

A Response to 'Christianity Today's' Call for the Removal of Trump From Office

Like many evangelicals, I have great respect for Christianity Today. It remains a hallmark, evangelical publication. And although it has leaned leftward in some respects in recent years, it is quite conservative compared to far-left evangelical publications like Jim Wallis' Sojourners. So, it represents a serious moment when Mark Galli, the editor-in-chief of Christianity Today (henceforth CT), writing on behalf of the publication, calls for Trump's removal.

Galli recalls Billy Graham's vision in founding CT—namely, that the magazine “will help evangelical Christians interpret the news in a manner that reflects their faith.” And while CT normally does not focus on political issues, recognizing the diversity within evangelicalism, it “welcomes Christians from across the political spectrum, and reminds everyone that politics is not the end and purpose of our being.”

Nonetheless, the impeachment of the president calls for comment, and so Galli will share his thoughts with conviction and love.

After affirming CT's love and prayers for President Trump, Galli recognizes how the Democrats have “had it out for [Trump] from day one,” acknowledging the partisan, even unfair, nature of the impeachment hearings.

Nonetheless, he writes, “the facts in this instance are unambiguous: The president of the United States attempted to use his political power to coerce a foreign leader to harass and discredit one of the president's political opponents. That is not only a violation of the Constitution; more importantly, it is profoundly immoral.”

Why is it, then, that many evangelicals are not shocked by this? It is because “this president has dumbed down the idea of morality in his administration.”

Not only so, but “[h]is Twitter feed alone—with its habitual string of mischaracterizations, lies, and slanders—is a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused.”

On this basis, Galli argues, Trump should be removed, and no amount of good that he has done can justify his continuing in office with our support. Rather, “The impeachment hearings have illuminated the president’s moral deficiencies for all to see. This damages the institution of the presidency, damages the reputation of our country, and damages both the spirit and the future of our people. None of the president’s positives can balance the moral and political danger we face under a leader of such grossly immoral character.”

Back in 1998, CT said of then-impeached President Bill Clinton, “Unsavory dealings and immoral acts by the President and those close to him have rendered this administration morally unable to lead.”

Consistency calls for them to say the same thing today about President Trump.

And then this impassioned plea: “To the many evangelicals who continue to support Mr. Trump in spite of his blackened moral record, we might say this: Remember who you are and whom you serve. Consider how your justification of Mr. Trump influences your witness to your Lord and Savior. Consider what an unbelieving world will say if you continue to brush off Mr. Trump’s immoral words and behavior in the cause of political expediency. If we don’t reverse course now, will anyone take anything we say about justice and righteousness with any seriousness for decades to come? Can we say with a straight face that abortion is a great evil that cannot be tolerated

and, with the same straight face, say that the bent and broken character of our nation's leader doesn't really matter in the end?"

How should we respond?

First, I'm glad that Galli spoke his mind as an evangelical leader on behalf of CT. Surely, he echoes the sentiments of many others, and the church and world need to hear this perspective too.

It's true that this also speaks of disunity within our ranks. But where is it written that we must have political unity to be one in Christ? That we must have the same view of the president to stand together for the larger cause of the gospel?

As I've said many times before, when we stand before God on that day, He will ask us what we have done with Jesus, not what we have done with Trump.

I'm aware, of course, of how the secular media will spin this. Galli's editorial will be used to deepen the divide between us.

It will be used to make rejection of Trump a litmus test for true evangelical Christianity. (Ironically, in other circles, it is support of Trump that serves as a litmus test of one's true faith.) It will be used to discourage evangelicals from voting for Trump, if not to shame them from voting for him.

But again, because a substantial minority of evangelicals concur with Galli's words, they needed to be spoken.

Second, there are many evangelicals who do not believe the Democratic charges against Trump and who see the impeachment as a witch hunt and a sham. (See this article from my Stream colleague John Zmirak for a clear, philosophical perspective.) In their minds, the charges are hardly "unambiguous." Quite

the contrary.

If, then, the president did not abuse his power as president, does Galli believe that Trump should be removed from office because of his offensive tweets and comments?

It is one thing to urge evangelicals to say, "Let's put forward an alternate candidate during the Republican primaries who will more closely mirror our values." It is another thing to say the president should be removed from office. For what, based on the Constitution?

Third, I share Galli's concern that we evangelicals can seem more closely aligned with the president than with the Lord, something I have written and spoken about time and again. (Most recently, see [here](#).) Have we sold our integrity and our ethics in support of a strong-willed president who fights for our sacred causes and gets in the trenches on our behalf?

At the same time, we are fooling ourselves if we think that the world will suddenly listen to us if we call for Trump's removal. Not a chance.

Galli might be the talk of leftwing media today (which I do not believe was his goal in writing). But tomorrow they will view him as just another bigoted, hateful, homophobic, misogynist who opposes women's rights and believes in an antiquated book.

He wonders if anyone will "take anything we say about justice and righteousness with any seriousness for decades to come" if we don't seek to remove Trump. The answer is that it depends on how we conduct ourselves.

We can support the president for the very real good he does do, much of it on behalf of causes that are of great importance to evangelicals. Religious liberty really does matter. Protecting babies in the womb really does matter. Helping the poor get better jobs really does matter. These,

too, are issues of justice and righteousness.

We simply need to be consistent when it comes to our ethics, meaning, we call balls and strikes with fairness and impartiality, and we call for ethical behavior as loudly as we call for righteous legislation. Why can't we do both?

I agree with Galli that, under the current administration, there has been a dumbing down of the idea of morality. And it's true that many evangelicals now wink at things that once grieved them, thankful to have a man like Trump who will stand up and fight (many would say, "Finally!").

But that doesn't mean we remove him for his alleged dumbing down of morality. It means we are careful not to lose our own morality in the process.

Fourth, I believe those on Galli's side need to listen to Trump-supporting evangelicals who feel that, despite his evident shortcomings, the man has been a God-send.

During a recent trip to California, a pastor spoke to me about the very real threat to religious liberties Christians were facing there, among other, major problems. He was convinced that, with Hillary Clinton as president, irreparable damage would have been done and that Trump has served as a strong anti-Hillary leader.

"Like a wedge in the door," I suggested to him, and he agreed.

But he also agreed that the wedge can only do so much. Only the church, through the gospel and with God's empowerment, can open the door and turn the tide.

That is where we must put our emphasis: living as Jesus would have us live, with politics an important and yet much more distant priority for most of us.

My proposal today for my fellow-evangelicals is this: Let us each humble ourselves before God and pray, "Father, what is

Your heart in all this? And what would You have me do? Show me my blind spots, and strengthen my convictions when they reflect Yours. I only want Your will.”

Then, let’s have honest conversations with our brothers and sisters who differ with us, starting with this: “Please share your perspective with me. I want to understand where you’re coming from.”

Then, when they’re done and you’ve heard their heart, ask if you can share yours.

Finally, go back to prayer and meditation on the Word.

The stakes are very high, and our nation is dangerously divided. Let us be sure that, as God’s people, we do not follow suit.