



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Use of Scripture in Policy Making

FEBRUARY 21, 2013

Dale Witherington / 7510 Maple Ponds Trail, Independence, MN 55359 / Dale.Witherington@capitolcom.org

One of the most fulfilling parts of being a pastor is having a part, no matter how big or small, in helping someone else become everything God wants them to be. The Bible says that a pastor "...[prepares] God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

These "works of service" might take place in the home, in a church, in the education system, in government and so on. Depending on your perspective, those of you receiving this have either chosen or were chosen by God to do your works of service in the government to the people of the State of Minnesota.

My calling as a pastor is to "make disciples" (Matthew 20:18-20). That is to say, it is my job to help people become more committed followers of Jesus Christ by developing a proper understanding of His Word, the Bible, and applying it to all areas of their lives. It is within this understanding that I write today.

As a variety of political issues are heating up, more and more elected leaders are utilizing various media outlets to make a case for policy decisions. In recent days some leaders have even referred to "the scriptures" (which appear to mean the Bible) as the source of their understanding for a particular point of view. This would seem to mean that at least some of you believe the scriptures to be authoritative enough to help you shape policy or you recognize that your constituents want you to refer to the scriptures as an authoritative source in shaping your decisions. Maybe it's both.

This is both admirable and dangerous.

Using the scriptures is admirable if one allows the scriptures to mean what they say. The study of hermeneutics helps people get the proper meaning from the Biblical passage they are studying. For instance, my seminary education can be summarized in the following three questions:

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. So what?

Without this process, using the scriptures to justify any position in life moves from the admirable to the dangerous. You might ask, "Dangerous how?" Here is one example:

I can use the Bible, the Word of God, to prove to you that God does not exist. Sound preposterous? Look at Psalm 14:1. It says very clearly, "There is no God." Therefore, an atheist can use the Word of God to prove there is no God. What changes in your life if God is "proven" not to exist?

Oh, but wait. What happens to the meaning of this verse when you read the preceding phrase, "The fool says in in heart"? Now the verse says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'". Everything now changes.

My point is this: In seeking to make any argument we cannot, indeed we must not, use the scriptures to “prove” our point if we are not willing to honestly include those passages that are diametrically opposite of our view. We cannot pick and choose which part of the Bible is the authoritative Word of God and which part isn’t based upon whether or not we happen to like what it says. We must not make the scriptures conform to us. We must conform to the scriptures or at least be willing to be intellectually honest enough to say, “Even though the scriptures teach (fill in the blank), I choose to believe and follow something else.”

In the New Testament book of Acts, there was a group of people in Berea who were known to be of noble character. It is said “they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

What would happen if those on both sides (all sides?) of the aisle who use the scriptures as an authority for policy making actually studied the scriptures together to discover truth as part of the policy making process? What if political compromise and leadership was based on agreement with God’s Word?

It would not be precedent setting. It would follow precedent. This is how our Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence and our nation’s Constitution.

What does it say? What does it mean? So what?

Thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of the people of Minnesota!

Pastor Dale

Dale Witherington, State Director
Capitol Commission Minnesota
651.785.3647
dale.witherington@capitolcom.org
www.capitolcom.org

*Capitol Commission Minnesota is a non-partisan, non-political pastoral ministry to the political leaders, their families, their staffs and their political networks in the State of Minnesota. Dale Witherington is the State Director and can be reached at 651.785.3647 and at dale.witherington@capitolcom.org. Visit us on the web at www.capitolcom.org.