11:39), but seeing it and embracing it from afar.



Should a Christian photographer take racy photos for a married couple?

It obviously is not wrong for a husband to view his wife in the sorts of situations that a photographer is in while taking racy photos for a married couple. That is not the problem. The problem is that the photographer is the one taking the photos, so he has to be involved in seeing someone else's wife in a situation that is meant to appeal to sexual desire. I think the Bible is really clear about the way we are to relate to others as it relates to sexual desires.

Think about for instance Romans 13:11, "And do this knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the day, not in revelry or drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust."

Now there are some things that people can say, "I don't have a particular temptation or vulnerability there." Someone may say, "I'm able to work in this place, because I don't have a vulnerability toward drunkenness, and I'm working at a place that's right next to a bar," or any number of other situations. But the draw toward the sexual union is present in everyone. This is at the root and the core of every single person. So no one can say, "I don't struggle with lust." The question is "*How* do I grapple with lust?" "What in my life are the ways that I put protections around myself when it comes to lust?"

It is inconceivable to me that someone would be able to take photographs of a woman, not his wife, very scantily clad. I find it impossible to see how a photographer would be able to navigate through taking boudoir photography without being at least at a point of temptation when it comes to lust, or as a stumbling block to other people when it comes to lust. He may be able to say, "I don't even see these things. I put a blindfold over my eyes and take these pictures." If he tells you that, I think he is lying. Even if he is not, this is a bad witness and testimony to the rest of the community.

I would say to him as his pastor, this is not a situation that a Christian ought to be in. I think where you are going to have complexity is not going to be in terms of the morality of his doing this. It is going to be where he is in his Christian life.

It could be that this is a brand new believer who hasn't been disciplined yet, and he doesn't know what the scripture teaches. Honestly I've faced many situations in discipling new believers where I overestimated what they knew about the word of God. What that takes is your coming in and discipling him, and showing him what this means and what the Lordship of Christ means in terms of grappling with his own sexual propriety toward other people. Or it may be somebody who has been in Christ for a long time, who has every reason to know what this means for his Christian life.

I would handle those two situations very differently.

It doesn't mean that I would say in either case this is OK. This I do not think is OK. I would speak more gently, and I would have more patience with the new believer, but also working toward the goal of getting him out of this totally.



We haven't consummated our marriage after 8 months. Now what?

A pastor contacted me asking for advice on what to do about a married couple in his church that has not consummated their marriage after eight months. The issue is with the husband, and not the wife. He says he finds sex to be “gross.” He does not have any medical issues, he is not attracted to men at all, and he loves his wife. The pastor wants to know if this is a church discipline issue, or something he should just pray about and move on from.

It seems that I am finding more and more young couples having sexual difficulties. A lot of times what people tend to think about are older couples as having sexual problems, whether medical problems, or they've been married a long time and the romantic energy is lagging in the marriage. But I am finding this situation with young couples.

The situation the pastor is talking about here is a crisis. Eight months without any intimacy within this marriage for a newlywed couple is a really significant thing. It is significant biblically since marriage, biblically, is made up of a vow—a commitment that is being made before God and before the rest of the community—and also consummation, that one-flesh union. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). So, an unconsummated marriage is something that throughout the history of the church has been recognized as no marriage at all, especially where there is a refusal to consummate the marriage. So this is a serious matter.

What I would say to this pastor is that there are several things I would keep in mind. The husband said there is no medical issue; it has already been looked at. I would make sure that's actually been examined. Make sure as you are counseling that the husband has a doctor weighing in on this, and he's not just assuming there is nothing wrong. You've already investigated the sexual orientation issue. It might be worth talking through one-on-one with him, without her there, to see whether or not it is an issue.

There are a couple of other possibilities that might be happening. One of them is pornography. And by that I don't mean that pornography generally leads to this, but it can if you have someone who has been exposed to pornography for a long time, especially prior to that person being shaped and formed sexually during puberty. So you may have somebody who has been exposed to porn

since he was nine, ten years old, and he is unable to think of a real-life woman in a way that causes the sort of response to her that God initiated and wired within us. It also may be that somehow he has been involved in porn for so long that there is a sense of shame he is attaching to sex. Maybe there is a sort of guilt he is attaching to sex, and being in the presence of her is similar to what the Bible says is the result of the fall; that the man and the woman were naked and they were ashamed before each other. It's creating a rift between her and him. I would take him one-on-one and say, "Tell me about what's happening in your past with porn."

Another possibility is that there is some sort of trauma that has happened in his life. It could be this is someone who was sexually abused. It could be there was some type of psychological wound he experienced. Spend some time talking to him. And I think in this case, after eight months, it's worth bringing in professional help with a professional counselor who can come in and help work him through this, maybe even before you put the two of them together in the conversation. Work him through this to say, "Is there some sort of trauma that is going on?"

Now, if this is simply someone saying he doesn't want to have sex with his wife, and is refusing to carry out his responsibilities to love and care for his wife, including the area of sexual intimacy, then I think that would constitute an abandonment of her. This would mean that the leaders of the church should come in and deal with it. My suspicion here, just based on the general information given to me, isn't that.

My suspicion is that there is some sort of trauma going on in his life, and as a pastor, you need to help him with that and provide whatever help you can give to him.

For the wife, it sounds to me, again based on the very little information I have, that she wants to fight this through; she wants to be there with her husband and work through this. She has stayed with him for eight months. So, give her the resources she is going to need. This includes keeping her from thinking somehow she is to blame. I mean, of course she is going to think that this is very unusual, and it is an unusual situation to be married eight months and have no sexual relationship with one another. She is going to feel as though she is somehow unwanted or unattractive, or maybe even freakish. That's not the case. This is not her problem, I am willing to say right here. This is something that is going on in his life. So help her to see this, and give the ministry to her that she is going to need as you work through this situation.

Find out what the problem is. If it's a medical, hormonal issue, well, that can be fixed. If it's a psychological, trauma issue, well then you need to have people who are able to help him work through this. If it's a sense of attaching shame and guilt to sex, then you need to help him work through that as well.

Sometimes you have Christians who have been diligent watching their hearts when it comes to sexuality in an unbiblical form. They are avoiding, as the scripture says, "flee fornication," but they don't cultivate that sense of the goodness of sexuality and the healthiness of sexuality, so they have some difficulties. It doesn't cause eight months of not being able to consummate a marriage. So there is probably something else going on here. But help him to work through, as you are moving

forward, that sexuality is a good thing; a good gift that God has given to us. And just help them to fight through this.

I do think it is right of this pastor to be concerned about this situation. This is a crisis in the marriage, because sexuality isn't something incidental to the marriage. That one-flesh union, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, and physically is really important in a marriage.

Life Issues



Should Christians adopt embryos?

Evangelical Christians, it seems, are adopting embryos at an increasing rate, and the secular media are noticing the trend. In 2012, religion journalist Krista Kapralos wrote about the theological and missional underpinnings of born-again believers giving birth to “unused embryos.”

I once received some kickback from someone who opposed any talk of so-called “snowflake adoption,” and objected to such an adoption happening in his extended family.

How, he wondered, could I support this kind of adoption when I am opposed (and I am, strongly) to In Vitro Fertilization, donor assisted reproduction, and other technologies that violate the one-flesh union and the relationship between love and procreation. The same thing, he argued, is going on here with a donor embryo being implanted in an adopting mother’s womb.

