

An Ecclesiological Approach to Protecting the Civil Wellbeing of Christians

Need:

Christians have always been called to live faithfully in the world. This sometimes requires suffering by opposing the culture in which the church finds itself. In some cases, that faithfulness requires resisting social pressures to affirm or practice evil. Sin manifests itself in a variety of ways, but in our American context in 2022, there are a few specific arenas in which Christians are finding themselves expected to conform to sin which may cost them their livelihoods and social standing. While religious liberty protections enshrined in law are likely to stand, the hostility of our culture towards historic Christian ethics is now outstripping legal hostility in some realms, such that legal protections are insufficient to preserve the social wellbeing of faithful Christians. For example, the social pressure for teachers to use pronouns for students which do not correspond to their biological sex is immense and growing, even if legally a teacher would be protected in their speech. The church needs to consider the ways in which it can care for its people beyond shoring up constitutional defenses.

Ecclesial Approach:

If the church is to counsel people to stand for ethical faithfulness that could entail losing their livelihoods, the church needs to be prepared to care for its own.

The terms by which Christians are live faithfully in a hostile world are set by God in scripture. The kingdom of God is headed by Christ, and his body is the church. The human institution that should lead in guiding Christians in faithfulness is Christ's church. Too often the church has ceded that responsibility to other institutions (corporations, governments, non-profits, universities, legal defense groups), but the ordinances of Christ have been entrusted to the institutional, visible church.

By having the church take the lead, individual abuses are corralled. It is God speaking in scripture, mediated through his church, which sets the path for faithful opposition. Too often individual, wayward opinions and consciences determine what a faithful response should be, and is belligerent, rude, and is incorrect. By having the church take the lead, corporations are shown that economic considerations are subservient to biblical standards, and that morality follows scripture, not the marketplace.

Ethical Standard:

Christians of all traditions affirm the 10 Commandments as holding an elevated position in biblical ethics. Christians in the Reformed tradition hold that the 10 Commandments summarize God's moral law (further distilled by Christ as loving God and neighbor) that is binding on all peoples in all times and in all places. Loving God and our neighbor is expressed in the terms set by God himself. The 10 Commandments are the ethical standard to which the church urges its members and the world to conform. The exposition of the 10 Commandments in documents such as the Westminster and Heidelberg Catechisms (ecclesial confessions of faith) should serve as the starting point for implementation.

The practice of this ethical standard in our cultural moment has significant implications and burdens for the life of faith.

Christians, as citizens, employees, and employers are not to,

- Speak falsehood about or to another person.
 - This is a violation of the 9th commandment. Specifically, affirming someone's gender identity that does not conform to their biological sex is a lie. Using pronouns to or about another person intended to communicate something other than their biological sex is a falsehood about another person.
 - Enabling sex reassignment operations, either through medical practice, referrals, or funding through insurance is to participate in enabling a lie and deforming God's design.

- Participate in murder.
 - This is a violation of the 6th commandment. Specifically, practicing abortion, referring people to abortion practitioners, or funding abortion through insurance is enabling murder.
 - Law enforcement abuses of power, such as flippancy towards citizens during stops and arrests, carelessness in the way the arrested and prisoners are handled, staying silent in the face of colleagues abusing their power are facilitations and encouragements towards murder.

- Participate in theft
 - This is a violation of the 7th commandment. Specifically, utilizing slave labor in production is evil, and knowingly investing in companies that rely upon and use slave labor is evil.
 - Not paying employees the value of their wages is theft of labor. Utilizing economic pressure to hire people at a wage level below their worth is theft and an additional violation of the 5th commandment to honor those in your service. Utilizing economic pressure to employ people below a subsistence level is not only theft, an abuse of power, but also a deprivation of life.
 - Taking advantage of the poor and the customer through usury is a form of theft and is unacceptable.

- Discriminate against their neighbor
 - To belittle, separate, treat differently or poorly, our neighbors on the basis of their skin color or ethnic heritage is to practice hate and not love, violating the spirit of the 10 Commandments.

