

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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### ***Evangelical Politics and the Loss of Moral Authority***

The clear teaching of the Bible is that all humans are sinners and in need of God's grace. Historically in the United States, evangelical Christians have agreed with these propositions and have faithfully proclaimed the Gospel. Consistently, evangelicals have been known as people who oppose "worldliness," the tendency to adopt and condone the world's assumptions and its worldview. By its nature, the Gospel is countercultural and evangelicals have adopted that lifestyle and perspective. But as evangelical Christian, William S. Brewbaker III, law professor at the University of Alabama, has so eloquently concluded, "Today's evangelicals have mostly abandoned those limitations, but we seem especially blind to other kinds of worldliness. Evangelical politicians fall prey to the allure of money, sex and power at the same rates as just about everyone else . . . Why would someone who believes that God will win in the end and that we are all accountable to him stoop to reprehensible political tactics and vilify his opponents instead of loving them? Why would someone who believes that sexual relations should be limited to the context of traditional marriage make excuses for aggressive sexual advances against teenage girls?" To be countercultural does not mean separation and disengagement, but it does mean that evangelical Christians will be different than the typical citizen. Evangelicals should represent humility, love of neighbor and ultimate loyalty to Jesus Christ "instead of arrogantly identifying the success of a given party or political movement with the advancement of the kingdom of God."

Over the last two months or so, we have seen in American culture an explosion of scandals involving men sexually harassing women. It is disgusting and revolting to read of these developments. It is my opinion that these developments manifest the depths of depravity and symbolize how sick American society really is. These scandals cover the entire political spectrum—from liberals such as Harvey Weinstein, Louis C.K. and Senator Al Franken to conservatives such as Roy Moore and Donald Trump. This is not a political issue. This is an issue of depravity and sin and evangelical Christians should be condemning such sin all along the political spectrum. For evangelicals to excuse what Roy Moore or Donald Trump has done in the name of political expediency is shameful and thereby evidences a lack of moral authority.

Permit me a series so of comments on several key individuals:

- First is former President Bill Clinton. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democratic liberal from New York and former supporter of both Bill and Hillary Clinton, has publically stated that "we need to, as a country, have a much fuller conversation about this kind of behavior—how wrong it is, how toxic it is, how harmful it is, and how we need to

support survivors and make sure that there is a place for them to not only tell their story, but to get some measure of justice, some measure of transparency and accountability.” She has also stated that President Clinton should have resigned over his deplorable actions with Monica Lewinsky and other women. Many liberals and most conservatives agree that Bill Clinton represents a clear abuse of sexual power. One major liberal commentator has argued that “Democrats and the center left are overdue for a real reckoning with the allegations against [Clinton].” Another has said that “the Democratic Party needs to make its own reckoning of the way it protected Bill Clinton.”

- Second is Roy Moore. The situation with Roy Moore is not a political issue. It is a moral and ethical issue: Nine women have accused Moore of a range of inappropriate conduct, including pursuing them when they were teenagers, groping and assault. Conservative Christian columnist and former Reagan speech writer, Peggy Noonan, has written: “The charges against Roy Moore are not only serious; they are completely credible . . . Four women [it is now nine] who did not seek out the press, who did not know each other, and who surely guessed going public would bring them nothing but grief, came forward and provided first-person details that established a pattern. Thirty people corroborated the details . . . His ‘attacking children’ was moving sexually on those young women and leaving them damaged . . . [He] preyed mostly on the unprotected. He chose young women he could push around . . . A thing about predators, from the men of the Catholic church sex scandals to the man cruising the mall, is that they never prey on the unprotected . . . They tend to prey on kids with no father in the home.” When Jim Ziegler, the state auditor of Alabama, claimed that there are many instances in the Bible where older men had sexual relations with young girls—he cited Mary and Joseph as one example—conservative Christian columnist Cal Thomas poignantly commented, “Principles are still being swallowed today in exchange for a false sense of influence and power.” He continues that “There is an unstated conceit among some evangelicals that God is only at work when a Republican is elected, even a Republican who does not share their view of Jesus, or practice what He taught. It is the ultimate compromise, which leads to the corruption and dilution of a message more powerful than what government and politics offer.” I find it unconscionable and infuriating that evangelicals are now downplaying what Roy Moore has done—a lifestyle with which the people of Gadsden, Alabama were most familiar!
- Finally, I cannot end this *Perspective* without a reference to Donald Trump. When the scandal about Democratic Senator Al Franken broke, the President tweeted, “The Al Franken picture is really bad, speaks a thousand words. Where do his hands go in pictures 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 while she sleeps?” But his silence on Roy Moore has been deafening and scandalous! [The president’s daughter Ivanka Trump stated frankly that she has “no reason to doubt the victims’ accounts” in the Moore case. Alabama’s governor stated that she has no reason to doubt the credibility of these nine women, but “I will vote for Moore anyway(!!).”] That Trump would so publically condemn Franken but be silent on Moore, is shocking and blatantly hypocritical. Why? Because more than a dozen women have come forward and said that Trump kissed them or

