



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## Soul Nourishment

by Irvin Himmel

Moral statements and positions will, necessarily, impact political issues. This is not because morality is inherently political, but because government has the task of recognizing the difference between good and evil, so moral issues will have to be dealt with (**Rom 13:3-4**). This means that, contrary to what is so often stated and argued, morality will be legislated by government, and it will be legislated from a worldview that either recognizes the significance of God or not. To say that God needs to be kept out of politics, then, is to default to the secularized view of morality; and secularized morality will then be legislated. Why is it that people default to keeping God out of it instead of keeping the secularized views of reality out of it? And why do some Christians seem to be buying into all of this?

We need to see what has happened here. Many have bought into the notions that 1) God and religion must be kept out of politics, and 2) morality is not something that can be legislated. In fact, both are false. God is never out of politics, and we are fooling ourselves if we think so, given that God rules in the kingdoms of men. Every worldview says something about God. If a worldview says there is no God, then a notion of God is still a part of the position, and actions will be taken that demonstrate that disbelief. Further, every law is a legislation of morality in one form or another; there is no way around it. The question is, will the legislation come from those whose worldview respects God as the foundation or not?

I don't say all of this in order to argue that Christians need to get more political. I'm arguing that Christians need to say more about God and morality in every area of life. We don't check our God at the door when we enter a political arena, and we don't set aside godly morals when we engage the culture. We don't take a moral view of something based on politics, but surely our political views ought to be based on godly morality. The point then is not that we need more political activists. The point is that we need to be more engaged in the moral discussions of our culture and take a stand for what is right, regardless of political fallout. In other words, it's not about being political; it's about standing for what's right in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation.

Even more, we need to hold up the gospel itself to the world. The answer to our problems is not to vote in or out this or that politician. No government in history has been a bastion of godliness, and I don't expect that to change. The answer is always where it has been: in Christ. The problems of this world won't be fixed by human government, but by the gospel. "The kingdoms of earth pass away one by one, but the kingdom of heaven remains."

So Christians should be concerned with 1) holding out the gospel to a lost world, and 2) standing up for Christ and His morality. It's not politics. It's just what's right.

## Sin Doesn't Bother Me Anymore

By Kyle Sanders

In Ezra 9, Ezra returns to the city of Jerusalem and is immediately confronted with bad news. The Israelites had intermarried with the Canaanite peoples, a breach of covenant for which even the priests, Levites, officials and chief men were guilty. Ezra's reaction in verse 3—*"As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled"*, the following guilt-laden prayer, and his relentless pursuit to address their faithlessness in chapter 10 all sound strange to our ears. Why was Ezra so upset? This sin (the intermarriage with foreign women) was a grievous breach of covenant with the Lord.

We might be tempted to think that Ezra's behavior was "over-zealous". We may not say this aloud, but our hesitant and often under-whelming responses to sin stand as witness to the truth in our hearts. Simply put, sin does not disturb us, appall us, enrage us, or provoke us to action.

***Frankly, I am appalled at how rarely we are appalled at sin.***

This sad fact was brought home to me during a recent sermon I heard on the subject of abortion. During the lesson the preacher (who is a brother in Christ) was attempting to give some of the awful statistics on this detestable practice but was completely overwhelmed and wept in the pulpit. The tenderness of his heart and the pain behind his words rocked me to my core. One thought rang out in my mind: "Sin doesn't bother me anymore." To say I am ashamed of myself would be an understatement. I was faced with a difficult truth: I had imagined myself to be in the place of Ezra, but in reality I was closer to Israel. While they acknowledged the fact of their sin they had grown numb and forgotten how to be appalled at what they had done.

***But how did I get to this point?***

Like the Israelites who lived during Ezra's time, my heart had become hardened by sin. The people of Israel do not react with trembling to their sin until they see Ezra's reaction. They began to gather around Ezra after he sits down because he is so appalled at their breach of covenant (v. 4), and they weep bitterly while Ezra "prayed and made confession" (10:1). What prevented them from having this reaction before Ezra's arrival? Why weren't they tearing their robes and pulling their hair out? Their sin didn't bother them anymore.

To combat this process, Paul instructs the Ephesian brethren to "no longer walk as the Gentiles do" (Eph. 4:17). In verse 19 we see the effect of continuing to live in sin: "They have become callous". Paul also warned Timothy against those who have departed from the faith via devotion to "deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared" (1 Tim. 4:1-2). When we continue to give in to unrighteousness and allow it to apply layers of scar tissue to our hearts, we become numb to sin.

***What can I do to soften my heart again?***

There is a repeated phrase in Ezra 9-10 that provides the answer that I desperately need. In verse 4, in response to Ezra's reaction, "all who trembled at the word of the God of Israel" gathered around him. In 10:4, "those who tremble at the commandment" of the Lord make a covenant to repent. Finally, the men of Judah and Benjamin gather in the open square before the temple "trembling because of this matter". In short, the answer lies in re-learning what it means to tremble at the word of God. We learn why we must tremble at the word of God by hearing what He has to say.

Only the word of God can cut away all the layers I've applied to my heart and restore it to its former softness. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb. 4:12). It is by listening to the word of God that I can know why I ought to tremble at His words. Paul described the word of God as being "at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13), and for this to occur I must do as the Thessalonian brethren did earlier in the same verse—"when you received the word of God . . . you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God".

It is through God's word that I can re-learn the proper response to sin. Ezra is exceedingly sorrowful due to Israel's sin and his first response is to pray to the Lord. (Turn to Ezra 9:6-25 and read that prayer.) Ezra mourned all night in prayer and fasting because of their sin (10:6-8). Ezra calls all Israel together and plainly states the issue: "You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel." (10:10) Ezra and company work for three months to systematically purge this sin from each of their towns. It is clear that Ezra's heart is in the right place, and my grave concern is that for so many of us our hearts are not in the same place.

Friends and brethren, I sincerely hope that your heart is soft enough to be appalled by sin. However, if your heart has been hardened by sin, all hope is not lost. Heed the words of Ezra. Be convicted and shamed by the words of godly men who follow Ezra's example. Learn again to tremble at the words of God, and then act accordingly.