

“The Bible and the 2004 Election”

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October 17, 2004

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## Introduction

This is an election year.

Does the Bible the Bible have anything to say about various issues in this election?

It does not speak explicitly about either party or either candidate, but there are several ethical questions in dispute in the current election. For example, there are differences over embryonic stem cell research, homosexual marriage, and abortion. Another question is whether it is right to use military power to oppose evildoers – or does the use of military force itself violate the command, “You shall not murder” (Exod. 20:13)?

I plan to talk about some of those ethical issues this morning.

### A. You might decide how to vote based on other issues than these

But before I begin, let me say that you may or may not decide how to vote based on these issues that I talk about. In fact, you might decide how to vote based on other things. For example, you might decide how to vote based on what you perceive of a candidate’s *character* – maybe one candidate strikes you as more trustworthy than the other. Or you may decide how to vote based on *historical differences between parties* – you may think that the long-term historical policies of one party are better than the other.

Or you may decide how to vote based on “means to an end” differences. For instance, both parties agree that we should help the poor, but they differ on how to get the job done. So you may think one party has a better means to help the poor than the other. But this is not a situation where one party says “we should help the poor” and the other candidate says “we should not help the poor”: They both say we should help the poor. They just differ on the best means to help the poor. So I’m not going to talk about how to help the poor this morning: that is a “best means to an end” question.

To take another example, both parties agree we should help the economy grow. Now you may decide that one party has a better plan to help the economy grow than the other - a better means to economic growth. This is not exactly an ethical question either. It’s a “how to get the job done question,” a “practical wisdom” question about the best means to an end. So I’m not

going to talk about economic issues this morning either.

There is another large area of great concern in our nation. That is the matter of racial reconciliation, racial discrimination, and social justice and fairness. This is a matter the Bible speaks to, and a matter that Christians should be concerned about. The Bible teaches that all human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), and that means we should treat people from every racial and ethnic background justly and fairly. On this issue also, both parties agree that we should work for racial justice and racial reconciliation. They just have differences over how we can best do this. On this question, you may think one party has a better means to work for racial justice than the other, and that may be important in your vote. But because differences here are largely “best means to an end” questions, I’m also not going to talk this morning about issues of racial justice and reconciliation, important as they are.

So let me say again that you may decide to vote based on things I am not going to talk about today. That is your privilege; that is your freedom; and I am thankful for it and I will defend it.

### **B. Church membership does not require you to support one party or another**

Nobody in leadership here at this church wants you to think you have to vote one way or another to attend this church, to be welcome here, to be a member, or to be active in the life of the church. We live in a nation that has a long and wonderful heritage of neighbors and friends being able to disagree w/ each other on politics and still be good friends and fellow citizens.

With respect to political parties, the pastors at this church do not want you to think that you need to be a member of a certain political party to be a member here. Our ultimate allegiance is to God, to the Gospel, and to the Word of God, and not to any political party.

Therefore there are several things I am not going to do this morning:

1. Mention the name of either candidate
2. Mention the name of either party
3. Tell you that you should vote for one party/ candidate or another.

And after I am done speaking, if you come up to me and say, “Are you saying we should vote for Candidate A?” I am going to say, “No, I didn’t say that. And I’m not going to say it now. I spoke about several ethical issues. Now it is your job to find out where the candidates stand on these issues and then consider how to vote in light of what you find out. I am not going to tell you how to vote.”

But I am going to talk about some ethical issues in this election. And I think they are major issues, issues that will set the direction of our nation for years to come. I am asking you to consider whether some of these issues might be so important that they would outweigh other issues in determining your vote.

### **C. Should Christians speak out at all about the large moral questions confronting our nation?**

There is one more preliminary question: Should Christians speak out at all about the large moral questions confronting our nation? Yes, I think we should.

If Christians do not speak about moral and ethical issues facing the nation, who will? Where will people learn about ethics? Where will our nation learn about matters of right and wrong?