First of all, there is no such thing as a “donor embryo.”

Someone can donate sperm or ovum or even a heart or a liver, but no one can “donate” an “embryo.” No one can “own” an “embryo.” An “embryo” isn’t a thing; he or she is a “who.” Our Lord Jesus is the pinnacle of the image of God (Heb. 1:1-3). He was an “embryo” (Luke 1:42-43). The “embryonic” John responded to our Lord’s “embryonic” presence in precisely the same way he responded to His adult presence on the banks of the Jordan River.

These so-called “snowflakes” are brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus and are stored in cryogenic containers in fertility clinics as the “extras” of IVF projects. They already exist, and they already exist as persons created in the image of God.

And there are Christians called to adopt them, to bring them to birth through pregnancy, and to raise them in love. To be sure, the numbers of children who can be adopted in this way are a microscopic percentage of the whole. And the number even of those who can be safely brought to birth is even smaller.

Isn’t this simply an embrace of the kind of Brave New World technology we elsewhere lament?

No.

Adopting parents are not complicit in the “production” (I shudder to use such a horrible word in

reference to a human creature) of these children. Again, the children are already conceived. The adopting parents are no more endorsing the technologies involved than parents adopting from an unwed mother are endorsing fornication or adultery.

Embryo adoption also doesn't carry with it the violence to the one-flesh union that comes with surrogacy or sperm donation, in which one spouse's genetic material is joined with a stranger's.

Embryo adoption would be problematic if the adoptions themselves became a further commodity in the buying and selling transactions of the reproductive technology business or if these adoptions were a widespread incentive for couples to justify the decision to "create" and freeze additional embryos. This is not presently the case, though, and doesn't appear likely to become so anytime soon.

But, most importantly, these aren't "unused embryos" as though they were things or tools. These are image-bearing persons who are endowed by their Creator, not by their "usefulness," with certain inalienable rights. Opening our hearts, and our homes, and sometimes our wombs, to the least of these is a Christ-like thing to do.

"Evangelicals seek a future for thousands of frozen embryos," religionnews.com, September 10, 2012



How should couples who use fertility treatments treat the surplus frozen embryos in the process?

Once In Vitro Fertilization has been done, the issues are simple, even if the consequences are complex.

In a Christian vision of reality there is no such thing as an "almost person," which is what we think with the abstraction of "fertilized embryos." Someone is either a human person, and therefore my neighbor, or not. You do not have "frozen embryos." You have children, frozen in this cruelly clinical world of suspended animation.

It is one thing to decide you can't afford to have children, before you conceive children, just as it is one thing to decide you can't afford to marry, before you marry. You're married though, and you've conceived children. You have an obligation to them. The one who does not care for his own household is, the Apostle Paul says, "worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

This doesn't mean your game plan is easy. There's a cross to take up here. The path from frozen storage to birth is difficult, whether through bearing those children or making an adoption plan for them into loving families. But these are not things; these are persons, worthy of love and respect and sacrifice.

I'd advise you to meet with some respected spiritual advisers, to look at your situation and come up with a plan for taking responsibility for your children. The first step is to start thinking of them

that way, not as your “embryos” or a project to be managed, but as your children, your neighbors, and the “least of these,” who bear the image of our Lord Jesus.

Your conscience might seem to be a nuisance to you; it does to all of us sometimes. But a nagging conscience can be a sign of grace. It might be that what you are hearing is a happy foretaste of obedience to Christ, as you hear his voice saying, “I was frozen and you remembered me.”



How should your church approach Sanctity of Human Life Sunday?

Many denominations observe a special day as related to Sanctity of Human Life. Even if your church calendar or denominational calendar doesn't recognize it, January is a time when many people in this country are thinking about the issue of abortion and the issue of Sanctity of Human Life, because it is the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. I think it is a good time for pastors to highlight and seek to shape the consciences of their congregations about what Sanctity of Human Life Day means.

I hate that we even need a Sanctity of Human Life Day. It is not because I hate speaking about Sanctity of Human Life, and it is not because I think we ought not to address the issue. I just hate the fact that we even have to say it. To have to say that we shouldn't kill our children is such a sad thing. We don't need to have “Gravity is Real” Sunday because we all recognize it and know it. I pray for the day when we no longer have to have a Sanctity of Human Life Day, because it is taken for granted.

But we are not there yet. And we are a long way from there, which means we need to highlight the fact that every human life is created in the image of God, and every human life matters.

There are a couple of things I would advise when it comes to Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.

One of those things is to make sure you are presenting God's perspective of human life, which is to say God honors and values all human life, not on the basis of its usefulness. I think one of the problems is we assume the issues for most people have to do with whether or not a fetus, to use the depersonalizing language so often used, or an embryo is a person. And so we spend a lot of time arguing that this unborn child is in fact a person. That is necessary, and we need to do that. It is a biological fact, a scientific fact, and a theological fact. John the Baptist leaps in the womb of his mother when he encounters his Lord, both of them in utero; both of them embryos or fetuses, to use that language. And yet, this was John the Baptist. This wasn't an “it.” It was a he. And this was the Lord. This was the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the issue for most people—most women going into the abortion clinic, and most men pressuring women into an abortion clinic—is not that they are ignorant of the personhood of this child. The issue is they believe somehow that in their situations and in their circumstances, there

is something better than life for this child. And I think what we need to do on Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, and throughout the rest of the year, is to highlight the fact that God sees, God knows, and God values and loves this life regardless of whether or not this person is seen to be useful.

There is something intrinsically valuable about every human life. I think that needs to be made clear regardless of whether this human life has Down syndrome or spina bifida, or whether this person is born in difficult economic circumstances. God values human life because human life is in the image of God.

I think we also need to speak very clearly about the fact that there is judgment, and there is an accountability that is going to be given. One of the most hair-raising things I have ever read in recent years was a woman who was working in an abortion clinic talking about the Catholic and Southern Baptist young women coming into the clinic to have abortions. The Roman Catholic women were saying, “I know this is wrong, but I am going to go to confession.” The Southern Baptist women were saying, “I know this is wrong, but ‘once saved, always saved.’” What I hear in those voices is, “Let’s sin all the more that grace may abound.” That is a chilling thing to hear. That is a false gospel. It is a different gospel from the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be very clear about the justice of God; that he hears, as the scripture says, the cries of the fatherless. But we can’t stop there.

We must address abortion as an issue of justice, not only in terms of the person standing before the judgment seat of Christ, but also in terms of public justice. There is a responsibility for the government to stand up for the lives of those who are being persecuted, those whose lives are being done away with. It’s a necessity for the culture to stand up for those lives being depersonalized and dehumanized.

But we also need to, in the midst of all of that, speak clearly about the gospel and about the fact that the blood of Christ reconciles people, guilty people, to God; that there is no sin that is outside the reach of the merciful blood of Jesus Christ.

Every time the issue of abortion is addressed—and for those of you who are pastors or ministers in other ways, you should be addressing abortion often—you need to address it not simply as some external cultural issue, but as something that affects your congregation and the people in your pews. Based upon the demographic numbers that we have, there are women in your congregation right now who have aborted. Their consciences are speaking to them about this. And the power that Satan has over the women who have aborted and the men who have paid for abortions or pressured women into abortions is really twofold.

