



Hope, Help, and Peacemaking Grounded in God's Word¹

P.O. Box 63

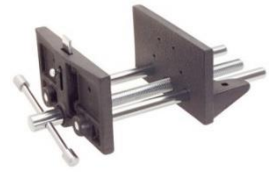
Essex Jct., VT 05453

Christiancounseling@earthlink.net ccmVT.org

June 4, 2015

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:9-10 (ESV)

CHRISTIANS IN THE VISE: A Season for Doing Good



Dear friends,

I'm a Christian and an American, in that order. And like all Christian Americans sometimes I feel like I'm in a vise, with pressure from two directions.

1. **Islamic radicals** hate us and everything we stand for. ISIS wants to remove every trace of Christianity (and every other non-Sunni vestige) from the Mideast and the rest of the world. It has urged Muslims worldwide to attack police and military personnel—a demand that motivated the recent unsuccessful attack on police officers in Boston. Even many law-abiding American Muslims sympathize with the utopian order promised by Sharia law. That is hardly surprising, because...

2. Muslims share with Christians a point of contact in their monotheism and convictions about moral absolutes. Yet we find ourselves immersed in a **post-Christian western culture** that opposes every restraint on personal lifestyle choices and every claim of unchanging truth—except the moral absolutes of stopping climate change and eliminating all gender distinctions. With religious fervor, the high priests of secularism want to sanitize our public institutions from every trace of our Christian heritage.

As a case in point, let's consider the gay marriage juggernaut. My concern here is not just to defend biblical marriage in a culture that has lost its moral bearings. We need to see the larger picture, because the entire debate about sexuality has taken an ominous turn that does not bode well for the church. It is no longer simply about the legitimate bounds of sexual activity; it is about the legitimacy of an *identity*. If I tell a man and woman that I disagree with their choice to live together before marriage, they might politely tell me to mind my own business. I'm just an odd relic from an age gone by, worthy of laughter perhaps, but no real threat. But if I object to the activities of homosexuals and to gay marriage, that's another matter, because they will see it as an attack on their personhood and identity. I've just become the moral equivalent of a white supremacist wearing a white hood and burning crosses on front lawns.²

I try to be optimistic and avoid paranoia, but I'm certain that as the public square becomes more intolerant of dissent, the church will experience more pressure. Court decisions already have steamrolled over the consciences of Christian bakers and photographers by requiring them to provide services for gay weddings. What about pastors? Since they act as agents of the state when they sign marriage licenses, will they be forced to officiate same-sex weddings? Or (close to home for me) will marriage counselors be required to give pre-marital counseling for Jim and Jake, or for Missy and Marcie? As I write, the U.S. Supreme Court is getting ready to rule on the constitutionality of several state laws that define marriage as the union between one man and one woman. That decision will have enormous implications for First Amendment rights and religious freedom in our nation.

¹ About **Christian Counseling and Mediation**: CCM is a non-profit organization of biblical counseling and peacemaking supported by the tax-deductible donations of those who believe in its mission. Our purpose is to help individuals, families, and churches to think and act according to God's Word when facing life's problems and conflicts. Toward this end, we provide private counseling and also seminars on counseling and conciliation topics. This article may be freely copied.

² "To object to heterosexuals having sex outside of marriage is to object to an illegitimate expression of a legitimate identity. To object to gay sex, or gay marriage, is to deny the legitimacy of an identity." Carl R. Trueman, in a penetrating article in *New Horizons*, available at http://opc.org/nh.html?article_id=853

Alright, I'm an American and I vote, and there's an election coming up soon. As Christian citizens we believe the civil state is "God's servant to do you good."³ It certainly has been so here, and we still enjoy high levels of freedom and a level of prosperity the rest of the world envies. So yes, let's get together and try our best to make a positive impact through the political process. But (reality check) politics is such a messy business we might end up cancelling out each other's votes. We live in extraordinary times, with no simple solutions in sight. So, after we wring our hands a bit...now, what are we going to do? How Should We Then Live?



Unlike my ramblings above, the Apostle Paul keeps it simple:

...Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity (lit. "season"), let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Paul makes use of the common biblical imagery of sowing and reaping. Every farmer knows about seasons. There is a window for both sowing and reaping, and he must seize those opportunities at the proper time, or the crop will be lost. "No one can hope to reap the harvest before the time appointed for it by God...But if he does not seize the time appointed him for sowing he will reap no harvest at all."⁴ The spiritual applications are obvious. The church, too, experiences "seasons"—a word carefully chosen, meaning the "right time" that occurs only once before it is lost forever. We must discern and use the opportunities God presents to us in each season, in every situation, whether in "plenty or in want."

What is the reality behind the metaphor? Paul gives to us simple and wonderfully vague instructions: "Do good to all" with special concern for those of the "household of faith." What does that look like? Perhaps financial assistance for the poor. Maybe international missions to proclaim the Gospel and plant churches. Or assisting the church toward spiritual maturity. Or caring for and training children in the home. Or serving in one's worldly occupation "as unto the Lord." As a general rule you strive to serve the Lord well wherever he places you, whether as a dirt-poor slave, or a prosperous merchant like Lydia, or as the influential Erastus who was *director of public works* in a major city, probably Corinth.

I recently stumbled upon a decade-old missions report from Iraq in which the church asked for Bibles to distribute to the needy. These faithful believers seized the opportunity of the moment before that nation descended into chaos. No doubt some of them have been martyred, but it is even more certain that God's Word *will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it*. Not in my lifetime have we witnessed a refugee crisis on such a massive scale in so many places in the world. What opportunities the Lord gives to the church! Think of the thousands of Rohingya Muslims fleeing persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar—and stranded at sea because no nation wants them. How will the church respond? How can it respond? I do not know the answers, but let's pray that some smart and well-placed believers will. The Church will demonstrate that we still believe in moral absolutes because, unlike the crumbling civilizations around us, we serve an eternal God who is over all the nations and over all time. We dwell in eternity right now, and with that perspective of the sure "harvest" to come, we throw ourselves into daily service for our Lord Jesus Christ.

May he be your encouragement in the days ahead as you serve him wherever he places you, making use of every season he grants you.

Andrew A. Selle

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:57-58

³ Romans 13:4; reference also made in this paper to Philippians 4:12, Ephesians 6:5, Acts 16:14; Romans 16:23, and Isaiah 55:11.

⁴ James M. Boice & A. Skevington Wood, *Galatians and Ephesians (in The Expositor's Bible Commentary)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p.98. Paul also understands that much hard work is needed between sowing and harvest—and the twin temptations to grow discouraged and to give up before the harvest season.