

July 2000

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## When Government Rewards Evil

On the Santa Fe School District, Santa Fe, Texas, community members are still in shock over last week's U.S. Supreme Court ruling that bans students from engaging in religious speech before high school football games. According to Jay Sekulow, Chief Counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, the opinion blurs the distinction between government speech and private speech.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who joined Justices Scalia and Thomas in dissenting, said the tone of the Court's opinion "...bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life." Interestingly, in the case of Internet pornography, the Court recently held that lewd and lascivious pictures are "protected speech," but thanking God for his blessings and asking protection for competing football teams is not protected speech.

There is widespread talk that the Santa Fe ruling will be ignored by many in Texas. Texas Gov. George W. Bush made his position clear before the announced ruling, by filing a brief urging the Supreme Court to uphold such student-led prayer. And, in a Republican primary election this past spring, 94 percent of voters approved a non-binding resolution backing student-initiated prayer at school sporting events.

Elsewhere recently, the State of Ohio was told by a federal court that it must strike its state motto or face legal sanctions. The offending motto? *With God, all things are possible*. The court holds that the motto is overtly sectarian (Christian). Many orthodox Jews and Muslims, however, disagreed with the ruling. Rabbi Daniel Lapin of *Towards Tradition*, said that the concept of a miracle working [G]od is by no means uniquely Christian.

Meanwhile in Kentucky, schools and other government facilities have been ordered by the court to remove from walls, historic (founding) documents which contain religious references. Some of the documents include; The Ten Commandments, Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence.

And, a new Vermont law granting marital status to same-sex couples takes affect this week. Word from Christian Coalition friends in Vermont is that many town clerks who must issue the equivalent "marriage licenses," are struggling with whether or not they can in good conscience comply with the new law. Several have announced they are quitting, others say they may ask other employees to stand in for them at appropriate times.

Due to these and other recent developments in the "war on virtue," the Church is being forced to consider the appropriate response when government goes too far.

According to Francis Schaefer, "government was established as God's means for restraining man's sin." As a delegated authority, it is not autonomous.

God says, *He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.* (2 Sam 23:3). Scripture also confirms the divine intent that rulers praise good works and punish evil. (Rms 13:3,4).

Therefore, says Shaefer, "When government violates what God clearly commands, it exceeds its authority."

The question then, is how does the Church respond when government promotes evil and punishes good? Should civil disobedience ever be an option?

Historically, God's people have faced tough decisions. The Hebrew mid-wives were ordered by Pharaoh to kill the male babies of Hebrew women during the birthing process (partial birth abortion?). But the midwives feared God and did not do as they were ordered. We are told that God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty.

In another instance of civil disobedience, Daniel felt compelled to defy an ordinance against praying to anyone other than the king. When he prayed to his God, he did so in plain sight for all to see - knowing full well what the punishment would be.

Similarly, the Apostles were frequently arrested and beaten for nothing more than the "religious content of their speech." Their consistent response to local authorities was, "We ought to obey God, rather than men." (Acts 5:29).

The parallels with these Biblical accounts and current events are striking. Many Christians in Santa Fe, Vermont, Ohio and Kentucky are facing a defining moment; they must choose whom they will serve, God or man. And, in choosing to follow God, some are sacrificing their careers and even risking their freedom by defying the law.

As our government continues in increasing measure to sanction and reward sin, there will no gray areas, no middle ground where we can stand and still maintain a distinctly Christian witness to our culture.

And, this is good news. The Church is not called to blend in but to be a light. We are not called to be safe and well fed, but to be Holy.

If we truly honor God above the authority of government, our response to these events will dramatically impact our world for Christ.

I pray we will be strengthened and ready for this task.

*Rick Forcier*

Executive Director