If we don't speak out about ethical questions, then people will be left to learn ethics from Hollywood movies, and from their feelings and consciences, and from their friends at work, or at the local bar, and from their professional counselors, and from their kindergarten teachers (didn't a best selling book tell us, "Everything I needed to know in life I learned in kindergarten")?" But that just pushes the question one step back. Where do kindergarten teachers learn about right and wrong? Where do counselors and Hollywood producers learn about right and wrong?

The simple fact is, if Christians do not speak out about what the Bible says about issues of right and wrong, there aren't many other good sources for finding out any transcendent source of ethics, any source outside ourselves. If Christians do not speak about ethical issues, it will be difficult for people ever to know what God considers morally right and morally wrong. Without a clear Christian voice, the nation will be morally adrift, as much of it already is today.

So I think it is right for us to speak up – to say, "This is what the Bible says," and, "This is how I understand the teachings of the Bible" – and then people can listen, and agree or disagree, but at least we have given a clear witness.

In the historical narratives in the Bible, God's people often spoke about ethical issues to government rulers. About 600 B.C., Daniel told the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar,

Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity (Dan. 4:27).

Here was a foreign king, the world's most powerful ruler at that time, and Daniel did not hesitate to tell him about ethical right and wrong. Daniel did not hesitate to tell him, "Break off your sins" and to tell him he should practice "righteousness" show "mercy to the oppressed."

Similarly, several Old Testament prophets speak to foreign nations about their sins. Look at Isaiah, chapters 13-23, and you will see Isaiah prophesying against one nation after another about their sins – Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Assyria, Tyre – one after another Isaiah speaks to them of the one living and true God and calls them to account for their sins. Ezekiel 25-32 does the same thing. And Amos 1-2 does the same. Obadiah prophesies to Edom, Jonah prophesies to Nineveh, Nahum prophesies to Nineveh, and Habakkuk 2 and Zephaniah 2

prophesy to various nations. These prophets remind us that the God of the Bible is the God who holds all nations and all people accountable before him.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul spoke in a similar way to the Roman governor Felix:

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." (Acts 24:24-25)

Here was a Roman governor, not a believer in the God of Israel, and not a believer in Jesus Christ, and Paul speaks boldly to him "about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment"! No wonder Felix was "alarmed"! He sent Paul away, but I don't think he could forget what Paul had said.

Based on these patterns, I think pastors and churches have an obligation to teach their people what the Bible says about the role of government, and what the Bible says about issues of moral right and wrong.

What is at stake here is whether we will preach about some of God's Word or all of God's Word. The apostle Paul did not think it enough to preach on only *some* of God's Word. He didn't think it enough to preach on the easy topics and avoid the controversial topics. He thought that he was accountable before God to preach on *everything* the Bible taught. He told the elders of the church at Ephesus,

And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:25-27).

If Paul had compromised in what he taught, if he had pulled back and decided not to teach (for example) about homosexuality, and then if some of the children in the church had grown up not knowing God's teaching on this and had become involved in homosexual practice, Paul knew that God would hold him accountable for that on the last day. He would not be able to say, "I am innocent of the blood of all of you." But in fact he *could* say that because he had been faithful to proclaim to them everything that God's Word taught, the popular and the unpopular. He had declared to them "the whole counsel of God."

## **I. Government should use its power to encourage good and to restrain evil**

This first ethical issue has to do with the purpose of civil government. Peter says,

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 Peter 2:13-14).

And Paul says,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Rom. 13:1-4).

These passages indicate that God gives us civil government as a gift, to protect us and to do us good.

To take one example, somebody might say, “Why do we need laws against drunk driving? Shouldn't the influence of the Gospel be enough? If Christians were *really* doing their job of witnessing to others, and being a *good example* of sober driving, wouldn't that eliminate all drunk driving in the United States?”

No, it would not. That is because in this present age, some people do not accept the Gospel, and some people do not believe in Christ or follow the moral standards of the Bible. Of course, many non-Christians still follow their consciences and common sense, and they drive soberly. But there are still *some* who do not. There are, sadly, drunk drivers who will not be persuaded by the Christian gospel, or by conscience, or by common sense. They still get drunk and go out and drive.