- Celebrate sexual immorality
 - This is a violation of the 8th commandment. Specifically, celebrating, affirming, or endorsing homosexuality, sinful divorce, or any sexual or relational practice that deviates from God's design for marriage is sinful.
 - Artistic practices that celebrate sin are sin, and should not be done.

- Violate the Lord's Day

- This is a violation of the 4th commandment. Specifically, the Lord's Day is to be devoted to the public and private worship of God, as well as vocations of necessity (e.g. emergency medical care, law enforcement, military, utility operations) and mercy (e.g. homeless shelter, mental health care, orphanages). Employers should not compel employees to work on Sundays, nor should employees violate the Sabbath.
- Practice Idolatry.
 - This is a violation of the 1st-3rd commandments. Specifically, Christians should never denigrate their God, his works, or his word. Christians ought to refuse to participate in any practice that affirms the validity of false religions or participate in the liturgies of idols.

Strategies and Needs

Christians should live their lives, following the law of God, in gratitude for Christ's work. Being belligerent, rude, antagonistic, or spiteful are not acceptable postures for the Christian. Losing employment or vocational status because of these attitudes is not the same as loss brought about because of faithfulness to Christ. We are always to speak the truth in love.

By defining the condition (present hostility to practicing Christian ethics), the primary stakeholders (the institutional, visible church), and standard (the 10 Commandments), the boundaries and termination of the project are set in advance. This protects against mission creep, and also acknowledges that while the institutional church may possess stewardship of God's ordinances, it does not have expertise in all the details of the economic and social sphere.

The church should provide:

1. Financial support for church members who lose their livelihoods for refusing conform to the world.
 - 1.1. Establishing an insurance pool for those who lose their livelihood for these reasons.
 - 1.2. Financial support should be administered by denominations. Preferably it should be administered by regional bodies of the church (e.g. presbyteries, dioceses) to ensure accountability, maintain local oversight. establish legitimacy of loss, and to avoid national bureaucracy
 - 1.2.1. Ecumenical partnerships could be helpful in pooling resources and coordinating assistance.
 - 1.3. Health insurance co-ops for those without access to this resource as a result of losing their livelihoods.
 - 1.3.1. Versions of this already exist, and creating one for qualifying members is tool of protection for the unemployed or when abortion or gender reassignment surgeries are mandated for all non-faith based in insurance providers.
2. Educational support for church members who decline to use the public-school system on the grounds of moral formation but cannot afford private education on their own.
 - 2.1. The EPC, and its presbyteries, should consider formally partnering with the school systems of other denominations or networks in order to scholarship students.

- 2.1.1. The LCMS school system is a good partnership possibility, as is the Association of Classical Christian Schools.
 - 2.2. The EPC and its presbyteries should encourage presbyteries and local congregations to start schools where possible and to consider funding a scholarship, voucher system for churches where school establishment is not a viable option.
 - 2.2.1. The Reformed Episcopal Church has begun the process of establishing church schools in all of their parishes, and should be consulted.
3. Establish independent system of communication and banking
 - 3.1. In light of big tech shutting down Parlor (refusing web hosting) and the financial sector refusing them service (Paypal, GoFundMe, MasterCard and Visa not processing funds) and terms of service being ideologically limited on social media, a plan needs to be established to allow Christians to exchange currency and communication.
 - 3.2. Encouraging the establishment of a network of local credit unions by evangelical businessmen that pledge to protect the adherents of these ethical values.
 - 3.3. Creating webhosting tools and email clients is in the best interest of American evangelicals.
4. Create a corporate pledge where businesses commit to upholding these values
 - 4.1. Various pledges already exist to protect religious expression of employees, but any such commitment driven by the church should value the church's ethics, not general religious non-discrimination.
 - 4.2. Commitments should include pledges against funding abortion or sex-change operations, discriminating on the basis of race through unequal treatment, against requiring or pressuring the use of gender language that does not conform to biological sex, requiring employees to work on Sunday, utilizing slave labor in their production chain, disowning usury, and paying employees a wage that reflects both the true worth of their labor and does not contribute to a cycle of poverty or bare subsistence.