

# Voices: Living faithfully in the public square today

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What is the role of Christians in the public square? For years, we have believed we possessed cultural power. But we no longer command privilege in society. Our calling is not to win a culture war, but to be faithful witnesses and to seek the common good.



Zac Harrel

We don't seek to "take our country back," because that is not our mission. We are not called to take back Washington, D.C. We are not called to take our country back to some golden age where, we think, everyone was a great Christian and everything was perfect. No such golden age existed. There is no perfect past.

The gospel does not call us to establish a kingdom for God; it calls us to live out the kingdom of God that already exists.

On the other hand, our calling does not mean we neglect the political dimensions of society. We don't withdraw from politics and the public

square, because we cannot. We are commissioned and commanded to take the gospel to the world, to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. One way we do this is by being present in culture and by seeking the common good.

### **Disobedient to God's command**



Abandoning culture would be disobedient to the command of God and the mission of the church.

We are not called to take over, and we are not called to withdraw, so how do we live as faithful witnesses in the culture?

To answer this question, we must recognize our place as the church in American culture. America is not the New Israel. We are not warriors following Joshua on a conquest. The church in America today is much more like Israel in the days of Jeremiah or Daniel. We are in exile. Fortunately, exile always has been our reality. We don't need to imagine a new way of existing; we just need to recover who we have been.

We belong to the kingdom of God, and this culture "east of Eden" is not the kingdom of God. One day, the New Heavens and the New Earth will descend to redeem and renew this world. But until then, we must live amidst brokenness, realizing we cannot make this place perfect, no matter the legislation we pass or the person we put in office. Laws cannot change hearts. Only the gospel can bring new life.

We must acknowledge many ways to be faithful, and we must seek God and follow our conscience. We cannot bring down the New Heavens and the

New Earth by ballot or legislation. Christians engage with our hope placed in a future kingdom and not in our power to transform culture.

## **Great Commandment**

As exiles, we seek the common good as faithful witnesses. How?

The Great Commandment is the key. We are faithful in any culture when we love God and love neighbor. So, we must define how to love God and love neighbor as a public witness.

To love God as exiles, to be faithful witnesses, we must know and obey God. Jesus said our love for him will lead us to obey his commands. As faithful witnesses, we will be obedient disciples. We will defend the truth of God's word as our authority.

So, being faithful sometimes means opposing culture and its ideology. Given a choice between faithfulness and accommodation, we must choose faithfulness. We will be different because we have a different allegiance to a different kingdom.

This is the faithful part of loving God, but we also love God by being a witness. As Christians, our commission is to be witnesses for the good of the place we live and the glory of God. Because we love God, we seek love, justice, grace and righteousness.

Love for neighbor—not a desire to be right or to bring our country back to a nostalgic golden age—must motivate and guide our public witness. Loving neighbor means pointing them to God's design for their lives, but pointing with respect, gentleness and kindness.

## **When love directs ...**

When love directs our witness, we care more about God's glory than our own. We stand for biblical truth and morality, not because we want to be

right, but because we love our neighbor and seek the common good. God gives us commands to live by our joy. His design for our lives is our greatest good. So, we stand for marriage, for life, for racial reconciliation, for the poor and oppressed because we love our neighbor and because living by God's design serves the common good.

We must stand for God's design positively, not out of a defensive or reactionary stance. If we lose our respect, kindness and love, we are nothing more than a "clanging cymbal."

Christians must be involved in politics and the public square because we love our neighbor and seek their good in God's design for their lives.

Hope is not found in taking our country back. It is found in Jesus. Faithfulness to Jesus is our first priority. I am not saying we shouldn't have convictions about candidates or which party we feel lines up with our convictions. We should follow these convictions as citizens of God's city, of his eternal kingdom, and we should hold these alliances loosely. Our political alliances should not overshadow our fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Our motivation**

Is our motivation in the public square to be right, to regain power, to fight for something we think we have lost? Or is our motivation love for neighbor and a desire to live according to the purpose of God and to see our society do the same?

The first is motivated by nostalgia, not concern for others. Our love for our neighbor leads us not to see others as the enemy, but as men and women created in God's image. Christians must engage others in a way that honors them, even when we disagree with them.

Humility guides us and compassion compels us into the public square. The

motivation for being faithfully engaged in politics is neither power nor nostalgia; it is love, compassion, and concern for the common good and the glory of God.

*Zac Harrel is pastor of First Baptist Church in Gusting, Texas.*