

The Donkey, the Elephant, and the Lamb: Part 2

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

July 1st, 3012

Last week we laid the foundation of a Christian's biblical view of government, and especially of being a citizen of a Republic of the United States, which is based on democratic principles. It is with great humility that I stand before you to speak on a topic that is very important to those in Marshall and Calloway counties.

Scripture

"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience-- I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I

do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

I will try to be as deliberate this morning as I was last week. Last Sunday, I concluded that if we are truly going to celebrate the 4th of July, it is imperative as Christians living in Marshall County and the City of Murray that we vote on July 17th. And as Christians, we all should vote on November 6th in the election for the President of the United States of America, as well as the representatives in our congressional districts.

I want to address *The Donkey, the Elephant, and the Lamb* and its effects on July 17th. First, I have to admit my bias. Hear me...I am biased. But, to the best of my ability, I have tried to lay that bias down as I speak to you as your pastor. I am biased because I was influenced by my mom, and I will never apologize for that. I do not know how old I was, but before I became the age that I would truly be tempted to drink, my mom sat me down and said, “Son, if you drink, just know I am going to go get drunk.” Whether you agree with my momma’s parenting method or not, it worked. I stand before you this morning, unashamedly and unapologetically saying that because of my momma, I have never touched nor tasted alcohol. I believe my story would have been the same if I had never gotten saved. I thank my momma for it. She and I had no idea that I would be standing in front of you as pastor of Hardin Baptist Church. I have no regrets.

As a 16 year old, I had something to happen in my life that just sealed it for me. One morning my mom came out the back door and told me to sit down. She had never told me to sit down in that way before, so I could tell there was something wrong. She explained to me that the night before, two of my friends were killed. I was close friends with one of them, and alcohol was a contributing factor in his death.

I am biased, and I say it upfront. But, as much as I am biased, I cannot let those emotional feelings lead me to say what I am going to say to you as pastor of this Church. But, I wanted you to know that I am not neutral. I

pray that at the end of this message, you can say that in spite of my bias, I did not let it influence what I said.

For the Good of my Neighbor

Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth. He was a person who would stand up for Christian liberty, but then remind us that while as Christians all things are lawful, not all things that we can get into would be helpful. Then, he told us that all things are lawful, but they do not all build up. Paul uses a term out of the housing industry to build a house. He knew there were some things in our life as Christians that we had the liberty to participate in, but if we did, they might not necessarily accomplish the objective we want and build things up. They would actually tear the house down. Then, he reminds us of a principle. Even though I have Christian freedom, I am never to use that freedom for my own personal good, but I am to use it for the good of my neighbor. Then, he just dives right into the issue. In his day, it was eating meat that was offered to idols. He said, *hey, there is really not an idol, everything is of the Lord. So, when you go to someone's house to eat, do not ask any questions, just eat what they put in front of you unless they say this was offered as a sacrifice. Then, do not eat it. No matter what they say from that point on, do not dare touch what has been put on that plate, for conscience sake. It is not for your conscience, but for his.* In other words, if he brought it up, it is bothering him. Therefore, do not touch it. Then, he tells them to remember whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, do it to the glory of God. And then, Paul reminded the Corinthians that he lived his life in such a way that he never tried to work things to his own personal advantage. He knew there were many, many people out there, and he wanted to live in such a way that many of the many would be saved. He was so confident that he was doing right in the eyes of Christ, and exemplifying the Spirit of Christ, that he actually told the Corinthian Church to imitate him when it came to this because he was following Christ. Wow!

The Party of the Lamb

I want to remind you that you do not go into that voting booth on July 17th representing a donkey or an elephant; you represent the Lamb of God. Whether you vote yes, or whether you vote no, it must be done to the glory of God. What you do must not be about your personal gain, but about the good of your neighbor. I do not think we have to ask who our neighbor is because Jesus made it clear. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, He told us our neighbor is not the person who lives next door, it is anyone in need. That is who the party of the Lamb should be concerned about. When you are the party of the donkey, you are sometimes concerned about the donkey. It is the same with the elephant. But, in the party of the Lamb, we are not concerned about us, we are concerned about others. That is what distinguishes us as the party of the Lamb.

Now, we are in a dilemma as a church. How do we apply this principle to our neighbor on July 17th? If you live in Marshall County, you will go to the voting booth, you will vote yes or no on buying alcohol by the drink, and by the package in stores. If you live in the City of Murray, you will vote yes or no on buying alcohol by the package in stores. Let me be clear, I pastor the Hardin Baptist Church in Marshall County, and I live in Calloway County, but I cannot vote in either election. I do not live within the city limits of Murray in Calloway County. Even though the outcome affects me greatly, I cannot vote. I am praying without ceasing that those who can vote do vote, either yes or no. As the party of the Lamb, we should be the best citizens in this country because we take very seriously the right to vote.

