

Voices: Whom Would Jesus Take Out?

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The Washington Post [reported on August 9, 2017](#) that Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Dallas, declared that President Trump had the biblical authority to “take out” North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Leaning exclusively on a vague understanding of Romans 13, Jeffress argued that the passage “gives the government ... the authority to do whatever, whether it’s assassination, capital punishment or evil punishment to quell the actions of evildoers.”



Mitch Randall Here is what the passage actually states: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God ... For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad ... But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.” (Romans 13:1-4 NRSV).

A clear warning

Now, let’s be very clear, this passage was *not* written to the governing

authorities but to those Roman Christians living under their authority. Paul was *not* creating a “How To” manual for emperors and presidents. He was, however, encouraging Christians living under an oppressive regime to act with integrity and grace.

Paul’s warning is clear: Christians should honor the authority of governing leaders while at the same time understand there will be consequences for unruly and unlawful behavior. Paul never makes the argument that emperors *should* kill but simply acknowledges the reality they do when given a purpose to do so.

Jeffress misses the mark in his argument when he neglects to consider other passages of Scripture, even those close to Romans 13. Immediately preceding it, Paul wrote, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:19-21).

When pastors and theologians fail to consider the entire Bible to make an argument about doctrine, then we fail to be objective and thoughtful practitioners of the Bible. When Christians fall short in measuring our theology against the teaching and life of Jesus, then we can be found guilty of using the Bible for our own objectives.

Picking and choosing

Back in 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention decided to eliminate one important sentence within the section on the Bible from their confession of faith. In that section in 1963, the sentence read, “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.” Now, only conjecture is left to determine why this sentence was eliminated from the SBC’s confession of

faith, but we might now be witnessing the damage it is causing.

When Jesus is taken out of the equation when we read, interpret and apply the Bible to important situations, then anyone is left to pick and choose passages of Scripture that fit their preconceived ideals. When those preconceived ideals merge with political agendas, then the stage is set for what we have seen unfold with Jeffress' claims.

Without Jesus to guide our thoughts and conclusions, we can make arguments for war against those we dislike and instill oppressive laws against those who worship differently than us. If we insert Jesus back into the equation, then we Christians must ask ourselves, "Whom would Jesus take out?"

Emperors, kings and dictators have been trying to answer this question for over 2,000 years. When church and state have worked together to eliminate common enemies with the sword, the only thing to suffer has been the gospel itself.

If only we had Jesus saying something about what we should do with our swords when faced by an enemy? Ah, yes, how quickly we forget.

On the night of his betrayal, as soldiers came to arrest him and Peter drew his sword to strike, Jesus said, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Now, there is an idea!

I think I will go with Jesus on this one.

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