On the one hand, Satan has the power of deception—“This isn’t really wrong,” or “No one will ever know.” But then the other aspect of his power is that of accusation—“I know who you are, and I know what you have done.” You’ve got to address both aspects, speaking clearly that God is on the side of the vulnerable, and God loves unborn children. God will hold accountable those who take the lives of the unborn.

On the other hand, you must talk about the fact that in the cross of Jesus Christ, the justice and

mercy of God have met. The message you are giving is to say to that woman who has had the abortion or that man who has paid for the abortion, if he or she throws himself or herself upon Jesus Christ in faith and in repentance, that person is so hidden in the righteousness of Jesus Christ that when God sees him, he does not see that man who paid for the abortion. When God sees her, he does not see the woman who had the abortion. He sees instead, hidden in Christ, this is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased.

You take away the sting of that accusation, not by saying the abortion was OK—It wasn't, and those consciences know it wasn't—but by saying if you are in Christ, you have already been through the judgment of God, and there is therefore now no condemnation for you. You need to speak to those consciences, redemptively and with a gospel focus.

Also speak to the people in your congregation who are facing a pregnancy that seems like a crisis.

There are going to be women and men in your congregation who, if they are not facing it right now, they will be facing it later on. Give them concrete steps of what to do. It may be that you stand up and say, "There are some of you who are going to find yourselves pregnant and you are not going to know what to do." You want to make it very clear, we as a congregation are not going to be shocked. We are not going to say, "Oh my goodness! Can you believe this unwed person? She must have had sex!"

No, you are not going to be shocked, you are not going to be horrified. You are going to minister to her and you are going to find a way for her to keep her baby and to live with and to love that baby. This means you are going to be the body of Christ to her, or if she does not want to raise the baby, you are going to go alongside her to help her to make an adoption plan for her baby. Give the choices she has in front of her and available to her through your congregation in a way that she or he can imaginatively put themselves in that situation to know what it would look like in your church.

I think we speak at multiple levels when we speak to the issue of abortion. We are shaping consciences to know when you are voting and when you are handing the sword, as the scripture says we're doing as we're voting, to Caesar to use it. If you are handing the sword to people who are going to use it against innocent children, you are wrong. You are going to be held accountable for that. We are speaking to those who in their minds and in their hearts see children as a problem, as a burden to be eliminated. That is not God's perspective on this. We are also speaking to those whose hearts are deeply burdened with guilty consciences, and saying there is a gospel that covers over the conscience and over every sin, including this sin they think is somehow unforgiveable. It's not, because the blood of Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

I think those are the things that are essential for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, and frankly for any Sunday.



As Christians how do we reconcile pro-life and capital punishment?

When Christians talk about being pro-life, sometimes people will say, “How can you be pro-life and also be for capital punishment?”

Now, let me say at the outset, not all Christians are for capital punishment. There are many Christians who are opposed to the death penalty for various reasons. Some of them hold to what Cardinal Bernardin used to call a “seamless web” from the “consistent ethic of life.” The Catholic bishops in this country would hold to the position that there should be no death penalty and no abortion.

I do believe the death penalty is sometimes warranted. I don’t think capital punishment is something we ought to be celebrating with bloodlust, but I do think it is a different situation than the abortion of an unborn child, and here’s why: All of us who are Christians have to agree that the Bible, on the one hand, says you shall not kill, literally you shall not murder, in the Ten Commandments that God has given. And the Bible also clearly reveals in some places that at least in some situations there is capital punishment.

Now, some people will come in and say, “Well, yes, but that’s the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law has been fulfilled in its civil code in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those things are no longer binding on the church.” And that is exactly right. But I’m not talking about the Mosaic code.

I am talking about what God has given in Genesis 9, for instance. This is a covenant with humanity generally, not just with the covenant people of Israel, and is part of a broader covenant here with the entire creation. God says this in Genesis 9:5, “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” That is given to all of humanity. In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul talks about the fact that governing authorities bear the sword. I think this is clearly language talking about the lethal power of the state that bears the sword only against evildoers. Evildoers face the sword, not the innocent. God requires a reckoning for the lives of the innocent.

So here is what I think we ought to keep in mind when it comes to the issue of capital punishment and the death penalty: The state-carried-out killing of an individual who is responsible and guilty and rightly convicted is different from the snuffing out of the life of an innocent human being, regardless of how that is done. These are two different things.

Capital punishment is not to be a vigilante act of one person or group of people in a lawless way, carrying out vengeance; scripture rules out vengeance. But the state is given a special responsibility by God following through careful procedures to determine guilt and to then carry out that execution. I think what happens with this type of punishment—and we can agree to disagree on whether or not capital punishment is something we ought to be carrying out right now in our context—is

not that life is being cheapened. It is demonstrating that life is to be seen with dignity. The killing of an image bearer of God (Genesis 9) is something that brings with it catastrophic consequences. That's one of the reasons why I would never favor capital punishment for marijuana possession. I would never favor capital punishment for people who violate a "three strikes and you're out" sort of law. It is only for those who are shedding innocent human blood.

The state bears a special responsibility to make sure that those who are executed are in fact guilty. Now, there are some people who oppose capital punishment, not because they oppose capital punishment theoretically, but because they oppose the way that capital punishment has been carried out in some states where the innocent are too often being executed or where there's a racial bias. Those are different conversations. I think we need to make sure when capital punishment is carried out it is of the guilty, it is just, it is fair, and it is rightly maintaining the fact that the shedding of human life is a serious question.

That's a very different question than the wanton killing of innocent human beings, whether in the womb or out.

Politics



How can a Christian honor a political leader whose policies they oppose?

I am always amazed by those Christians who will dispute the command to honor those in authority, arguing that “kings” in our system are the people, and therefore we’re called to honor the Constitution, but not elected officials.

The scripture doesn’t command honor simply for the ultimate authority (which is, of course, ultimately God). Humanly speaking, the ultimate political authority in the New Testament context was the Emperor. And yet, the Apostle Peter specifically calls the people of Christ not only to show submission to the emperor “as supreme,” but also to “governors” (1 Pet. 2:13-14). The Apostle Paul calls on the churches to pray and to show thanksgiving for “kings” (plural) and for “all who are in high positions” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Paul imitated this when he showed due respect to the governor Felix, referring to him with the honorific title “his Excellency, the governor” (Acts 23:26), even as he appealed his way up through the political process of the Roman Empire of his time. Paul showed thanksgiving for Felix, despite his part in a system with which Paul disagreed at some important points, for his “reforms” for the common good.

Beyond that, we have a more general command to “honor everyone” (1 Pet. 2:17) and to pray for “all people” (1 Tim. 2:1). We are to not only pay our taxes, but also give “respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” (Rom. 13:7).

Christians, above all people, should pray for and show respect to our President and all of our elected officials. After all, unlike those who see politics as ultimate, we recognize that our political structures are important, but temporal, before an in-breaking kingdom of Christ. We don’t need to be fomented into the kind of faux outrage that passes for much of contemporary political discourse. Unlike those who see history as impersonal or capricious, we see behind everything a God who is sovereign over His universe.

So let’s pray for our President. Let’s not give ourselves over to terms of disrespect, or every crazy conspiracy theory that floats across the Internet.

