

Bishop Challenges Bible-Believing Republicans to 'Humanize Enemies'

Jonah was a prophet typical of many believers today who wrap their faith in nationalism and/or patriotism to the point where it supersedes obedience to the will and heart of God.

The Assyrian nation (modern-day Iraq) had harassed and fought against Israel and in 721 BC took the land of the ten tribes of Israel. Jonah was called by God to preach the gospel in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh either before or right after this period of disinheritance. Jonah initially refused to go because of his hatred toward the Assyrians; this would be like a Jewish rabbi being sent to Berlin to preach repentance to Hitler during the Holocaust, or like an American evangelist being sent to preach to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida in Pakistan, or to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

This lesson from the book of Jonah is also preached by Jesus in the Beatitudes of the gospels when He taught us to "love our enemies" (Matt. 5). This is not just referring to our personal enemies but also our national enemies. It is hard for the human soul to believe that God actually loves our enemies and those people responsible for atrocities committed against humanity. But we have to realize that God is bigger than our prejudice and our pain! (For example, how do you think the families of the victims of the "Son of Sam" shooter David Berkowitz feel when they hear him giving his testimony of his conversion to Christianity?)

This is not to say that a nation never has a right to go to war against another nation (refer to the just war theory first taught by St. Augustine in the 5th century), or that an individual never has the right to defend his or her liberty,

property, life and family. But it does mean that, given the chance to be an ambassador of God's love and reconciliation after or during such conflicts, committed Christ-followers need to be ready and willing to forgive and bring the message of God's reconciliation to anyone He calls us to!

That being said, when it comes to radical obedience to the gospel, we need to start humanizing our enemies so we can pray and reach out to them for the sake of the gospel. Case in point, I am getting so tired of hearing Christians complaining and/or being scared of Muslims immigrating to this country from the Middle East and/or North Africa instead of looking at this as an opportunity for the church to reach out to them and show them the love of God for the sake of their salvation.

Does it occur to any of these so-called Bible believers that God so loved the world (John 3:16) that He would cause certain hard-to-reach people groups to leave their homeland (like Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees in Genesis 11, which is modern-day Iraq) for a nation replete with evangelical Christianity where the gospel is freely preached on the airwaves and streets?

What if it were you and your family who was born in Iran, Saudi Arabia or other nations where it is illegal to convert a Muslim to Christianity? Wouldn't you be thankful that, in the providence of God, He led you to immigrate to the United States so you could more readily hear the gospel? I believe it is high time we begin to live out the gospel message and "humanize" the people of the world, even those we deem a threat to our national security, heritage and faith.

We also need to look for opportunities to go against our normal (and understandable) nationalistic tendency in order to build bridges and demonstrate the love of God to those least expecting it from us. For example, days after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, I went into two local mosques wearing my clergy collar, took the shoes off my feet out of

respect, and spoke to the imams and told them I am not blaming every Muslim for the attacks, then offered to help them as a community leader if there was any harassment or persecution from non-Muslim neighbors. The imam in the first mosque started weeping and hugged me and all those surrounding him in his office started weeping and greatly appreciated my gesture as a minister of the gospel of Christ.

I was angry against Islamists and outraged over the thousands who lost their lives on Sept. 11, 2001, just like the rest of America, but when God laid upon my heart to go to these mosques I had to go and replace my righteous anger with Christ-centered agape love for missiological reasons.

As much as I love and respect the United States and appreciate our Christian heritage and the great sacrifice the military makes every day to protect our liberties, I cannot clothe the gospel with the American flag and put my patriotism before my role as an ambassador of Christ.

Some Challenges for Bible-believing Republicans

As a person who usually votes Republican when it comes to national elections (in local, city and state politics I work with many Democrats and thus am an independent) I have to be careful not to affiliate with any particular political party to the extent that I no longer vote my values according to Scripture.

Some challenges for Bible-believing Republicans include the (perceived) tendency of Republican presidents to expand American influence by use of the military, even if it means going to war when we have not been attacked or without a proven threat to our national security.

(I was against the nation-building strategy of the second Iraq war because I didn't think we could build a nation with a culture that was not ready for electing proper leaders through the democratic process, although I wasn't opposed to specific

military strikes if it was deemed that Saddam Hussein was an imminent threat or had something to do with the terrorist attacks of 9/11.)

I am a proponent of Reagan's "peace through strength," but I also believe we have to be careful to steward that strength in a very wise, prudent and just manner.

Republican believers also have to be wary of the intentional decision by the party to virtually give up on the black vote and not even reach out to areas dominated by blacks. This inaction can easily lend itself to racism, although it is justified by strategists as a pragmatic approach due to limited time and resources during election campaigns.

Republicans are also generally strong pro-lifers when it comes to the unborn. But we need to be just as zealous in our pro-life approach for the post-birth children who are at risk. That being said, the "trickle-down" economic theory of Paul Ryan doesn't go far enough for Bible-believing Christians because, biblically, it is not just about profit and creating jobs but about making sure the poor have every opportunity to break the cycles of poverty through micro-finance loans, job training, education and equipping capable employees with the means to start their own businesses. Without intentionality toward empowering the poor, they will continually hold menial jobs that will never generate wealth to break poverty for future generations!

Some Challenges for Democratic Believers

When it comes to the pro-choice, same-sex marriage of the national platform of the Democratic Party, many believe it is an oxymoron to say *Christian* and *Democrat* in the same sentence! While there are many "blue dog" pro-life and pro-biblical marriage Democrats, the vast majority merely go along with far-left liberal progressive beliefs that are obviously anti-biblical in nature.

There are also many individual city and state Democrats who are very conservative but run as Democrats because it is virtually impossible for a Republican to be elected in many urban cities of the Northeast.

Thus it is a great challenge to remain faithful to a party that continues to slide further and further away from the biblical view of the sanctity of life and marriage which, even before economics, are the building blocks of civilization.

Economically, the tendency for many to emphasize short-term entitlements that make the poor dependent on big government and keep them in cycles of poverty versus the emphasis on long-term entrepreneurial empowerment should also challenge Bible-believing Democrats. This is especially important in view of the parable of the talents, when Jesus says that God will take away from the one who has not and give to the one who will invest and be productive (Matt. 25:14-30).

In summary, whether we are patriots who are proud of our national heritage (that's me!), Democrats or Republicans, Christ-followers need to make sure they are first and foremost putting the teachings of Scripture above national and/or party affiliations so that we do not compromise and disobey the first commandment from Yahweh "you shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3).