So how can these drunk drivers be stopped from harming other people? *They have to be stopped by use of government power.* The government takes away their right to drive, and if they continue drunk driving anyway, they go to jail. This is what should happen, to protect all the rest of us. God gives us civil government to restrain such harmful wrongdoing. First Peter says the government is “to punish those who do evil.” Romans 13 says the government should be “not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.” It says the government is “God's servant for your good” to “bear the sword,” and it says that government “carries out God's wrath against the wrongdoer.”

Some of you here today probably work in law enforcement in different levels of government, and some of you serve in the military. The Bible says you are “the servant of God” as you do this. You are God's gift to the whole society as you work to restrain evil. We are thankful for you. And we should be thankful that God gives us the wonderful gift of civil government.

Why do we need laws against murder, then? And why do we need police to protect us from murderers? It is not primarily because we are not doing a good job in proclaiming the Gospel. It is because the Bible recognizes that there is some evil in the world that can only be restrained by force. There is some evil in the world – sadly – that cannot be restrained by education, by friendship, by example, or by kindness, and it will not be restrained by the Gospel message.

There is some evil in the world that can only be restrained by force. And God gives us civil government to restrain that kind of evil

My conclusion to this first ethical question then is this: Government should use its power to encourage good and to restrain evil. This is not itself a primary issue in the election, but it does affect some of the issues in the election.

## **II. Abortion: The Bible views the unborn child as a human person who should be protected.**

King David said to God,

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

David thinks of himself as a person before he was born. He says, “You knitted *me* together in my mother’s womb.” It was not just some body tissue in his mother’s womb – it was David himself!

David also said, after he had sinned with Bathsheba,

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions .... Behold, I was *brought forth in iniquity*, and *in sin did my mother conceive me* (Psalm 51:1-5).

David is not talking about his mother’s sin here, but rather his own sin. We know that because in the previous verses the whole Psalm is about David’s own sin, not somebody else’s (look at verses 1-4). And David is saying that as far back as he can think of himself, he had a sinful nature, a tendency to sin. He had a sinful nature when he was born: “I was *brought forth in iniquity*.” And even before he was born, all the way back to the point of conception, he thinks of himself as a person with moral qualities: “In sin did my mother conceive me.”

In the New Testament there is another example. When Mary, the mother of Jesus, came to see her relative Elizabeth, Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist. And when Mary came, the unborn John the Baptist leaped for joy!

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:41-44)

So here is another example of an unborn baby carrying out the actions of a human person. The unborn John the Baptist “leaped for joy” in his mother’s womb.

In addition to these verses, the Old Testament laws gave special protection to the unborn

child and its mother. In Exodus 21:22-25, the Mosaic law prescribed a greater penalty for accidentally killing an unborn child or its mother than it did for accidentally killing anybody else in Israelite society. The Bible places a high value on protecting the lives of unborn children.

Before I talk about the election regarding this issue, I need to say that in a congregation this size there are no doubt people here who have had an abortion, or have encouraged someone else to have an abortion. Perhaps you did this not fully understanding what you were doing. Probably you have already asked forgiveness for this through Jesus Christ, and probably you now deeply regret what you did. I am not here to heap additional guilt on you today, but to reassure you of the promise of God that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). That promise is true for all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

But how does the matter of abortion affect the election? Stated simply, the ethical issue in this election is this: Should the government use its power to protect the lives of unborn children?

The answer depends on what you think of the unborn child. If the unborn child is just part of its mother’s body – like your appendix – then the government has no right telling the mother what she can do. It is her decision alone.

But if the unborn child is a separate human being – as these verses indicate – then there is a little person inside the mother’s womb, and that person should be protected.

My conclusion is that government should use its power to protect that unborn child.

Yes, crisis pregnancy counseling will help. Yes, encouraging adoption will help. Yes, supporting single moms will help. We should do all these things, and many of you are doing these things. But there are still little unborn babies whose mothers will not be persuaded by these things, and who will seek to take their child’s life through abortion.