This doesn’t mean slavish obedience. In a democratic republic, the President and the Congress govern by the consent of the governed. We appeal to our elected officials, and lobby them for the common good, expressing disagreement when we must. But we do this, as Paul does before Felix and Agrippa, with respect and honor, even as he seeks to persuade them of the need for religious

liberty, and as he preaches “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25).

However we voted, let’s pray for God to bless our President. We can pray for him to be granted wisdom and health. We can pray that God would prosper his good ideas, and change his mind on his bad ideas. Moreover, we can teach our children to respect our President.

There’s a time to vote. There’s a time to campaign. And there’s a time to petition. But, through it all, let’s be the people who, even as we speak with conviction, are marked by kindness and respect. When we have to differ with the President, let’s do that, with backbone. But let’s make sure we do all this with honor, respect, prayer, and, most of all, with love.

Let’s render unto Caesar, as free people with natural rights. Because we know as believers that we will eternally say, “Jesus is Lord,” we can as citizens temporally say, “Hail to the chief.”



Is it ever wrong for a Christian to sue the government?

The Bible commands us to not only obey the governing authorities (Rom. 13), but to show honor to them (1 Pet. 2:17) and pray for them (1 Tim. 2:2). That being said, a lawsuit in our legal system is not necessarily an attack. It is an attack, however, when it’s the result of vengeance or acrimony between individuals. But the suit of a governing agency is less like an assault than like an appeal for a grievance to be answered. The normal mechanism of a citizen seeking justice, in our system, goes ultimately through the court system.

In that sense, I think, if all other avenues are exhausted, suing this branch of government would simply be the equivalent of Paul appealing to Caesar to settle his legal dispute (Acts 25:1-12) and pointing to his Roman citizenship in order to question the legality of his scourging (Acts 22:25-28).

This is a very different matter from Christians suing one another, which is forbidden by scripture. But why is it forbidden? It is not because God is uninterested in justice. It’s because when two Christian persons sue one another they are signaling to the outside world the church is incompetent, not gifted by Christ, to settle disputes among brothers. It is a defective eschatology, and ultimately says something profoundly untrue about Christ and His gospel. It is better, Paul says, to be defrauded than to do such a thing (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

A suit against a government agency is a different matter precisely because the church has no jurisdiction over the state (Jn. 18:36; 1 Cor. 5:12-13). A suit could be simply an appeal to the state to do justice in a particular matter.

There is also a difference between something being ethically permissible and being wise. A war, for instance, might be just and yet be imprudent. In the same way, it may be that you can, in clear

conscience, sue a government agency and yet it would be an unwise use of your family's resources and emotional energy. Only you, in seeking God's direction in prayer and the counsel of wiser Christians, can discern that.



Should Southern Baptists engage in or withdraw from the current political climate?

One of the things we have to be on watch for right now is that in evangelicalism, we tend to ping back and forth between extremes. This happens on the personal level, and it also happens on the congregational level.

People might say, "I don't want to go through what happened back then." So church members who had really contentious business meetings in their local congregation, say congregationalism was a mess. If you grew up in really legalistic, strict church then you want to say, "Let's not talk about commands, let's just talk about who we are in Christ." If you grew up in a really chaotic sort of church you want to say, "Let's regulate everything and have a lot of rule-heavy Christianity."

The same thing happens with Christians and the political climate.

There is a sense in which a lot of people want to overreact to a highly politicized Christianity with what they believe is an apolitical Christianity saying, "Let's just preach the gospel and not deal with any issues that are of social or political importance at all." There are several problems with this type of mindset. One of them is that there are certain expectations of the government. God holds Caesar accountable for what Caesar does with the sword. Caesar doesn't wield it in vein; he wields it with the authority of God. Caesar can overstep that authority and become a Revelation 13 beast-state, and he will be held accountable for that. In a democratic republic, the people are ultimately accountable for that sword, so we are accountable as voters, and we have to form the consciences of those in our congregations.

This doesn't mean we come in as though we have a word from God on every single policy issue. We form a conscience on what it is to deal justly that applies itself to different policy issues, but we don't come in with specifics on those sorts of things.

I think we also need to speak in a way that doesn't allow ourselves to further cynicism. If what we are doing is using the gospel in order to carry out a political agenda, people are going to see that and they are going to reject, not only our political agenda, but also the gospel behind it. We are speaking of the gospel, that's first and foremost. We are speaking to the implications of the gospel, but it is very clear which kingdom is preeminent in the way in which we are speaking.

I don't think pastors ought to typically endorse candidates. I'm not saying there would never be a time when it would be appropriate. John Leland endorsed Thomas Jefferson because it was religious liberty or no religious liberty. Typically I don't think it is a good thing for congregations or

for pastors to do, but that doesn't mean you pretend as though you can be apolitical altogether. The churches and people who thought of themselves as apolitical actually tended to be the most political.

Take the issue of slavery, for example. There were pastors all over the South, Southern Baptists and Southern Presbyterian pastors, who said they were not going to talk about slavery because they were going to talk about the gospel. But if you stand up and talk about the law of God and what God is going to hold people accountable for, and don't talk about human slavery, you are talking about human slavery, because you are saying to that slave owner when he stands before God in judgment, "God is not going to be asking you about whether or not you claim to own another human being." If you are in 1925 Mississippi preaching against drunkenness, fornication and adultery, and you are not talking about lynching, when you have people who are lynching other human beings created in the image of God, you are speaking to lynching by saying, "This is not something that you are going to be held accountable for."

In modern-day America, if you stand up and speak to sexual morality and poverty and other political issues, but you don't speak to abortion when you have human beings who have their very personhood being denied, you are speaking to abortion by saying, "This isn't something worthy of being held accountable for."

So, I think Christians should engage in the political climate when there are issues that will be accounted for by God.



How should a Christian choose a political party?

When thinking about choosing a political party, I think Christians need to keep a certain prophetic distance from any outside group of people, because we can easily become co-opted. One of the things we learn about human nature is that people who are close to us and people who are distant from us will both want to take advantage of interest groups. We are not an interest group. We stand apart from that.

We do recognize that at certain times, certain political parties are going to be more favorable to the things we believe, and those issues and parties are going to change over time. There was a day when Democrats were leading the pro-life movement. Today, it is extremely hard to find many pro-life Democratic members of Congress or other elected officials. We pray that will change.

What I hope for are two parties in America that are committed to life, marriage and religious liberty. That is not where we are right now, but it could change. We need to keep a certain amount of distance, even as we are speaking to issues, and not necessarily support a party infrastructure.



How will the Supreme Court's decision on the Hobby Lobby case affect Christians?

I think Christians and church members need to really recognize how the Hobby Lobby case is going to affect all of us. Sometimes with Supreme Court cases, it can seem really distant from our people. This Supreme Court case is really going to be impactful for all of our people in our churches for probably the next hundred years, regardless of what the court does. And here is why: Because the question is, “Does Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood, which is a Mennonite woodworkers group, have the right to carry out their business according to the dictates of their consciences?”

Now, we all recognize there are some limits to any right and to any aspect of religious liberty, and so there is a limit. I can't say, “Hey, I am a Baptist and I have got this coffee shop, and I am not going to serve Lutherans. So, if you look Norwegian to me, get out!” You know there is a limit there.

