

10 Political Things You Can't Do If You Follow Jesus

Rev. Yme Woensdregt

Two weeks ago, I had some fun with a top ten list about things you can't do if you claim to follow Jesus. Last week, I made the argument that Christian faith is never merely a personal thing; it's also political. Christian faith has much to say about how human beings live together, and how we manage relationships within a society. Love your neighbour, for example.

Here's a beginning of a list of ten things you can't enforce as government policy if you claim to follow Jesus. It's not a complete list, but it's a pretty good place to start.

10) Force your religious beliefs and practices on others.

Jesus taught us to love. Love, by definition, opposes any form of compulsion. Love never coerces. That includes the whole notion of theocracy which I argued against last week. If you try to use the government to compel people to practice your spiritual beliefs, you might be the reason baby Jesus is crying. Christian groups must stop trying to use the powers of government to impose a Christian form of sharia law.

9) Advocate for war.

Jesus was called the Prince of Peace for a reason. Sure, you can quote, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword," and even two or three other verses, but they don't hold a candle to the overwhelming abundance of verses where Jesus speaks about peace and peacemaking. It's funny how things keep coming back to that concept of love. You just can't love someone and kill them. In the end, love wins. In the early church, many Christians faced martyrdom because they refused to serve as soldiers.

8) Favour the rich over the poor.

Favouring the rich over the poor is a slap in the face of Jesus the poor peasant. It is bad enough when we allow the rich to take advantage of the poor, but when we write laws to protect the privileged position of the rich, we've gone over the line. Indeed, part of the subversive message of the Bible is that God favours the least, the poor, those who live on the margins of society.

7) Cut funding that hurts the least of these.

This is related to #8. Favouring the rich is despicable, but when politicians and leaders start actively hurting the poor, it's a whole lot worse than despicable. When Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do it to me," he meant it. When you cut funding and it hurts people, you are hurting Jesus.

6) Let people go hungry.

Yes, this one is on both lists. Hunger is both a spiritual issue and a political issue. One of the wise sayings of Gandhi was, "There are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." Politically, hunger causes problems with education, production, and civil behaviour that are all necessary for a successful city, province, and nation. More importantly for Christians, Jesus said when we feed the hungry, we are feeding him.

5) Withhold healthcare from people.

Health care is not just a necessity. It is a right. We can't put a two-tier medical system in place which favours those who can pay for health care. We can't cut benefits for those who are poor. Canadians pride ourselves on our universal health care system, but studies show that about 20% of Canadians don't have adequate medical coverage — supplementary benefits such as prescription drugs, glasses, dental care, and physiotherapy.

4) Limit the rights of any particular group of people.

Jesus loves everybody. He doesn't love me, or my kind, or my group, best. If you spend any time reading the Bible, you know that all are made in God's image. Any law that doesn't treat people equally is as good as thumbing your nose at God.

3) Turn away immigrants.

One of the overarching themes of Scripture is that we are "to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger in the gate." In ancient times, these three groups were the most vulnerable in society. Indeed, the whole story of our faith is a story of people who came from somewhere else: Abraham and Sarah packed up their belongings and moved to a strange place. Moses, Miriam, and Aaron led a nation out of Egypt into the desert and to a new land. Jesus himself was a refugee as an infant, fleeing the persecution of a paranoid king. And he died at the hands of an imperial governor who didn't know what else to do but execute him at the urging of religious leaders.

In one way, we are all immigrants. If you're not Indigenous, your ancestors came from somewhere else, whether it be Europe, Asia, Africa, or South America. To turn immigrants away is a hypocritical act since we're all from somewhere else. At worst, we betray our ancestors and our God.

2) Devalue education.

Proverbs tells us that God delights in wisdom. Indeed, wisdom is better than gold. When you look at the percentage of our budget that goes to education and at what is happening with student loans, it's becoming clearer that our governments no longer delight in wisdom. In some places, the government is actively working against a fulsome education, limiting what students can learn about history and our society.

1) Support capital punishment.

Jesus was an innocent man, executed by the state. We don't support state-sanctioned killing, but we are moving inexorably closer to more draconian measures to punish criminals. It's time for another way.

I know politics is a messy business. But these are basic values.

Finally, a bonus. If you follow Jesus, you can't do almost anything being done by politicians such as Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, and the disgraced and disgraceful former President, Donald Trump. They have shown themselves to be enemies of the gospel.