

Would Jesus Remain Silent On Social Issues?

Relating his stance on same-sex marriage, a New York City megachurch pastor has on more than one occasion publicly claimed that Jesus only dealt with the root issues of the heart—not merely the symptoms of sin. Jesus never took a stand on the moral issues of His day; thus, we should not make general statements regarding important moral issues of society, but only deal with these controversial issues in personal dialogue.

I want to make a few observations regarding his statements.

From a practical perspective, many pastors with large ministries who rent in liberal cities such as NYC are very careful what they say regarding same-sex marriage and other moral issues because they can easily be thrown out of spaces they are renting. Thus, in their minds, they have to be more cautious than ministries who own their own buildings. However, this caution should never become a doctrinal issue for the church at large; it should merely be a method and or strategy for one particular church or pastor (whether they are right or wrong to take this posture).

Regarding the moral issue at hand—do you really think Jesus, if He were here physically ministering today, would not take a position on social issues such as slavery (as evangelical Christian William Wilberforce did and eradicated the slave trade in the British Empire in the 19th century, or as Charles Finney did, who was an avowed abolitionist in the 19th century ardently preaching against slavery during the Second Great Awakening)?

Was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrong to use his pulpit to fight racism and launch the Civil Rights Movement?

What about today? Would Jesus not preach against the sex slave trade or the abuse of children today? What about the Holocaust? Was Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrong for speaking out politically against Hitler for exterminating the Jews and forcing Fascism on the nation? Would the early Church apostles have fought abortion if they were in ministry today?

It is easy to know the answer to this since, the oldest extra-biblical document we have on record is the "Didache" which is a short treatise giving the early church guidelines for faith and practice. In this document that many scholars date to the middle of the first century A.D., the church took a stand against abortion and infanticide. (Yes, the church has historically been publicly vocal against abortion for over 2000 years since the Roman Empire practiced abortion and infanticide!)

Furthermore, the early church preached against slavery and even released slaves in the presence of the bishops during worship services during the second and third centuries. Even John the Baptist was put in jail because he preached against all the evil things King Herod was doing (Luke 3:18,19)! Hence, John was beheaded for politically incorrect preaching and prophetically calling out his earthly ruler!)

Therefore, since same sex marriage has ramifications for all family life, every time a pastor preaches on the biblical framework for marriage and family it flies in the face of culture, even if alternative forms of marriage are not mentioned!

In the Greco-Roman culture of Jesus' time, all forms of sexual expression outside the norms of scripture were rampant! However, Jesus' primary purpose was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 10:5,6). His main concern was not with the majority culture of Rome but to reveal Himself as Messiah to the Jews—which is why He did not have to deal directly with all issues related to human sexuality (since it was not a big

issue for the Jews of His day). However Paul the apostle did numerous times since he was called to minister to the Gentiles (read Romans 1:24-31, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Furthermore, although Jesus did not focus on the social issues of the (Gentile) Roman Empire, His very essence and ministry was in and of itself a major threat and an affront to Rome! Not many understand the fact that Jesus was crucified because He wasn't politically correct since His claim to be King of kings threatened the powers of the Roman Caesar—which is why the early church was also persecuted (read Acts 17:5-7). Hence, the real reason our Lord was executed and the early church was persecuted was not for religious reasons (because, as a polytheistic society the Roman Empire tolerated millions of gods)—it was due to political reasons!

Related to Israel, Jesus did indeed deal with controversial moral issues: like the issue of marriage, adultery and divorce (Matt. 19:3-9), greed and money (Luke 12:13-21), and the true meaning of the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). As a matter of fact, Jesus said in Matthew 19 that marriage is between one man and one woman, thus showing the biblical template regarding the distinction between the genders and their complimentary role as one flesh in marriage.

Furthermore, Jesus did not operate in a vacuum in isolation but pointed to the Old Testament writings to affirm His legitimacy (Matthew 5:17-19). Thus, to ask the question related to the title of this article we need to include the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writings that practically applied the teachings of Jesus.

For example, the first two chapters of the book of the Old Testament prophet Amos is a current events commentary regarding the sins of the surrounding nations—all the OT prophets from Samuel to Elisha dealt with social/moral issues—even John the Baptist explained to his adherents that true repentance meant they were to cease from receiving bribes

and extortion (Luke 3) which were symptomatic of the social and moral decay of their culture and not just an issue of personal heart transformation.

If you are silent as a pastor and never take a position then your silence on such a major issue as same-sex marriage can be interpreted by many in the congregation that you are condoning it! Also, some may even accuse the silent pastor of deceiving same sex partners who, after climbing the ladder of church affiliation are then told (in a private conversation) that they do not qualify because of their sexuality and or same-sex marriage. (One prominent pastor I know almost had a major lawsuit on his hands a few years ago because he was silent regarding same-sex marriage and two of his same-sex leaders announced they were getting married to each other!)

Because most pastors are silent and erroneously separate the gospel from the kingdom and culture—we have left society to be framed without a biblical template. Whatever area the church does not influence will come back to try and destroy us—there is no neutrality in this world!

In conclusion, it seems obvious to me that Jesus is calling for the church to lovingly serve their cities without compromising their prophetic call as salt and light to this world.

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