In the U.S. today, there are over 4000 abortions per day. Every year over 1.3 million unborn babies are put to death. [Statistics from <http://www.abortiontv.com/AbortionStatistics.htm> .] Since the Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade in 1973, over 40,000,000 unborn children have been put to death. The oldest of them would be 31 this year. They would be raising their own families, standing here in front of the church dedicating their children to the Lord with the other couples this morning, working in productive jobs, contributing to all levels of society. But they are not here.

I think it is the role of government to protect these little babies. They are helpless, unable to defend themselves. More than protecting anyone else, government should protect these defenseless little babies. Government was given to us by God to restrain evil, to protect the innocent from those who would harm them.

In this election the two parties and the two candidates differ over the role of government in this question. One thinks governments should protect these unborn children, the other thinks the

decision on whether to take the child's life should be left up to its mother. I encourage you to find out their positions, and then decide which candidate you will support.

Something else happened in the past year that is very revealing on this matter of abortion. Congress passed a law called the "Partial birth abortion ban." The term "partial birth abortion" refers to a medical procedure whereby a baby in the 8<sup>th</sup> month, even 9<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy could be aborted in a horrible way. The doctor turns the baby so that its legs and body and arms would come out first. Then with only the head remaining in the mother's womb, the doctor uses a medical instrument to crush the baby's skull, and then he sucks its brains out. Then the baby's head is delivered, and since the baby is dead when it is born, it is not called a murder but an abortion. "Partial birth abortion."

Last year, after trying for seven years, Congress finally passed a law making it illegal to kill little babies in this way. The law was called the "Partial Birth Abortion Ban." On Nov. 5, 2003, the President signed it.

So now is it illegal to crush little babies' skulls before they are delivered? No, because after that law was signed by the President, three different U.S. District Courts declared it "unconstitutional." The courts have done such things again and again with any attempts to restrict abortions. They have decided they have the right to do this even though there is not one word in the Constitution about abortion, and the original authors of the Constitution never would have even dreamed that people should have a right to murder unborn babies. The courts have invented a "right" to abortion, and told us there is nothing that we the people, or any elected body such as Congress, can do about it. Of course these decisions will be appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, and nobody knows now what the Supreme Court will decide.

In the election for President, the two candidates differ over this law. One supported it, the other opposed it. They disagree over the fundamental question of whether government should use its power to prevent such murder of innocent lives.

This is an ethical issue in the current election. It is an issue of tremendous importance for the future of our nation.

### **III. Homosexual marriage: Marriage should only be between one man and one woman**

Another issue in the current election is homosexual marriage.

The Bible teaches that marriage should be between one man and one woman. Here is what we read about the original creation of man and woman:

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife,*

*and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:21-24).

This is the Bible's pattern, and it is the only one that receives God's blessing in the Bible (see Eph. 5:22-33). Marriage should only be between one man and one woman. This is what is best for society, for all cultures, for all people, for all time. It is crucial for bringing up children, because study after study has shown that children should have both a mother and a father for normal, healthy development. In addition, it is necessary for the preservation of the human race, because it is only through the union of a man and a woman that children are born so the human race can be preserved after people today have died. Homosexual marriages, by themselves, bear no children for the next generation.

Now as Christians we should love people who are gay as well as all other people. We should never act with cruelty or unkindness or mockery toward homosexuals, but with kindness, friendship, and love. We should extend to those who are gay the same offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ that we offer to every human being on earth. In fact, Paul noted the fact that there were former homosexuals in the church at Corinth, for after talking about various sins including homosexuality, he said, "and such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The Bible does not say that homosexual conduct is right, however, or an option. The Bible clearly teaches that in God's sight, homosexual conduct is wrong. It is contrary to God's moral standards. Paul writes in Romans:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done (Rom. 1:26-28).

But now someone might say, "What does it hurt anybody else if two people, even two homosexual people, want to live together? Why should the government be involved with this at all? What does *government* have to do with *marriage*?"

Remember 1 Peter 2:14, which we looked at earlier. It says government is "to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." And Romans 13 says the government not to be a terror "to good conduct, but to bad" (Rom. 13:3).

