

# The Christian and the Social Order

*by Russell D. Moore*

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Shouldn't Baptist confessions of faith focus on matters of faith, not politics? Why can't Baptists address issues such as the person of Christ and the way of salvation, leaving alone such thorny contemporary controversies as abortion and gay rights? Is it really our place as a convention of churches to speak to the fiery debates of the public square?

If the Bible addressed only matters of individual redemption and personal piety, such objections would be compelling. Such, however, is not the case.

The prophets denounced social evils ranging from legislation deemed unfair to the poor (Isa 10:1-2) to mistreatment of immigrants (Deut 10:17-19) to the "inappropriate relationships" of public officials (2 Sam 12:1-12; John 14:4). Jesus called on his followers not to disengage from society, but to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matt 5:13-16).

But Southern Baptists are not willing to repeat the errors of turn-of-the century Social Gospel Protestant liberalism. This article makes clear that all efforts toward societal righteousness "can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ." In this, the article is consistent with the rest of the document.

Social disorder does not spring ultimately from an under-funded public school system or from crumbling infrastructure, but from the sinful rebellion of Adam's heirs. Thus, all attempts at social reformation are doomed to failure, unless they are joined with the full-throttled preaching of a gospel that results in a "new creation" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17).

This confession asserts that Christians should "seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love." It does not leave these undefined, however, but contends that Christians should oppose such evils as racism, greed, adultery, homosexuality, pornography, abortion and exploitation of the poor and the weak.

In doing so, Southern Baptists are not taking a break from doctrine in order to address a few political matters. This statement recognizes that these injustices are often themselves theological claims - addressed not only to the world, but also to the members of our churches. In our history, the local Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan was far too often a member in good standing of the local Southern Baptist church. He was able to justify a hateful heart by assuring himself that black people aren't really made in the image of God.

Today, the neighborhood Planned Parenthood counselor is all too willing to assure the scared pregnant teenager that the fetus within her womb isn't really a human life. Gay rights slogans invariably include the theological assertion that God creates some human beings with an irreversible

same-sex attraction. When it comes to sexual morality, Southern Baptist youth groups may hear from their pastors that "True Love Waits." But they also hear from their elected officials that, well, it depends on what the meaning of the word "is" is.

This article seeks to remind Southern Baptists that a Christian worldview means more than avoiding R-rated movies. Believers in union with Christ will share his priorities. They will be angered by those defrauded by unjust court systems (Isa 11:4). They will oppose those who seek to snuff out the lives of the helpless (Ps 72:4). They will stand against those who counsel sinners that there is no hope for them to change (John 8:34-36). Above all, they will warn the powers-that-be that all social unrighteousness will end when the kingdoms of this world are crushed by the kingdom of our Christ (Dan 2:44).

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