But we also recognize though that what many people are saying, and really what the government is saying, is that because Hobby Lobby is for profit that means it doesn't have any religious liberty rights. You think about some of the ways some people are ridiculing this saying, “Oh, so it's a company, and this company is now a person, and the person has religious liberty rights,” and “So, does this company tithe? Can this company pray? Is this company going to go to heaven?”—that sort of ridicule.

But in reality, this has to do with people. I mean, what is a corporation? It's a group of people who are coming together and saying we are going to do things, and we are going to do things in a certain way. And everybody recognizes that a company ought to have some sort of moral caliber. I mean, Marianne Glendon wrote a piece in the *Boston Globe* that I really encourage you to take a look at because she gets at what the real issue is. Starbucks says, “Hey, we're going to sell a Fair Trade coffee. We are not going to sell coffee that we think is coming from people who are exploited.” Regardless of what you think about Starbucks coffee, they have a right to make that sort of a moral judgment—that we don't want to exploit workers to do this. We have been calling on Wall Street for a long time to have some moral principles when it comes to how they operate. Those are all corporations and we expect them to say we are not going to be involved in things that are going to cause people to lose their homes intentionally or to prey upon vulnerable people.

That's what's happening here. You've got a group of people who say, “Hey, we are going to start a business, but we don't want to sell shot glasses because that violates our principles. We want to sell things that we think are within our moral framework.” And they are saying, “We can't in good conscience pay for these devices that we think cause abortions.” They are not even saying, “We won't allow our employees to have these things.” They are saying, “We don't want to pay for it.”

And so what the Supreme Court is going to decide is whether or not groups of people have rights

to carry out their religious liberty and whether or not the government has to show there is a compelling interest in violating that liberty.

Now, sometimes there is a compelling interest in the same way with the freedom of speech. We believe there is freedom of speech, and so we don't want the government coming in and telling the *New York Times* or *Christianity Today*, that it doesn't like how they criticize an elected official, so they must stop doing it. No. Those corporations have the right to speak—freedom of the press.

But there are limits to freedom of speech. If the *New York Times* starts listing where all the nuclear submarines are located for the United States government, the government is going to come in and say, “No, we have a compelling interest why you cannot print that material and let our enemies know this.”

The same thing is going to happen here with religious liberty. So it is a really important case.

I think Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood are going to win. As president of the ERLC, I don't bet, but if I did, I would probably bet for Hobby Lobby because I think there is enough precedent here, not only with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that really addressed this issue back in 1993—and so the government has to show that compelling interest—but also with some other cases in recent years. I think Hobby Lobby is going to win.

Church



How should congregations exercise church discipline?

Law enforcement officials use the term “doctor shopping” to refer to the way those addicted to prescription pain medications seek to avoid accountability. If you go to your doctor to ask for Vicodin, and your physician refuses to prescribe it, you are doctor shopping if you then seek out multiple doctors until you find the one who will prescribe the Vicodin. Sometimes an addict will have multiple doctors going at once, all prescribing different medicines, often those that are dangerous to mix. I’ve noticed the same thing going on when it comes to church accountability.

The truth is, there’s a certain type of personality that doesn’t want accountability, only affirmation. If a person wants to divorce someone, shouldn’t divorce or marry someone one, shouldn’t marry, or do something they shouldn’t do, he will seek out a pastor’s “accountability.” When the pastor tells him the opposite of what he wants to hear, he leaves to look for a pastor or counselor who will. And this goes on and on.

This isn’t being shepherded. It’s the same old autonomy of the self that first manifests itself in the life-cycle of a child saying, “But Dad said it was okay...” except now grown up into something with a far more malevolent motive and a far more dangerous outcome.

Sadly, there are too many ministers of the gospel out there willing to empower this sort of behavior. If you have a church member who has been warned or disciplined by another pastor or church, you have a responsibility to investigate what’s going on. True, it might be that the old church spoke where there is no authority to speak, disciplining a parent for not homeschooling, for example. But, even then, if you will give an answer for the soul of this person, you bear the responsibility to find out what exactly is going on.

If you’re the kind of minister who refuses to acknowledge the discipline or accountability structures of other churches, you might simply be more enlightened than those churches and leaders. Or you might not know what you’re dealing with. And you just might be fighting against a word spoken by Jesus himself, handing over an unrepentant soul to Satan, with the hopes of ultimate repentance (1 Cor. 5:4-5).

Any sort of affirmation of an unrepentant and fugitive-from-discipline church member isn’t an act of love or mercy. It’s an act of hatred. You are empowering the unrepentant to “bear the name brother” or sister (1 Cor. 5:11), to assuage a conscience that should be convicted by the Spirit. If so, you’d be better off just prescribing an addict another round of Percocet.



Should a church display the American flag?

Every so often I hear of a pastor embroiled in controversy over his removing the American flag from the church sanctuary. The most memorable incident to me was the pastor who simply secreted the flag away in the middle of a Saturday night, as though the flock wouldn't notice the next morning. But, by dawn's early light, they saw the flag was not there. And that's when the metaphorical bombs started bursting in air.

I agree with the impulse behind such a pastor's concern. The church, after all, isn't an outpost of American society but instead a colony of the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Phil. 3:20). Christian worship isn't a routine act of mere civil society, like a parent-teacher association meeting or a union gathering, but it is instead a gate between the covenant body and the larger gathering of the redeemed of all ages in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). Your church is a "satellite campus" of the Mount Zion sanctuary, and the vast majority of worshipers at that sanctuary are not, and never were, American citizens.

The flag can be a perilous thing in an American evangelical subculture so infected with civil religion. Sometimes patriotism for the United States seems easier than patriotism for the New Jerusalem because it's so experientially immediate. This doesn't mean that we should treat Old Glory like an Asherah pole. Patriotism is dangerous, yes, but that's because it's a strong natural affection that's rooted in something good and right. When rightly applied, patriotism is akin to what God commands us to do in showing honor to our father and mother.

When we honor our country, we are recognizing that we are not self-made or self-situated. We are here, placed by God in a particular plot of land because of the sacrifices of forefathers and foremothers we haven't known. We have a responsibility to our neighbors of all faiths for the generations to come. Patriotism can become idolatrous, sure. So can family affection. But the gospel doesn't evaporate family love. It just re-narrates it, and situates it in a right context, in which we seek first the kingdom of God.

The same is true for the flag. Removing a flag doesn't remove the tendency to idolatry or triumphalism; it just leaves such things unaddressed and untroubled. If a congregation already has a flag in the sanctuary, the first step might be for the pastor to use it as an object lesson in a right-ordered patriotism.

The flag can prompt the church to pray for and honor leaders. The flag can prompt us to remember that national identity is important but transitory. There will come a day when Old Glory yields to an older glory, when the new republic succumbs to a new creation. Until then, let's reorder all our affections, including our flag-waving. But let's do so maintaining the paradoxical tension of "resident aliens." There is no need to play "Rapture the Flag."



Should ministers officiate at weddings of unbelievers?

Early in my ministry I found myself with a difficult decision. A couple asked me to officiate at their wedding. Neither of them was a follower of Jesus. It was a torturous quandary because I wanted an ongoing relationship with them as an inroad to the gospel.