Voting No: Is it an injustice to my neighbor?

My actions are supposed to be for the salvation of people. But sometimes, before you can ever think about the salvation of your soul, you think about the salvation of your financial or emotional situation. For example, my neighbor is a business person who is struggling because a boat knocked out the bridge in Aurora, and he is distressed. I pass by the business and

there are "vote yes" signs all over the lawn. If I vote no, will I do an injustice to my neighbor who is a business person looking forward to the sale of alcohol for profit, and to possibly save his business? That money could be used for things that would possibly benefit us. I have to seriously think about voting no and if it would be an injustice to that business person. Also, if we vote no, then all of the tax dollars that could be generated from alcohol sales will not come into our government.

What about my neighbor down the road who has a "vote yes" sign because they drink and have to go to another county to get it? Am I doing that neighbor an injustice if I vote no? As the party of the Lamb, my answer is no. I am not doing either the business person or the neighbor who drinks an injustice. I am not doing my neighbor who drinks an injustice because he can still drink. He chooses to live in this county and he knows that if he wants to drink, he has to purchase it somewhere else. What he does in the privacy of his own home is up to him. I, or the Church, will never tell him what he can or cannot do. He can continue to live his life the way he has been all along. Therefore, I am not doing him an injustice. Neither am I doing an injustice to the business person. You would have to be foolish to open a business in Marshall County believing you could rely upon the profit from alcohol sales to make your business work. Even though this is a great tourist area, historically, there has never been any evidence at all to believe that one day you would eventually get to sell alcohol. With good conscience, I do not believe that voting no would do an injustice to any person, or in any way tear down anyone living in these two areas.

Voting Yes: Is it an injustice to my neighbor?

As the party of the Lamb, if I vote yes, could I do an injustice to my neighbor or businessman who has a "vote no" sign on their lawn? Do you see my dilemma? I am supposed to do what is best for, or what builds up, my neighbor. So, if I vote yes, could I be doing an injustice to that neighbor, or other neighbors who really want me to vote yes? Let me remind you of something before I answer that question.

- **Public Safety and Morality**

Local option laws come under the Kentucky Revised Statutes. In particular, the one concerning alcohol sales is statute 242. The statute concerning alcoholic beverages is listed in the books under Public Safety and Morality. I thought this was an economic issue, but not according to the legislature in Frankfort. Now, one of the arguments for voting yes is that people are already drinking in our county, but have to buy it somewhere else. Wouldn't it make economic sense to buy it here? We would get the tax dollars instead of someone else. Why did the Kentucky Legislature not put this under commerce or economics? It is possible they put it under Public Safety and Morality because 79,000 alcohol related deaths occur each year, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, or the CDC. It is the third leading lifestyle cause of death in the United States. Each year, 2.3 million years of potential life is lost in those deaths because, on average, each of those deaths occurs 30 years prematurely. In 2005, 1.6 million people were hospitalized from alcohol related causes. The same year, there were 4 million alcohol related emergency room visits. That is why it is a Public Safety and Morality issue according to Kentucky State Legislature. In 2006, alcohol related abuses costs our country \$224 billion. That is \$746 per person, or \$1.90 per drink. A standard drink is 12 ounces for a beer, and 8 ounces for malt liquor. Wine is 5 ounces, and distilled spirits are 1.5 ounces. Our local state and national government collects .12 per drink in taxes. That means that binge drinking costs our government .62 per drink, but .12 is all we collect. Abraham Lincoln said the government was we, the people. In other words, of the \$224 billion that the alcohol industry costs our economy, our federal government, (we, the people) pays 42% of that cost.