And marriage is not just for Christians, but for all people. This is because God established marriage at the beginning of creation, before there were any Christians or non-Christians on the earth. Marriage is a "creation ordinance" that applies to every culture, every society, all history.

Therefore is it right that the civil government regulates marriage. Government tells society certain rules about what can be counted as a marriage and what cannot. The result of this is that you can't just be married to anybody you want. For example, you can't marry your sister – it's against the law. You can't marry your son or daughter – it's against the law. You can't marry a

twelve-year-old child – it's against the law. And you can't marry somebody who is already married. And you can't marry somebody of the same sex.

Why has our government made these rules? It is because our nation, through our elected representatives, has decided that these rules about marriage are what is best for us as a nation and best for individual persons. These laws regulating marriage are good and right. They use the power of government to restrain evil and to reward good. They actually encourage marriage between a man and a woman, and give certain legal benefits to protect, preserve, and encourage one man and one woman as the only form of marriage that deserves society's approval.

Should government also approve homosexual marriages? No, definitely not. Civil government should not give its *approval* and *encouragement* and *blessing* to an arrangement that God's Word says is morally wrong, and that is destructive to healthy families and destructive to society.

The vast majority of people in the United States agree with this. When given a chance to actually vote on it, and when people are adequately informed about what is at stake, significant majorities vote that marriage should be restricted to one man and one woman – this has happened in California, in Hawaii, in Missouri, and in other places.

But we have an ominous trend from courts in the United States that are increasingly forcing on us homosexual marriage contrary to the will of the people. For example, a few weeks ago the people of Louisiana voted by over 78% not just to enact a law but to amend their state constitution to say that marriage should only be between one man and one woman. You might think that a 78% vote would settle the issue once for all. But within a few days a court struck down the amendment! Never mind the will of the people.

So the courts have become the real problem on the issue of homosexual marriage. Homosexual marriage is being forced on us not by not by Congress or the state legislatures, but by the courts. In Massachusetts, to take another example, it was the Massachusetts Supreme Court that told the legislature that it had to pass a law approving same-sex marriage.

It is unclear what the U.S. Supreme Court will do on the question of same-sex marriage. The Court is almost evenly divided on many issues, and it is on this one too. Remember that a few years ago a case came to the Court in which they were asked to decide whether the Boy Scouts of America should be *forced* to hire homosexual scoutmasters. The Boy Scouts won that case by one vote – it was a 5-4 decision. It is that close.

In another case, perhaps the most egregious example yet of Supreme Court tyranny over the will of the people, the state of Colorado had passed an amendment to their constitution that said they were not going to give special rights and special protections to homosexuals as a special class. Homosexuals still had all the same rights all the rest of us have, but the state as a whole voted they could not be given special status. The issue went to the Supreme Court in the case *Romer v. Evans*, and the Court struck down the amendment to the constitution of Colorado. The Supreme Court refused to let Colorado citizens decide their own laws in this regard.

So what can be done to protect marriage as between one man and one woman? Some people say, “Leave it to the states,” but the examples of Louisiana and Colorado and Massachusetts show that the courts are not allowing states to decide matters related to same-sex marriage. The courts are usurping authority that should not be theirs, and judges are imposing their own opinions on us as law. Therefore to those who say, “Leave this to the states,” I think we must say, “That means leaving it to the courts, not to the people, to decide. And leaving it to the courts means ultimately leaving it to an unpredictable Supreme Court to decide.”

So “leave it to the states to decide” is a shorthand expression for “leave it to the Supreme Court to decide.”

What can we do then? Is there any other way to safeguard marriage between one man and one woman? There is one other way. If we amend the *United States Constitution*, and add a sentence saying that marriage shall only be between one man and one woman, then not even the Supreme Court can strike it down. The Supreme Court must be subject to the explicit wording of the Constitution.

In my opinion, I think this is the only reliable option that remains to us. Because of the unpredictability of the courts, and because they are increasingly trending toward approval of homosexual conduct, I think the only way to effectively protect marriage by law is an amendment to the Constitution. Whether in fact that is the only way left, you will have to decide for yourself.

