

Answering Caesar

Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesars, and give to God what is God's" Matt 22:21

By Gregory Schmidt

The Alaska Supreme Court has minimized the impact of marriage amendment to our State Constitution by conveying the benefits of marriage to homosexual (and only homosexual) unmarried couples. Their decision raises troubling questions for Christians. Front and center is how believers should respond to government when the state diminishes or counterfeits something that God himself created -- here something as fundamental as marriage.

Since the founding of our republic, our government (Caesar) has worked well because it has generally respected the foundational areas that belong to God and has upheld the moral order. Murder and stealing are illegal under Civil Law just as taught in the Bible. Relationships that scripture defines and that civil law upholds have been respected, as government has helped Christians serve mutual interests, and Christians were happy to accept this help.

Sometimes, however, Caesar reaches to take what belongs to God. When this occurs, the believer is called to respond.

Scriptural direction to believers about how to interface with civil government is limited. Jesus provided the guidance above in response to a question about taxes; similarly Paul directed that civil authorities are to be obeyed. In a democracy, ultimate political power rests with the people themselves. Such a government derives its power "from the consent of the governed" and exists at the pleasure of the people. Although not directly mentioned in scripture, because such a government did not exist at that time we're called to use scripture as our guide in relating to our government, just as in relating to each other. Jesus' direction regarding Caesar certainly applies to our involvement with our democratic form of government. Believers should answer the call to vote on critical issues and be involved in our society as "We the People" go about governing ourselves.

If it be asked, What is the most sacred duty and the greatest source of our security in a Republic? The answer would be, An inviolable respect for the Constitution and Laws - the first growing out of the last. . . . A sacred respect for the constitutional law is the vital principle, the sustaining energy of a free government. -- Alexander Hamilton, 1794

Historic examples of Christians responding to Caesar's over-reaching abound. In 1871, Chancellor Otto von Bismark launched his "Kulturkampf" in an effort to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church in the German empire. All Christians felt the restrictions, as clergy were prohibited from discussing political issues from the pulpit; four years later, marriages were required to be performed as civil, rather than church ceremonies. These restrictions led to an awakening of people of faith through the "Center Party", that ultimately evolved into the "Christian Democrat" party. Christians who involved themselves in government recovered the sacred vows of marriage from the grasp of the state.

Over a century later in our own country, homosexual marriage was forced upon the people of Massachusetts via a 4-3 decision of their Supreme Court. Civic-minded Christians have struggled mightily in that state in an effort to allow it's residents the chance to vote on a Constitutional Amendment. In the meantime, homosexual activists have demanded that the church conform. One example is the requirement that Catholic Charities that place children for adoption abandon their scriptural beliefs and recognize the State's definition of marriage. The Archdiocese of Boston struggled with this and did the only thing it could do by closing the doors of its adoption agency. No one could seriously argue that a homosexual married couple was inconvenienced by going to another of the multitude of secular adoption agencies. Nevertheless, the voices that demand tolerance for themselves and respect for diversity silenced the diverse opinions of those who disagreed with the courts new definition of marriage. The welfare of those most vulnerable, the hard to place children who had been placed with adoptive parents so effectively for over one hundred years, did not stand in the way of homosexual activists or the ideological Massachusetts court. The freedom of Catholic believers to practice their faith was withdrawn -- by the very

court system the people had entrusted to interpret their laws.

Let's look at our own situation in Alaska. Our Constitution, the Supreme Law of the Land, states that "all political power rests with the people, and is to be exercised for their benefit." Alaskan's voted overwhelmingly in 1998 to define marriage as between one man and one woman. The Alaska Supreme Court based its decision granting Same-Sex Benefits on the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. The court's opinion acknowledged that "The state equal protection clause cannot override more specific provisions in the Alaska Constitution." But, the Court went on to effectively give little regard for the express will of the people in the Marriage Amendment. In arriving at the conclusion that those who engage in homosexual activity and declare themselves committed must receive taxpayer funded benefits, the court equated unmarried same-sex relationships with married couples and then used the fact that the Marriage Amendment leaves the issue of marriage benefits to the democratic process as the force of their conclusion that they were free to close the democratic process. As a result, behavior that previous generations did not even speak of was affirmed and subsidized via government policy. Those who say "this is no big deal" fail to understand that the court has trampled the Constitution and effectively created counterfeit marriage for homosexuals, albeit under a different name.

There should be no doubt about the next shoe to drop. Public policy, as adopted by Caesar for his employees, will set precedent for the next case. Under the banner of the "implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing", the court will order private employers (Christian or not) to provide the same benefits for both the spouses of married employees and the partners of unmarried homosexual employees. In Canada, and the Netherlands pastors have been prosecuted under "hate crime" speech restrictions for teaching Biblical truth on homosexuality. What is to prevent similar restrictions from becoming reality in Alaska? As in Massachusetts, dissent might not be tolerated. What are we, as responsible citizens and followers of Christ, to do?

First, as believers, we must pray. As was recognized by our founding fathers, this experiment in democracy relies upon the providence of God's divine hand. We must pray for God's wisdom and blessing.

Secondly, we are to practice love as called for in Matthew 22:37-39, where Jesus identifies the greatest commandment. We should also recognize that we are all sinners, saved by grace. The homosexual's sin may look different from mine, but I need God's mercy every bit as much, and have no room for self-righteousness. We must also be wise and look beyond cliché's such as "love the sinner, hate the sin." Practitioners now often identify themselves with the sin of homosexual activity, and now say "if you hate the sin, you hate me!" We must recognize their claim as false -- we "love the sinner and hate the sin" every day in our own lives.

Homosexual activity is clearly labeled as sin throughout scripture. (Romans 1:26-27) When our own state court tosses the will of the people and forces each of us to affirm such relationships through our taxes and court-mandated regulations, Caesar is clearly out of line with the powers delegated to him. It is the duty of everyone who claims to be an authentic believer, particularly those who care about their fellow man, and about the society we live in, to engage in this issue. It needs discussion within our congregations, at work, and among age-appropriate family members.

Finally, as Christians, we must take seriously the call to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and give to God what is God's. We are not threatened with being thrown to the beasts in the arena, just with being forced to affirm and subsidize behavior which is contrary to scripture. Our elected representatives have thrown the issue back to us, with the advisory vote on April 3rd. Believers should be encouraged to be worthy of self government, and take time to get to the polls. We must vote our conscience, as guided by our scriptures.

Gregory Schmidt is on the Board of Directors of the Alaska Family Council

The opinion of the Court may be found and read by all Alaskans at <http://www.touchngo.com/sp/html/sp-5950.htm>