The next major person picking up the tab is the family of the person who abuses alcohol. A lawyer in this county said, "Alcohol and drugs have been really good to my family." Then he began to name all of the things he has, and places he goes. Then, he said with a frown, "It is sad, but it is true." One-third, or 35%, of Americans do not use alcohol of any form. Some of

those, for whatever reason, are t-totalers like me. Others, and the majority, are people who had an alcohol problem and have vowed to never use alcohol again. That leaves two-thirds, or 65%, of Americans that drink in some form. That should not surprise us. According to the CDC, there is a level of alcohol you can use and not be a threat to public safety. A female can drink one drink a day, or two for a man, and not be a threat. I have really good news...37% of our country drinks in moderation. They are no threat or risk to us at all. 35% do not drink at all, and 37% drink in moderation and are no threat. This means out of the 65% of those who drink, 56% of them are not a threat to public safety because of moderation. But, 19% of our country will go over the daily or weekly limit. When they do, it is usually called binge drinking. This is five or more drinks within a two hour period for a man, and four or more for a woman. 19% of the population in our country is a weekly risk to our public health. 9% of our population is both a daily and a weekly risk. This means that out of the 65% of those who drink, 44% are a risk to themselves, this country, and this community. The Japanese proverb says, "The man takes a drink, then the drink takes a drink, and then the drink takes the man."

Every world health organization that I researched said that alcohol consumption needs to be reduced worldwide because the economic costs are too great to society. Phillip Cook from Duke University, and Michael Moore from the University of Virginia did a study and concluded that the Excise Tax collected from sales is far less than the social cost of each drink consumed. The world health experts say they believe there are two ways to reduce alcohol consumption.

1. Raise the Excise Tax

If alcohol is taxed high enough, it will reduce consumption. The two leading groups of binge drinkers are adult men who make over \$75,000 per year, and adult men who make less than \$16,000 per year. When the men who make \$75,000 binge drink, they average 7.2 drinks. When those who make less than \$16,000 binge drink, they average 8.2 drinks. More

alcohol is consumed by the group with the lower income. The thought is to raise the Excise Tax so it is not affordable to as many people.

2. Reduce the alcohol density outlets

The more places that sell alcohol, the more likely people are in that community to drink. It is just a given.

The world health organizations believe that if we do those two things, we can reduce alcohol consumption, thus reducing the health risks and economic costs to society.

Now, in Marshall County, we cannot tax what we are not yet selling, so we cannot help there. But, do we really want to be another county that adds to the density outlet of this area? Some who are going to vote yes think that being able to buy alcohol here instead of going to another county is not going to add to the consumption of alcohol. People are already drinking here, but just going somewhere else to get it. They believe that we would just be reaping the benefits that the other county has been reaping. The world health organizations will not agree with that. 11% of the alcohol is consumed by people who are under 21, and it is illegal to drink until you are 21! The average age of the youth that begin to drink is 12. The youth that start by the age of 15 have nearly a 50% likelihood of having a three year period of alcohol dependency.

The world health organizations give four ways to reduce youth consumption.

1. Enforce the laws we already have in place

When a youth drinks before the age of 21, they binge drink 95% of the time.

2. Raise the price in the form of the Excise Tax

3. Reduce Density outlets

4. Curb advertising that is attractive and appealing to youth about the benefit and the lifestyle of alcohol

87% of the people who drink start before age 21. The CDC says that if we can stop people from drinking before age 21, it would dramatically reduce alcohol consumption in this country.

If I vote yes on July 17th, is there a possibility that I might do an injustice to someone under the age of 21 in this county? I am not saying you will, but it sounds like we run a really big risk of doing an injustice to a neighbor if the party of the Lamb votes yes on July 17th.

I thank God for my momma. I thank God for the people of Calloway County and that I was raised on the east side in a sheltered environment. I was not bombarded with alcohol and never went in a store where it was sold until my family went to Paducah. I want to believe that if I had ever drunk alcohol, I would have used it in a wise way. But, the way I drink Sprite, and the way I eat chocolate, I am just not sure. I thank God that no one in my county or family ever did an injustice to me concerning alcohol. I ask you to vote on July 17th. You and I are the party of the Lamb. When you go into that booth to vote, it will just be you and God. Do what you do to the glory of God. Do what you believe is best for your neighbors in this community. Until July 17th, be heard. But, do it in an intelligent way, not an emotional way. Speak articulately, clearly, and factually. Be seen at the voting booth in your community and vote as a person of character and conscience. Be Christ-like. Christ did not condemn those people who had opposing views to Him. Many of them were open to redemption. As a matter of fact, many times He took a seat right alongside of them. The group He played hardball with was the Pharisees. Please do not wave your Bible in someone's face and condemn them to hell because their belief is different from yours. Do not be un-Christ-like to the person who has a different sign in their yard than you do. The Church cannot let this issue cause us not to be able to sit down with the person who disagrees, and

one day share the plan of salvation or discuss our view in a biblical manner. As the party of the Lamb, you are not voting to keep someone from drinking in the privacy of their home. We are voting on whether it is best for the community for it to be sold in our county and city. That is the issue.