This issue will also have enormous impact on us as a nation. If homosexual marriage is forced on us by the courts, we cannot now imagine the destructive impact it would have in the lives of our children and grandchildren. It is likely that almost immediately homosexuality would have to be taught in all our schools as morally right – if it’s the law, how can teachers teach that it is wrong? It is likely that day care centers and nurseries and summer camps and sports clubs would be forced to hire homosexuals to work with our children. Certainly homosexual couples could adopt children in all fifty states, and no state could resist this decree. There would be massive gender-identity confusion in millions of young children growing up and forming their own sense of their sexuality.

It might even become illegal to preach a sermon like this one. In Canada right now, it is against the law to make statements in public saying that homosexual conduct is morally wrong. Whether churches and pastors will be exempt from that has not been tested in case law, so nobody knows what will happen. It is possible that a pastor could be fined or put in prison for preaching a sermon like the one I am preaching this morning. Because of the uncertainty, you can imagine the chilling effect that could have on freedom of speech and freedom of religion. What has already happened is that the largest Christian radio ministry in the United States is prohibited from broadcasting on this subject in Canada. Whenever James Dobson’s radio broadcast “Focus on the Family” talks about the issue of homosexuality, it is blacked out throughout Canada and can’t be broadcast – it is against the law of the land. That is how close this issue is to our borders.

The two candidates for president differ on this question. In the U.S. Congress there was a law passed called the “Defense of Marriage Act” that said marriage could only be between one man and one woman, and it passed by large majorities in both the House and the Senate. One of the current candidates for President supported the Defense of Marriage Act and one opposed it. You will have to find out their positions on this question, and then think about your vote in light of what their positions are.

The issue of same-sex marriage is a major moral issue in this election.

#### **IV. Embryonic stem cell research: people should not make the beginnings of little babies for the purpose of harvesting their parts**

Creating more human embryos for their stem cells is making the beginnings of little babies for the purpose of harvesting their parts. Six days after fertilization, stem cells are taken from the embryo and the embryo is destroyed.

Because the Bible views the unborn child as a separate person, even from the time of conception (see Psalm 51:5 above), creating the beginnings of little babies like this and then killing them is contrary to the Bible’s command, “You shall not murder” (Exod. 20:13).

But if we say we cannot do research with stem cells from embryos, does that prevent us from using stem cells to cure disease and disability? No, because there is a good alternative: we can use *adult stem cells* for medical research, because this does not destroy the life of the adult whose cells are used. This kind of stem cell research is already being done, and it already has shown encouraging results. Both candidates agree that adult stem cell research is good and should be encouraged.

In addition, there are already some embryonic stem cells available, cells that reproduce themselves to make more stem cells (not more embryos). These stem cells came from embryos that had already been destroyed before the government had made any decisions about stem cell research, and that research can still go on. Both candidates agree that research should continue on stem cell lines that already exist.

However, because of the Bible’s teaching about the life of an unborn child, I believe it is morally wrong to *create* little embryos just to destroy them for their parts. Do we really think that the rule for scientific research should be “anything goes”? Do we really think that scientific research should have no moral boundaries? Or do we think that there some moral principles that require our society to say to scientists: stop. Go no further. To destroy these tiny little babies is to step over the bounds of what kind of research is morally acceptable.

On this issue, the two candidates for President differ at only one point: whether *government funding* should be given to stem cell research on embryos. One candidate says yes, use government money to go on creating more embryos and harvesting their parts. One candidate says no, we should not use government money for this. It is up to you to find out their positions, and then to think about what kind of world you want to live in in the future, and what kind of

scientific research you think our government should fund and encourage.

## **V. Defense against terrorists: It is right to use military force to defend a nation**

A major question on everybody's mind in this election is the question of defense against terrorist attacks. Here we must recall again that a fundamental responsibility of government is to "punish those who do evil" (1 Pet. 2:14) and thus to protect its citizens.

