

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT'S CALLING GOD "STUPID"

Recent comments given by President Rodrigo Duterte regarding his opinions on matters of faith has and is creating a stir. We are referring to his tirade-sounding statements questioning the Biblically inspired narratives of Creation, God's purpose for providing Eve to Adam, the wisdom of God in allowing man's fall into sin, the Last Supper incident, and the like. As a result, the President's logic has led him to conclude that God is "stupid." While the President has qualified that he is criticizing the "God of the Catholics," and that he has categorically affirmed his belief in a sovereign and a perfect God, still his statements were pointed toward the narratives of Scripture.

This has triggered inquiries from some of our friends to ask us what we think should be the proper Biblical response to such a situation. We have decided to put our thoughts into writing as an attempt to address such inquiries. This is being written with the hope that this will shed light, not heat on the current controversy so that understanding hearts and more sober minds would prevail.

We believe the consequent emotional reactions from social media on the President's recent statements stem from two primary concerns.

First, the President is no theologian. We all know he is a lawyer, was a city fiscal, a local city mayor who now occupies the highest elected office of the land. But, just like many unbelievers and others struggling with the Christian faith, his recent statements bear out that he questions, at least, the accuracy or authenticity or perhaps even the authority of the Bible. Knowing this helps us to understand where he is coming from. Therefore, he is not an authority in matters dealing with the reasonableness of the Christian faith as revealed in Scripture. Just like everyone else, Mr. Duterte is a sinner who needs to be instructed and enlightened by the timeless and transcultural truths of the Word of God. Thus, he needs to be made aware that there are serious consequences for anyone who wrestles with the Scriptures, 2 Pet 3:16.

Secondly, he is the President of the entire Philippines. As such, he is bound by the constitution he has sworn to uphold to mobilize the entire government bureaucracy to maintain law and order in the streets, continue building infrastructure to improve the quality of life in our country, ensure the delivery of basic government services - regardless of his or anyone else's religious persuasion. These are the areas where he should be focusing his energies on. As President, matters of faith (important as they are, since they deal with eternal realities) are very personal and may be shared on *personal* platforms. They should be kept that way as he conducts his duties as head of state. While he has every right to his own opinion, attacking anyone's faith from any *presidential* platform would be overstepping his boundaries, may come across as offensive to some, and could be read as an attack against one's right to exercise freedom of religion in our pluralistic society, 1 Pet 2:13-14; Rom 13:1-7.

So, what is the proper Biblical response to such a situation? We have listed seven.

One, regardless of whether we voted for him or not, we should recognize that God, in His divine providence and sovereignty has placed Mr. Rodrigo Duterte as the President of our Republic, Dan 2:20-23; Rom 13:1. Because all authority is ordained of God, ultimately, resistance to government authority is resistance to God, Rom 13:2-7. This is why the apostles admonished believers to "*submit ... to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,*" 1 Pet 2:13-17; Tit 3:1.

Two, Bible-believing Christians should continue praying for him: for his success in assuming his role as our country's president, 1 Tim 2:1-2; and for his salvation, that he may come to personal faith in Christ as Savior, 1 Tim 2:3-4.

Three, as citizens, we should utilize the democratic institutions, take advantage of lawful avenues and respect the equal powers of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government to hold people in

authority accountable for their misdeeds. Even the apostle Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen and knowledge of Roman law to humble certain magistrates of their illegal and unjust treatment on them, Acts 16:35-40.

Four, we should always prayerfully, responsibly and conscientiously exercise our right of suffrage every time the chance is given us during elections. Those moments are divinely appointed opportunities to participate in our democratic processes in choosing officials of character and statesmanship. There is a sense in which we get the leaders we deserve due to our wise or careless use of this right, Prov 29:2.

Fifth, for the born again believer, we should realize that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, John 18:36. Therefore, we should guard ourselves against efforts from various sectors of society that would initiate some form of civil disobedience motivated politically, personally or otherwise that may result in anarchy. Christians should ascertain that they do not contribute to this climate of lawlessness in any sphere of life.

Sixth, let us get busy carrying out our God-given mission to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to this lost, dying and decaying world for this message remains to be the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, Rom 1:16. The almighty God continues to offer forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, reconciliation and deliverance from sin and from this present evil world. He alone is able to save for He is God-man, the only mediator between God and man who voluntarily gave up His life to atone for our sins. His resurrection proves His sacrifice at Calvary was sufficient, 2 Cor 5:21; John 14:6. He will save all who will repent of their sin and come to Christ in child-like faith, John 1:12; 3:18, 36; 5:24.

These are the Christian's primary responsibilities: evangelism and godly living. Through preaching the gospel, we provide the opportunity for sinners to be radically transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through righteous living, we impact society with a good testimony. Through personal and public obedience, we honour God.

Lastly, when the state begins to infringe on matters of personal conscience and compels its citizens to disobey the clear commands of Scripture, the example of the apostles would be in order: "We must obey God rather than men," Acts 5:29.

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