This couple wasn't disobeying God by "being unequally yoked." That would have been an easy answer, since scripture forbids it as sin.

Marriage is a creation ordinance, given to all people (Gen 2:23-24). It is good for unbelievers to marry—good for them, for their children, and for society as a whole.

I called several pastors I know. One told me he marries virtually whomever asks. Another told me he routinely married unbelievers, as a means of sharing the gospel. I went away from these conversations depressed. It seemed there was something trivializing about marriage and the call to preach in these conversations.

I find that this question remains one of the most pressing questions for young ministers. Should a minister of the gospel marry unbelievers?

No.

Why, you ask.

First, a minister of the gospel needs to know that he has no personal authority. Ordination does not mystically confer authority to a preacher or pastor. The pastor has legitimate authority (Heb. 13:17), and I believe ordination is biblical (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 2 Tim. 1:6). However, this authority is not his authority, it is gospel authority.

In the New Testament, the marriages of church members are the business of the church community (1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5). Furthermore, Paul tells the church at Corinth: "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside" (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

For unbelievers the church has no right to hold a couple to their vows through church discipline. They are not members of the church. A church that isn't able to hold a couple to their vows (through discipleship and discipline) has no right to solemnize these vows. So, in the case of unbelievers, a minister of the state is perfectly appropriate to officiate because it is the state, not the church, which will hold the couple accountable.

Almost every pastor I've ever heard who performs weddings appeals to the evangelistic potential. I've never met an unbelieving couple who were won to Christ by a pastor who was willing to marry them regardless of their belief in Christ. I know several couples, though, who came to Christ because a faithful pastor lovingly told them no, and why.

For many young ministers, this question comes down to a question of courage. If you're not able to turn down family members and friends who expect you to act as a wedding chaplain for them, then how are you going to turn down unbelievers who want to be baptized? The gospel minister is made of sterner stuff than what many of us are accustomed to seeing.

The wedding ceremony is one more place where we don't need civil servants. We need ministers of the gospel, those with the courage to let their yes be yes and their no be no.



How should the church address violence against women?

Male violence against women is a real problem in our culture, one the church must address. Our responsibility is not simply at the level of social justice, but at the level of ecclesial justice as well.

We must teach from our pulpits, our Sunday school classes, and our Vacation Bible Schools that women are to be cherished, honored and protected by men. This means we teach men to reject American playboy consumerism in light of a Judgment Seat at which they will give an account for their care for their families. It means we explicitly tell the women in our congregations, "A man who hits you has surrendered his headship, and that is the business both of the civil state in enacting public justice and of this church in enacting church discipline."

Church discipline against wife-beaters must be clear and consistent. We must stand with women against predatory men in all areas of abandonment, divorce and neglect. We must train up men, through godly mentoring as well as through biblical instruction, who will know that the model of a husband is a man who crucifies his selfish materialism, his libidinal fantasies, and his wrathful temper tantrums in order to care lovingly for a wife. We also must remind these young men that every idle word, and every hateful act, will be laid out in judgment before the eyes of the One to whom we must give an answer.

In the public arena, Christians as citizens should be the most insistent on legal protections for women. We should oppose a therapeutic redefinition of wife abuse as merely a psychological condition. And we should call on the powers that be to prosecute abusers of women and children in ways that will deter others and make clear society's repugnance at such abuse.

Whatever our views on specific economic policies, we must recognize that much economic hard-

ship of women in our age is the result of men who abandon their commitments. We should eschew obnoxious “welfare queen” rhetoric and work with others of goodwill to seek economic and social measures to provide a safety net for single mothers and abused women in jeopardy.

We should join with others, including secular feminists, in seeking legal protections against such manifestations of a rape culture as sexual harassment, prostitution and sex slavery.

An abusive man is not an over-enthusiastic complementarian. He is not a complementarian at all. He is a pathetic, aping perversion of Adamic leadership. He rejects male headship because he rejects his role as provider and protector. As the culture grows more violent, more consumerist, more sexualized and more misogynistic, the answer is not a church more attenuated to the ambient culture, whether through a hyper-masculine paganism or through a gender-neutral feminism.

Instead, the answer is a truly counter-cultural church, a church that calls men to account for leadership, a leadership that cherishes and protects women and girls.



How does a Christian deliver a eulogy for a non-believer?

I just saw a piece of news in the *Huffington Post* about an obituary written by some children of a woman. I won't give the woman's name, because I don't know how accurate this rendering of her life is. But her kids wrote this eulogy, and they said this,

“She is survived by her six of eight children whom she spent her lifetime torturing in every way possible. While she neglected her small children, she refused to allow anyone else to care or show compassion toward them. When they became adults, she stalked and tortured anyone they dared to love. Everyone she met, adult or child, was tortured by her cruelty and exposure to violence, criminal activity, vulgarity, and hatred of the gentle or kind human spirit. On behalf of her children whom she so abrasively exposed to her evil and violent life, we celebrate her death from this earth and hope she lives in the afterlife reliving each gesture of violence, cruelty, and shame that she delivered on her children. Her surviving children will now live the rest of their lives with the peace of knowing their nightmare finally has some form of closure.”

Yikes! No wonder this made national news. We are not accustomed to seeing obituaries or hearing eulogies that take place at funerals that picture people in these stark sorts of nasty terms. But of course we know there are nasty people who are out there. We realize that. We see that all the time in our own lives. So how should we act at a funeral?

Funerals can be very frustrating to me when you go to a funeral and know the person who is deceased was not a Christian; you know this person wasn't following after Christ. You know this is an evangelical, Bible-believing gospel-preaching pastor, who nonetheless gets up and talks about how Aunt Flossie is now in the presence of Jesus and she is not in pain anymore; she is not suffering anymore. Or Uncle Bob, he is now walking on streets of gold. And you sit back, and you think

where is the gospel in all of this?

On the other hand, I went to a funeral one time, I remember probably 20 years ago, where there was a pastor who stood up and said, “You know, I’ve heard everybody stand up and say all of these great things about Bob and about how Bob is now with the Lord. I had a conversation with Bob last week, and Bob told me he didn’t have time for the gospel; he didn’t have time for the church of the living God. And I just want you all to know that Bob split hell wide open at 5:03 a.m. on January...” And everyone was taken aback. I don’t think that’s the way to go either.

When we are thinking about eulogies and standing up and giving a rendering of someone’s life, there are several different responsibilities we have. One of those is the primary responsibility that we always have to the fidelity of the gospel. The Apostle Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” I’m not ashamed of the good news that’s been given to me, because it is the “power of God unto salvation.” If we take the edge of the gospel off to where someone is justified by the grief of his or her family alone, then we really are not handling rightly the word of God that has been given to us; we are unfaithful to the gospel.

On the other hand, a eulogy is also given primarily for the summing up of the life of this person and the comforting of the people who are in the room. I don’t think this is a time to take shots at the person who has died. Certainly it is not the time to settle old scores. And it is not the time to neglect the aspects of that person’s life where the grace of God was seen. Part of a eulogy, even for an unbeliever, and even for a hardened person, is to say this is someone who was made in the image of God and there are some aspects of this person’s life to which there should be some form of gratitude given.