groped them against their own will. He said they were lying and threatened to sue them. He has not! The infamous "Access Hollywood" tape has Trump saying that when he saw beautiful women, "I just start kissing them" and would try to "grab 'em" by their private parts. "And when you're a star, they let you do it," he said. "You can do anything." Although Trump apologized for these remarks, he is a compromised figure when it comes to the issue of harassing and abusing women. Sara Fagen, White House political director under George W. Bush, has correctly observed that "A president should be a step above in leading for the entire country. When somebody is behaving in an immoral way, a president should call them out. Trump's a unique case here. He's got his own issues with respect to this. He denies them all but he's got them."

Evangelical Christians that defend and excuse a Roy Moore or a Donald Trump are defending the indefensible. Sexual predation is a gross sin and must be condemned, whether it was committed by Bill Clinton, Al Franken, Roy Moore or Donald Trump. Evangelical Christian leaders should take on the role of an Old Testament prophet and call out such egregious sin, not condone it, hide it or dismiss it. It seems as if many such leaders have an impulse to hide or dismiss such sin because it hurts the short-term cause, whether it be abortion, same-sex marriage or even tax reform [!!!]. To do so is devastating for it tells the world that our religious convictions about morality, ethics and leadership standards are always secondary to our political partisanship. Again, as Cal Thomas has argued, "Principles are still being swallowed for a false sense of influence and power."

In so many ways, the evangelical church of North America is similar to the Ephesian church Jesus addressed in Revelation 2:4: We "have left our first love." Thomas: "For too many modern Protestants, politics has become a cult and their "Artemis" [the chief goddess of ancient Ephesus]. They are forgetting their first love, the consequences of which can be found in history, dating back to Israel's King David, who warned, 'Do not trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save' (Psalm 146:3)." Jesus Christ said "For nothing is hidden, nor is anything secret that will not be known or come to light" (Luke 8:17). That is what is occurring within American culture right now. We are a nation under judgment. Evangelical Christian leaders must now decide who their "god" is: Is it Jesus Christ, the enthroned Suffering Servant who died a substitutionary death on Calvary's cross and who promised to return for us? Or is it the idolatrous "god" of politics where we must accept and rationalize morally flawed leaders such as Moore and Trump and where humility, sexual morality, honesty and basic decency no longer matter because of an end-justifies-the-means ethical value system? It is time for evangelical leaders and evangelical Christians to choose!

See Cal Thomas, "The Final Stage in the Corruption of American Evangelicalism" at [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com) (14 November 2017); Ross Douthat in the *New York Times* (11 and 19 November 2017); Peter Baker in the *New York Times* (16 and 18 November 2017); Peggy Noonan in the *Wall Street Journal* (18-19 November 2017); and William S. Brewbaker III in the *New York Times* (16 November 2017).