We now face a unique challenge in our nation, because terrorists who will sacrifice their own lives in killing others cannot be deterred by the usual threat of punishing a criminal after he commits a crime. We used to warn would-be murderers, "If you murder someone we will apprehend you and put you in prison for life and maybe even put you to death." That threat of punishment was an effective deterrent against most people who might commit murder. But today, when terrorists are willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to murder others, that kind of deterrent will not work. Instead, we must catch terrorists and stop them before they commit a deadly attack.

But sometimes Christians wonder, is it right to use military power against such evildoers? Is it right to go after them and even to put them to death if necessary? Or is that against the command, "You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13)? In fact, I saw a headline in *USA Today* where an American soldier in Iraq said, "I just did what the Bible says not to do."

I wished I could have talked to that soldier. I would have told him that the Hebrew word in Exodus 20:13 is *ratsach*, and that word is never used in the Old Testament to refer to killing in war. Other Hebrew words are used instead. The command "You shall not murder" specifically prohibits what we today would call "murder" and what we would call "manslaughter" (taking of human life through carelessness). But it does not say anything about soldiers killing in war to defend their country, or about judicial execution. It is not talking about those things.

Likewise, when Jesus tells us, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39), he is prohibiting personal taking of revenge by individuals, but he is not prohibiting the use of force by people working for the government.

When the Bible does talk about civil government, it says the person working for the government "God's servant for your good" and he is to "bear the sword" (Rom. 13:4). The person working for the government in law enforcement or in the military is a servant who is authorized to carry out "God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4).

Therefore it is morally right for government to use force to oppose violent evil. There is evil in this world that will not be restrained by reason, by foreign aid, by negotiations, or by diplomacy. There is evil in this world, evil that is especially directed against the US today, that can only be restrained by superior force.

In this area, the two candidates agree in principle, but they differ in the extent to which they

would use military power against terrorists.

I bring it up as an ethical issue because sometimes Christians wonder if use of military power at all is somehow non-Christian and unethical. No, God tells governments they are to bear the sword. When they do so to protect us, the Bible says they are God's servants for our good.

## **VI. Supreme Court justices: It is dangerous to have too much power in the hands of a very few people**

People don't often think of the appointment of Supreme Court Justices as an ethical issue, and in the past it would not have been an ethical issue. But today it has become an ethical issue because several decisions of the Supreme Court have now determined the direction of the whole nation's on some of these major ethical questions. The Supreme Court has imposed on our nation new policies on major ethical and religious questions. Thus, the makeup of the Supreme Court has a huge influence on several ethical issues.

In the past few decades, a small majority of our current Supreme Court, and lower courts that follow their example, have gone beyond their Constitutionally-defined task of *interpreting* laws passed by Congress and state legislatures, and have in effect created new laws that have never been passed by any elected body. By this process they have imposed on us decrees that allow abortionists to murder unborn babies (contrary to Exodus 20:13 and Romans 13:9, "you shall not murder"), that protect pornographers who poison the minds of children and adults (contrary to Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet ... your neighbor's wife"; see also Matt. 5:28), that redefine marriage to include homosexual couples (thus giving governmental encouragement to actions that Romans 1:26-28 says are morally wrong), and that banish prayer, God's name and God's laws from public places (thus prohibiting free exercise of religion, and violating Romans 13:3 which says that government should be "not a terror to good conduct, but to bad").

Therefore in several areas, the Supreme Court is now *preventing* our government from doing its job of restraining evil, encouraging those who do good. In this way, it has become a major ethical issue in this election.

In taking to itself the right to decree such policies, the Supreme Court has seriously distorted the system of "checks and balances" intended by the Constitution between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The authors of the Constitution knew from experience the too much power in the hands of any one person (such as the King of England) always led to corruption and to a misuse of that power. Therefore they distributed the power to govern this country to several different groups. They gave some power to the states and other power to the Federal government. In the Federal government itself, they divided the power into three branches of government: the legislative branch (Congress) was to pass the laws, the executive branch (under the President) was to enforce the laws, and the judicial branch (the court system) was to interpret the laws. When one branch started to go astray, the other branches could correct it.