I remember having someone talk to me about the funeral of her mother, and she was trying to think of some good things to say about her mother. And she said, “You know, really the only thing I can think of is that she was kind to birds. She fed the birds in the backyard.” I think most people can find some sense of gratitude in the life of that person without necessarily speaking of that person as a Christian or as someone who is reconciled to God.

The other part of this that I think is really important is something that I learned years ago and something that really hit me unexpectedly. I heard an old Welsh Baptist preacher preaching, and I think of this all of the time, and he was talking about the thief on the cross. He said, “If you think about it for a minute, the thief on the cross, if he had believing family members, none of them would have imagined after they put him in the ground that he was with the Lord. They would have all looked back at his awful life and assumed that he was in hell. So imagine the shock on the faces of any God-fearing family members or friends of this thief, this criminal, this terrorist when they see him in blessedness in the eternal state.” And he gave this anecdote of a man who was riding a horse. His family members and friends had been sharing the gospel with him. He didn’t believe it; he rejected it. He was thrown from the horse, believed the gospel in midair, cried out for mercy, hit the ground and went into a coma for six or seven weeks, and when he emerged from the coma, he said to his family, “I am a believer. I am your brother in Christ now.” But he recognized if he had died they would not have known that until Judgment Day or until they had died themselves and

were in the presence of the Lord.

That really was a humbling sort of word for me, to recognize that while we shouldn't give a whole lot of hope for deathbed conversions—I mean we need to be sharing the gospel with people; “It is appointed for a man once to die,” the scripture says, and “after this comes the judgment;” we need to be sharing the gospel now—but we should never discount the fact that we do not know what happened in the heart of someone in those final seconds or nanoseconds before death.

While it is yet time, I would say to you, if you are an unbeliever, don't be counting on that and say, “Oh, I'll repent at the last minute on my deathbed.” That is a presumption that the scripture says is very, very dangerous. “Now is the time, now is the day of salvation.” But for those of us who are looking back on the life of someone, we do not know exactly what happened at the very end.

So, that means, in the case of an unbeliever you are giving a eulogy for who lived a very hard life, I think you can stand up and say, “You know, we know that John lived a rough life. We know that John made some very difficult choices. We give thanks to God for these aspects of John's life.” And then preach the gospel.

You don't have to stand there as though you are some sort of psychic giving directions as to what John is doing right now in the eternal state. You stand up to say this is what the gospel says about sin. This is what sin does to us. This is how sin alienates us from God. This is the sort of judgment that we are all going to face because all of us are ultimately going to die. We have a limited amount of time in this life, and the only way to escape the condemnation that we face—that we have brought on ourselves—the only way that we can be made right with a holy God is through the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, placing our trust in him, believing in him.

You preach that gospel. You don't necessarily speculate about this person.

Race



Why is racial justice a gospel issue?

In 2012 the Southern Baptist Convention saw the election of Dr. Fred Luter, its first African-American president. This is significant for all sorts of reasons: one being, of course, that the SBC was founded, partly, to protect the “right” of slaveholders to be missionaries. It’s important also because it’s a test for whether the SBC will go forward with the gospel and mission we say we believe.

One of my earliest memories is of a substitute Sunday school teacher in my Southern Baptist church chastening me for putting a coin in my mouth. “That’s filthy,” she said. “Why, you don’t know if a colored man might have held that.” It might just be my imagination playing tricks on me, but it seems as though she immediately followed this up with, “Alright children, let’s sing ‘Jesus Loves the Little Children, All the Children of the World.’”

Now, this lady probably didn’t consciously think of herself as a white supremacist. She almost certainly didn’t think of herself as subversive of the gospel itself. She never thought about the hypocrisy of holding the two contradictory worldviews together in her mind. She probably didn’t see how her dehumanizing of African-Americans was a twisted form of Darwinism rather than biblical Christianity.

She wasn’t alone.

On the question of civil rights in the American Christian context, there is little question that, with few exceptions, the “progressives” were right, often heroically right, and the “conservatives” were wrong, often satanically wrong. In the narrative of the dismantling of Jim Crow, conservatives were often the villains and progressives were most often on the side of the angels, indeed on the side of Jesus.

The question is not whether the progressives won the argument or whether they should have won the argument; the question is why they were persuasive, ultimately, on this point (and almost no other) to their more conservative brothers and sisters. The turnaround is striking, perhaps nowhere more clearly than in my denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, where a generation ago most conservative leaders were segregationists.

Some, of course, will claim cynically that conservative evangelical leaders, like some national politicians, don’t play with racial demagoguery anymore because such appeals don’t “work” anymore in twenty-first-century America. No thinking person wants to be seen as a racist. Well, okay, but, even if one accepts that argument, why is it true that a segregationist would be barred (and rightly

so) from speaking at the SBC Pastors' Conference of 2014 and wouldn't have been barred from speaking at the SBC Pastors' Conference of 1950? Isn't it because the people wouldn't tolerate it? Well, why the change? It must be more than just changing American culture since conservative evangelicals have been in the throes of a much hyped "culture war" on all sorts of issues since the 1960s?

Why is civil rights no longer a "culture war" issue? Why were the voices of the civil rights pioneers persuasive, not only to mainstream America but to conservative Christians as well? Some might argue it is because the culture has changed. But the culture has changed just as much (if not more so) on the question of gender and sexual issues, after three waves of feminism and a sexual revolution, but not so for traditionalist Catholics and confessional Protestants.

The reason SBC progressives, and the larger Civil Rights Movement, were persuasive was because of the mode of their argument. The progressives, as scholar David Chappell shows in his book *Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, appealed to biblical orthodoxy and missionary zeal, in their arguments, not simply to the arc of historical progress.

This is true at the macro level (think of the King James Version of the Bible woven so intricately into the themes of Martin Luther King's speeches and sermons). It is also true at the micro level. SBC civil rights advocates—from Foy Valentine to T.B. Maston to Henlee Barnette—argued from decidedly conservative biblical concepts.

The Civil Rights Movement struggled on multiple fronts. In the political sphere, leaders such as King pointed out how the American system was inconsistent with Jeffersonian principles of the "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." Politically, Americans had to choose: be American (as defined in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence) or be white supremacist; you can't be both. King and his compatriots were right.

But the Civil Rights Movement was, at core, also an ecclesial movement. King was, after all, "Reverend King" and many of those marching with him, singing before him, listening to him, were Christian clergy and laity. To the churches, especially the churches of the South, the civil rights pioneers sent a similar message to the one they sent to the governmental powers. You have to choose: be a Christian (as defined by scripture and the small "c" catholic apostolic tradition) or be a white supremacist; you can't be both. They were right here too.

How can white supremacy be true, they would argue, if humanity is made from "one blood" in the creation of Adam? How can one segregate evangelistic crusades if the cross of Christ atones for all people, both white and black? If God personally regenerates repentant sinners, both white and black, how can we see people in terms of "race" rather than in terms of the person? If we send missionaries across the seas to evangelize Africa, how is it not hypocrisy not to admit African-Americans into church membership?

The biblical power of the argument is true, regardless of whether all the civil rights pioneers, in the

SBC and out of it, believed in biblical orthodoxy.

Many did. See the faithful heroine Fannie Lou Hamer of Sunflower County, Mississippi, for example. If Baptists had a means of canonization, I'd support it for her. But regardless of personal faith, the civil rights heroes indicted conservative hypocrites, prophetically, with the conservatives' own convictional claims. And, as Jesus promised, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me."

