

From the Editor: JAFE355

## RECLAIMING CIVILITY AS A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

by Melanie M. Cogdill

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This is the first time you are hearing from me in this column although my name has been in the staff box for more than twenty years. During the past twenty years, one of the attributes that I have always emphasized to others (especially non-Christians) when describing our work at the Christian Research Institute (CRI) and the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL is that, although we cover controversial issues, we strive to address them in a measured and dispassionate manner.

When I started working at CRI, both the Internet and e-mail were still novelties. Since then e-mail, texting, blogs, social media, and a twenty-four-hour news cycle on TV and online have contributed to an increasingly shrill and uncivil tone in public discourse.

Shielded by the anonymity of online interaction, Christians are not beyond participating in the angry and rude discourse that permeates our tech-driven culture. In fact, apart from the absence of expletives, at times it can be hard to tell the difference between Christian and non-Christian political commentary. As we head into the height of the American political process, the incivility seems to be reaching a fever pitch. Christians assert their First Amendment rights to enter into the fray along with the non-Christians and make insulting, dismissive comments online to anyone who does not agree with their views. And it's not only political differences that raise their ire, but theological ones as well. From eschatology, Calvinism and Arminianism, young or old earth, to whether it is biblically allowable for Christians to see R-rated movies, many of us seem to feel it's our duty to set people straight with no consideration as to *how* we approach the discussion.

In this issue's two Viewpoint articles, we demonstrate an alternative approach to debate. In the Viewpoint piece on the ethics of political engagement, editor-in-chief Elliot Miller responds to a previous opinion piece by JOURNAL contributor Scott Klusendorf on whether Christians should vote straight ticket, and Klusendorf offers a rebuttal to Miller's argument. Our other Viewpoint article is a pro/con discussion of the biblical basis for Christians to either attend or not attend the same-sex wedding of a friend or family member. Our Viewpoint column has always been a forum to provide readers

with respectful, dispassionately written opinion pieces on topics on which Christians do not always agree.

Being strident and censorious is the antithesis of what we strive for in the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL. We say here at CRI that truth matters, and indeed it is paramount, but as Francis Schaeffer wrote in *The God Who Is There*, "There is nothing more ugly than an orthodoxy without understanding or without compassion."

As apologists we take seriously the admonition in 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with *gentleness and respect*." We need to interact with both Christians and non-Christians in a respectful way. Jesus did.<sup>1</sup> In John 4, as He talked to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus associated with someone who was far from acceptable in Jewish society, and while He fully told her the truth, He did so in a kind, compassionate, and redemptive manner. As apologists we too need to speak truth boldly in the public square, but we need to do so as Christ's representatives, bearing the fruit of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22–26). This means refraining from insults, name-calling, and excoriation not only in theological discourse but also in political. Indeed, more nonbelievers are likely to be observing us in the latter.

—Melanie M. Cogdill

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## NOTES

- 1 Some Christians point to Matthew 23 as a basis for addressing nonbelievers. In this passage as a prelude to Mathew 24, Jesus' strong language to the Pharisees is in the context of His office as Prophet, denouncing unbelieving Israel for their hypocrisy, and pronouncing their forthcoming judgment and desolation'