

## **Politics, Christian Witness, and Virginia's Constitution**

I love the United States of America. I am thankful and proud to be an American. I believe America is the greatest country in the history of the world. Our Declaration of Independence states very clearly the ideal on which our nation was founded: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." That was a revolutionary claim in 1776. We haven't always lived up to that ideal, but we continue to pursue together a more perfect union.

As citizens of the United States of America, I believe we all have a responsibility to seek the good of our nation. We do that each time we cast our ballot in an election. We do that through public service. We also do it through engaging the political process in many other ways.

As Christians, we do not check our Christianity at the door when we step into the voting booth, run for public office, or engage the political process. In fact, we can't. We are followers of Jesus. He has saved us. He has radically transformed our lives. And there is no area of our lives that remains untouched by the Lordship of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Colossian church, "For by [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16). He then exhorted them a little later in the letter, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

This is regular Christian living. Because Jesus is Lord of all, followers of Jesus reject any argument that says Christians should not be involved in the public square or that we have to check our beliefs at the door if we are going to engage. We do everything, including voting, in the name of the Lord Jesus.

However, we don't do partisan politics at Goshen. We pray for our leaders. We encourage you to vote. But we don't try to tell you for whom to vote. The primary reason is that our church is focused on building a kingdom that is not of this world. We want to be good citizens here and seek the welfare of our community, but we also recognize that followers of Jesus are sojourners and exiles in this present world. "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

Jesus gave the church its marching orders in Matthew 28 when He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). This Great Commission from the Lord Jesus should guide everything we do together as a church.

Part of making disciples and “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” is teaching God’s people how to apply the Bible to all of life, including politics. But the Great Commission is not about getting out the vote, winning elections, or taking America back for God. It is about Jesus and His eternal kingdom which has come and will come and will never fail. Christ will build His church, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it.

All of that brings me to the primary point of this article.

This November you will have the opportunity to vote on two amendments to the Virginia Constitution. There are actually three amendments being proposed, but two of them are of special concern for Christians. One addresses the definition of marriage in the Virginia Constitution. The other deals with the issue of abortion. I believe it is my responsibility as your pastor to speak very clearly to you about these two moral issues.

I want to be clear because God is clear. Marriage, as designed by God in Creation, is the one-flesh union of one man and one woman for life (Gen. 2:24). Even nature testifies to God’s design in Creation. Procreation requires one male and one female. Mankind has devised a myriad of ways to suppress this truth, but the truth remains. God is the Creator of marriage, which means that He gets to define the terms. You and I do not get to determine what marriage is and what it is not. Neither does the state get to determine what marriage is and what it is not. Only God defines what is true marriage.

Regarding abortion, the Bible is clear that the baby in the womb is a human being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). David declared in Psalm 139, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:13-14). When Elizabeth was visited by her relative Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Bible says that the “baby leaped in her womb” (Lk. 1:41). The sixth commandment, “You shall not murder,” reminds us that God values human life, and we should too (Ex. 20:13). If you’ve ever seen an ultrasound, you know that the baby in the womb is a human being worthy of full dignity and protection. Christians should be people who defend the full dignity of all human life from the womb to the tomb.

It is impossible for us as Christians to separate the clear teaching of the Bible concerning marriage and the sanctity of human life from what we know is good and right for all mankind. We do not oppose homosexual marriage and abortion because we want to oppress people or stomp on their rights. We oppose homosexual marriage and abortion because we know that what is best for human flourishing is life according to God’s design. Good laws promote human flourishing. Bad laws undermine human flourishing.

You can find links to both proposed amendments at [www.sbcv.org/lifeandmarriage/](http://www.sbcv.org/lifeandmarriage/).

The marriage amendment strikes from the Virginia Constitution language limiting marriage to one man and one woman. It also adds language preventing the state from denying a marriage license to any two adult persons. This amendment doesn’t change current practice because of the Obergefell SCOTUS decision in 2015. However, Christians should oppose the amendment because the current language in the Virginia Constitution regarding marriage as the union of

one man and one woman is a testimony to the truth about marriage. One of the purposes of the law is to serve as a teacher of what is right.

The abortion amendment uses the language of reproductive freedom to create what is essentially a universal right to abortion for any reason in the Virginia Constitution. While the amendment does permit state law to regulate third trimester abortions, it gives physicians broad discretion to approve third trimester abortions for any reason determined to impact the mental health of the mother. There are also legitimate questions about how the amendment will be applied when it comes to parental notification for minors seeking an abortion.

Because the Bible is clear regarding both marriage and the sanctity of human life, I encourage you to vote “NO” on both of these amendments. Election day is November 3. The polls will open for early voting on September 18.

While I am the one writing this article, I am doing so after discussion with the other elders about these issues. We are united in our approach to these matters dealing with politics, Christian witness, and the proposed amendments. We take seriously our responsibility to shepherd God’s church. We want to make disciples faithfully by teaching God’s people to observe all that He has commanded. If you have any questions about how we are thinking through these issues, please do not hesitate to speak with us. We would love to talk about it with you.

For the Lord Jesus and His Eternal Kingdom,

Pastor Adam