The arguments for racial reconciliation were persuasive, ultimately, to orthodox Christians because they appealed to a higher authority than the cultural captivity of white supremacy. These arguments appealed to the authority of scripture and the historic Christian tradition.

This authority couldn't easily be muted by a claim to a "different interpretation" because racial equality was built on premises conservatives already heartily endorsed: the universal love of God, the unity of the race in Adam, the Great Commission and the church as the household of God.

With this the case, the legitimacy of segregation crumbled just as the legitimacy of slavery had in the century before, and for precisely the same reasons. Segregation, like slavery, was shown to be what all human consciences already knew it to be: not just a political injustice or a social inequity (although certainly that) but also a sin against God and neighbor and a repudiation of the gospel. Regenerate hearts ultimately melted before such arguments because in them they heard the voice of their Christ, a voice they'd heard in the scriptures themselves.

Conservative Christians, and especially Southern Baptists, must be careful to remember the ways in which our cultural anthropology perverted our soteriology and ecclesiology. It is to our shame that we ignored our own doctrines to advance something as clearly demonic as racial pride. And it is a shame that sometimes it took theological liberals to remind us of what we claimed to believe in an inerrant Bible, what we claimed to be doing in a Great Commission.

I'm thrilled about where God might be taking the SBC. A denomination formed to protect slavery led by a descendant of slaves, that's just the kind of providential irony our God loves.

Maybe it will prompt our denomination to stop seeing non-white people as opportunities for "ethnic ministry," and prompt us to see in them opportunities to find our leaders. Maybe seeing a non-white face with the gavel of the SBC has reminded us that the Man we'll see on the Judgment Seat, well, he isn't a white guy either.



What can churches do to increase ethnic diversity within their congregations?

I've seen a lot of churches with communities that have changed in terms of ethnic and racial demographic around them, but those churches haven't changed for all

sorts of reasons. This is a sign of some deep sickness going on in the congregation.

One of the things necessary for this type of church is to recognize the mindset of thinking about the majority ethnic group within that congregation. Your people can't have the mindset of, "We are going to minister to the other ethnic groups around us." Especially when your people say, "We are here in this primarily Latino community—or it is becoming more Latino—so let's minister to the Hispanic people in our community." That is a mindset I think needs to change, especially among majority ethnic groups of white people of America.

White people in America are really a tiny minority in the body of Christ. We are part of a cloud of witnesses, the scripture says, in heaven. There aren't many white people there. Abraham is not a white guy, and neither is Jesus. These are Middle Eastern, Jewish people. Augustan is an African. You go through the whole list of everyone in the history of the church and that great cloud around us. We are not the people that God has given—whoever the majority race is or ethnic group in that church is—to bless the nations. The nations are being blessed through the seed of Abraham, which is Christ. Which means we need to change that mindset.

We also need to recognize the people in that congregation are not just going to minister to, but are going to be ministered to. It is easy, especially for some of us who have Messiah complexes, to want to minister to all sorts of people, because we can be in charge of that. We need to say, "We want to be ministered to in ways we don't even recognize we need to be ministered to." It changes a mindset, and it changes the way worship looks when you have people from various different cultures getting together. Finding ways to anticipate this ahead of time, and to signal it from the pulpit is important. We also need to start intentionally working to signal that in worship.

Jimmy Scroggins, pastor of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, has done a really good job with this, especially at the level of worship by realizing he is in an ethnically diverse place in south Florida, so he is not going to be able to come in and say, "Here are our worship styles." Instead it is almost a Kaleidoscope of different forms of worship that are intentionally saying to everybody that worship is not about finding your groove and ministering to you in it. It is about teaching and admonishing one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

We need to recognize this is going to take a while.

The Jew-Gentile division in the New Testament church meant that there was a lot of conflict going on with people who didn't understand one another and didn't know what was happening, and that had to be explained. Most of the epistles in the New Testament are dealing with that divide, which was theological at some level, but also was cultural.

Churches today are going to have that. Pastors need to have some patience as time goes on. But starting to get your people to recognize, if you are in an all-white church or an all-black church, that there is a problem, the pastor needs to say, "Hey people, this is not normal for the body of Christ." We are not going to solve this situation by saying, "We should all bring someone from another race next Sunday," but we are going to say, "If we still look this way 10 years from now,

something is wrong.” I think it is a long-term project.



What role should the church play in racial equality?

What happened in the Civil Rights Movement is exactly the reverse of what should have happened. The result was right, but the way it happened was wrong.

We had people speaking to churches and saying, “You are hypocrites who do not hold to the gospel you say you hold to.” What should have been happening is that congregations should have been the ones leading the charge in the South. Congregations should have been leading the charge to the outside society saying, “Repent, because the kingdom of God is at hand, and if you want to see what the kingdom of God looks like, look within our congregations where you have people who are united around the blood of Christ and around the spirit of Christ where there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither white nor black, but all are sons of God in Christ.”

That’s what should have been happening; instead, you had churches adapting themselves to the outside culture. They took on those political realities of the culture around them, and then tried to find proof texts in the Bible to suave their guilty consciences. The churches had to have their consciences being arrested and spoken to by a prophetic word coming from outside of their congregations. They should have been leading.

We need to be the people who are—when it comes to those issues of tearing down the carnality, the evil and the Satanism of racial division—leading within congregations. This means we need congregations that aren’t built around the same value systems as the outside world. And this doesn’t just apply to ethnicity. It also applies to all sorts of other things.

It is amazing how, in a lot of congregations, the people who have the standing and power in the outside world also have the standing and power in our local congregations. This is not what the scripture tells us ought to be the case. James tells us not to put the poor in the back of the congregation, not because he is saying to be nice to the poor and to feel sorry for them. He is saying we should not feel sorry for them, because they are the future kings and queens of the universe. “... Don’t you know God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?” (Jas. 2:5)

So the inside of the church ought to be turning all of those things on their head. I think where we ought to be in 20 years is that the very language of white churches, black churches, blue-collar churches and white-collar churches ought to be completely meaningless. Instead we should have congregations that don’t seem to have anything necessarily in common except for the gospel and the blood of Christ.

This is what was so striking about the first century churches. You had Jews and Gentiles in the same body, which is sign to the principalities and powers and the heavenly places. I think this has to happen intentionally. We are going to see real progress on this issue when we stop assuming we have white people who are ministering to black people and Latino people and other types of people. This mentality still assumes some kind of normality for white people, that we are somehow blessing everybody else. Most of the kingdom is not white American. We need to take a step back and recognize that we are only going to see progress when we see majority white congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention calling African-American pastors. And calling them as pastors, not because they are saying, “Well, our community is changing so we want to reach African-American people,” as a strategic move, but because they are saying, “This is our pastor.”

When we start to see that, I think we are going to start to see God doing some really good things.



Russell D. Moore is President of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the moral concerns and public policy entity of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Prior to his election in 2013, Moore served as provost and dean of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also taught as professor of theology and ethics.

Moore is the author of several books, including *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* and *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families & Churches*.

A native Mississippian, he and his wife Maria are the parents of five boys.

- Subscribe to Dr. Moore's podcast, *Questions and Ethics*
 - Visit Dr. Moore's website
 - Visit the ERLC website