

Russell Moore: I Didn't Mean to Slam Every Evangelical Who Voted for Trump

If Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, didn't know what it was like before, he surely knows now what it's like to have his words taken out of context and used as weapon against himself.

Monday, he published a blog post in which he reflected upon the 2016 election. It was shared with *The Wall Street Journal*, which published a largely reactionary piece with the headline: "Baptist figure faces backlash over his criticism of Donald Trump."

In reality, the blog post was offering sound advice for Christians about how we need to proceed in the days, weeks and months ahead. He offered three main suggestions:

- *First, try to see where there are misunderstandings. ... For many of you, you may find yourself in situations where you haven't been clear in what you're saying and what you're not saying. I know I have. That's true not only in an election year but anytime. Try to find out when those times are.*
- *Second, as Christians, particularly as it comes to this election, we need to make sure we have empathy for one another ... This is important because, regardless of which side you're on, as Christians, we are called to honor everyone (1 Pet. 2:17), and we ought to take the time to understand and not caricature one another.*
- *Third, don't ignore your conscience. Regardless of how we voted, I think we can all agree that 2016 has been fraught with ugliness, much of which couldn't be left*

unchecked. In my personal situation, there were some outrageous moments in the midst of the campaign that I felt compelled by my job to address.

To those who felt he had maligned them during the course of the election, Moore offered a sort-of apology:

I remember one situation where I witnessed a handful of Christian political operatives excusing immorality and confusing the definition of the gospel. I was pointed in my criticisms and felt like I ought to have been. But there were also pastors and friends who told me when they read my comments they thought I was criticizing anyone who voted for Donald Trump. I told them then, and I would tell anyone now: If that's what you heard me say, that was not at all my intention, and I apologize. There's a massive difference between someone who enthusiastically excused immorality and someone who felt conflicted, weighed the options based on biblical convictions, and voted their conscience. In a heated campaign season focused on sound bites, this distinction can get lost in the headlines, so it bears repeating.

Moore said the 2016 election reminded him, somewhat, of the divisiveness created by the Vietnam War. He said Christians must avoid two big mistakes many made back then:

One mistake would be for those families to remain divided, and not speaking. The other mistake would have been for those families to conclude that the way to avoid such division in the future is to stop worrying about matters as important as war and peace, life and death.

The same could be true this year. On the one hand, we could conclude that it's just not worth ever talking about issues of character and conscience, of what it means to repent and believe in Christ, of human dignity for all people. That would be a mistake. The opposite tragedy would be never to

move past election day and constantly war with one another about who was right in the midst of the campaign. Too much unites us as Christians, and too much is at stake with the issues we all care about to be permanently entrenched in intramural warfare.

Moore said now that the election is over, Christians “owe it to Donald Trump to pray for him” in accordance with 1 Timothy 2, and to “give honor to whom it is due” in accordance with Romans 13. He said, “as responsible citizens,” Christians owe it to the president-elect to “work with him for the common good everywhere possible.”