

An Open Letter to Jerry Falwell Jr.

Dear Mr. Falwell,

In light of your not-unexpected endorsement of Donald Trump for president, I have some candid questions for you.

But I write with the utmost respect for Liberty University and with real appreciation for your own labors, not to mention those of your esteemed father.

I raise these questions for you as well as for other evangelicals who also support Mr. Trump for president, but in doing so, I recognize that there is far more that unites us than divides us, and I do not intend to lose sight of that.

That being said, my concerns are very deep, addressing the fundamental questions of: 1) What are America's most pressing needs right now? And 2) What qualities should we look for when voting for the President of the United States?

You had previously pointed to your father's support of Ronald Reagan, noting that, "When he walked into the voting booth, he wasn't electing a Sunday school teacher or a pastor or even a president who shared his theological beliefs; he was electing the president of the United States with the talents, abilities and experience required to lead a nation. After all, Jimmy Carter was a great Sunday school teacher, but look at what happened to our nation with him in the presidency. Sorry."

So on the one hand, you have stressed that as evangelical Christians we can back someone who does not share our theological beliefs as long as that person has "the talents, abilities and experience required to lead a nation."

At the same time, you stated in your endorsement that Mr.

Trump is “a successful executive and entrepreneur, a wonderful father and a man who I believe can lead our country to greatness again,” adding, “In my opinion, Donald Trump lives a life of loving and helping others as Jesus taught in the great commandment.”

Are you, then, seriously endorsing Mr. Trump as a man following the example of Jesus?

One colleague wrote to me after learning of your endorsement, saying, “I just don’t understand how a true Christian can so easily dismiss all this. ... Wife posed nude, married three times, nasty, crude, cruel, proud, dishonest, manipulative, casino owner and promoter, bankrupted several companies, ‘hates’ abortion but agrees to make it legal, gutter mouth ... and on and on and on. It’s not necessary for the president to be a Christian, but doesn’t integrity and a moral compass count for the highest office in the land? How about someone who can reign in their tongue?”

Conservative Christian leader John Stemberger has raised similar concerns in detail, and I have asked whether Mr. Trump’s words can be trusted based on his consistent flip-flopping, right until now. (It appears that he has changed political parties at least 5 times. Are you sure you can trust where he stands today?)

Mr. Falwell, in light of Mr. Trump’s attacks on those he happens to dislike at the moment—be it Megyn Kelly, Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush or Rosie O’Donnell—attacks in which he behaves more like a spoiled, petulant child than a presidential candidate, how can you point to his Christlike character?

I cite this as one small example out of many, but isn’t it true that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks? And does it not concern you that it seems that no matter what he says or does, his followers still back him?

I’m sure Mr. Trump can be a very kind man, and I’ve been told

that, in private, he is very genuine and caring. And I don't doubt that he helps lots of people with his wealth, and it's great to hear that his kids love and respect him. But to extol his allegedly Christlike ways is, in my view, quite absurd.

You might say, "But this is where you're missing the point. He is the man for the job, the man who can get things done and restore our nation to greatness."

Yet this is where I have my greatest issue with evangelicals backing Donald Trump.

Simply stated, I firmly believe that our greatest problems are moral and spiritual, not economic or otherwise, and to think that we can make America great again by securing our borders, defeating ISIS and rebuilding our economy, without first addressing the moral rot in our society, is to deceive ourselves gravely.

Donald Trump is hardly the man to address America's moral demise!

Proverbs 14:34 states, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." This is true for all peoples and all nations, and without addressing our deepest issues first, we will be guilty of repeating the error of Israel's false prophets who superficially treated the fracture of their people (see Jer. 6:14; 8:11).

Looking at some of our most pressing moral issues, when it comes to same-sex "marriage," Mr. Trump has stated that it's the law of the land whether he likes it or not. In contrast, a number of the other Republican candidates have made clear that they will work against this unjust Supreme Court ruling.

Similarly, while we have a number of true, proven pro-life Republican candidates, Mr. Trump can hardly be viewed as a pro-life champion, despite his recent editorial touting his

pro-life sympathies.

Our next president could appoint as many as four new Supreme Court justices, and those justices could potentially shape the nation for decades to come.

Will Mr. Trump cut a deal with his opponents when it comes to appointing justices, or will he appoint righteous justices who will help restore our country's moral sanity? Can you really say you're confident you know what he will do?

You stated that, "He cannot be bought, he's not a puppet on a string like many other candidates ... who have wealthy donors as their puppet masters."

But here too you appear to have missed something of great importance.

Perhaps Mr. Trump is not beholden to his donors—at least, not at this early stage of the campaign—but he does seem beholden to the gods of money and fame, and he is as driven by material wealth and popularity as any candidate in memory (perhaps even more than any candidate in memory).

Do not these gods blind one's eyes even more than gifts from wealthy donors? And do you have concrete proof that all the other candidates have strayed from their convictions in order to gain financial support? It would seem clear that some of them have done quite the opposite.

It is absolutely true that we are not electing a pastor or priest or Pope. But it is of the utmost importance that our president be a man of integrity, a man of strong moral character, a man who can address the most fundamental needs of our nation.

Nothing I have seen or heard in recent months has given me any indication that this describes Donald Trump.

Rush Limbaugh has pointed to the new divide between

nationalism and conservatism, with Donald Trump being viewed as the nationalist/populist leader and Ted Cruz being viewed as the conservative leader.

For me, as an evangelical follower of Jesus, the contrast is between putting nationalism first or the kingdom of God first. From my vantage point, you and other evangelicals seem to have put nationalism first, and that is what deeply concerns me.

Accordingly, if we put the kingdom of God first (by which, of course, I do not mean trying to impose a theocracy but rather putting biblical values first), we can also rebuild the economy, address the immigration issue and strengthen our national defense.

But if we put nationalism first, the most pressing issues will be relegated to second place, and it will be a distant second place at that. And like Israel of old, we will look for a king to make us great rather than looking to the Lord.

I welcome your response to these questions and concerns however you choose to respond—in writing, on my radio show or in private—and I pray that regardless of our differences, God will use you to draw Mr. Trump to Jesus as his Savior and Lord.