This system of a division of powers seems to me to be consistent with a pattern we also see

in the Bible. Though the Bible reports on many kings, the kings who have unchecked power always seem to go astray – even King David in his sin with Bathsheba, and even wise King Solomon when he took many wives and they turned his heart away from God. The New Testament leaves not one person in charge of the church but a group of twelve apostles, and it assumes a pattern in which not one elder but a plural group of elders is set over individual churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; James 5:14). Power is distributed, not concentrated all in one place.

This was the way our Founding Fathers set up our government to work. To respect the division of powers, the Supreme Court should have stuck to just interpreting laws, not making new laws. But it has gone beyond its original purpose, and has issued decision after decision not based in any law passed by any city council, any state legislature, any Congress – not passed by any elected body accountable to the people. The Supreme Court is not accountable to anyone for its justices are appointed for life. The system of government given to us by our Founding Fathers is broken, and too few people have too much power.

Is there any way to change this? There is one way: appoint justices to the Court who will follow the “original intent” of the Constitution. There are justices like this on the Court now, certainly three of them and perhaps four. But we need at least five, and eventually nine. Then the making of laws and deciding the major issues facing our country will be back where it belongs, with the people of this nation acting through their elected representatives.

The two candidates for President differ dramatically on this issue. One candidate wants to appoint more justices who will go on decreeing from the bench new policies that have not been passed by any elected body. The other candidate is committed to appointing justices who will follow the original intent of the Constitution and just interpret law and not make it (these are judges who have a long track record of being “strict constructionists” or following the “original intent” of the Constitution).

This is now a moral issue *because all the other issues are affected by this*. This question is fundamental to what kind of government we will have in the future. The basic question is whether the courts or the people will rule the United States of America.

In issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, pornography, speaking about God and praying in public places, and dozens of other issues, the question is: who should decide these things for the nation? Nine unelected justices? Or the people as a whole speaking through referendums and through their elected representatives?

This area of Supreme Court justices is as important as any of the others that I talked about, and many people think it is even *more* important, because this issue will likely determine what happens on several of those other issues.

On the question of the kind of justices we will have on the Supreme Court, the candidates have a huge difference over who will control the United States of America for the next 30 or 50 years. In this matter, the future of our country truly is at stake. It is your responsibility to find

out what the candidates think on these things, and to consider your vote in the light of their positions.

## **VII. What should you do?**

If you are a pastor or a Bible study leader, one thing you should do is teach your people on these crucial ethical issues facing our nation.

But I would say to all Christians: You have a great responsibility, the responsibility of helping to determine what kind of nation we will have and what kind of government we will have. With that responsibility comes, I think, a moral obligation to use to investigate the candidates, investigate the issues, and to vote wisely.

You might say, “But it is in God’s hands.” Yes, I agree, God is sovereign over nations. But throughout the Bible God works through means. He works especially through people. And he will work through you as you exercise your right to vote.

Many of you may care enough for our nation, and may be so deeply moved about the historical consequences of this election, that you will decide to do more than vote. You may talk to friends, distribute literature (even this sermon!), or donate time or money to the party of your choice. Some of you may even decide to run for office as a way of serving others and obeying God’s specific call on your life.

Jesus told us, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:19). Being involved in the political process in order to influence our country for good is one practical way of loving your neighbor as yourself.

And then we should all pray. Pray much about this election. Pray that truthful speech and right conduct on both sides would prevail. Pray that people would know accurately the truth about every candidate and every candidate’s true positions. Pray that God would give us good and wise and righteous rulers at all levels of government.

If you are deeply concerned in your spirit about this election, as I am, because you feel so deeply the historic consequences of what will happen, then let that deep concern drive you to cry out to God time and again throughout the day, to cry out that he would intervene and have mercy on us as a nation, and that he would give us good and wise leaders at all levels of government.

Then, when you have prayed, be at peace. Don’t despair. Rest in God. Trust in him. Believe that he will yet do us good, that he will yet have mercy on us for our sins, that he will yet advance the righteous conduct of his kingdom here on earth, here in this nation.

The God who made the heavens and the earth is the one who truly reigns on the earth.

“The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan. 4:17).

“For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up, but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another” (Ps. 75:6-7).

“Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. .... 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Let us pray.