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Readers support, criticize posting of Ten Commandments

Reader

Editor's note

Greene County Circuit Clerk **Steve Helms** announced on Monday he would relocate a **poster** containing religious and patriotic images off county property following the advice of his lawyers, saying "It was never my intention to do anything wrong." Today we continue with a portion of our readers' opinions on the **poster** and the issue of separation of church and state.

poster

Love guides commandments Bob Mosier Mountain Grove

What is it about the Ten Commandments that makes Mr. Wright so uncomfortable? When it comes right down to it, they are based on two commandments. Love for God, and love for our neighbor. If a true Christian keeps those words, they will not try to make non-Christians feel unwelcome, but will show patience and kindness towards others.

Even if you believe in God, or choose not to follow the first four commandments, why do the last six bother him? What is wrong with respecting our parents, or not cheating on our spouses, or killing, stealing, etc.? Many of our own laws are based on those commandments. I believe strongly in separation of church and state, to respect a person's right to worship as they see fit, or choose not to worship if that is their desire, but our forefathers never meant for separation from God. Sometimes Christians have to go into places that have calendars of naked people, or where foul language is used. We don't have to let that affect us, just like Mr. Wright and others like him, can choose to ignore the Ten Commandments, when one is posted. It's not hurting a thing or anyone.

Christians should stand up Teresa Cox Nixa

I agree with Mr. (Chris) Dalton's letter in Sunday's paper, if I go into an office it is to do business and not help them decorate the room. I see and hear things every day that could offend me if I allowed them to but because we live in an abstract society, I try to accept that there are things that I have to choose to tune out so that I can live what is my normal and comfortable way of living. If someone really has enough time to be concerned about someone's decor in an office, considering the world that we live in today, that person really needs to step outside of their four walled box and take a good look at things going on in this world that they need to take a stand against.

I commend Mr. **Helms** for displaying the **poster** and for standing up to defend that **poster** against people with narrow-minded approaches to living. The Christian community gets ridiculed every day and it is time that we all stand up for the very things that we are suppose to stand up for. If people don't like something, they don't have to look at it, read it, stand by it, or touch it. They can leave the area which offends them and move on with their lives. Somewhere in the course of all of

everyone's days, I'm sure most of us do get offended, we just don't voice idiotic opinions about it. If you are going to complain about something, let it be something worth defending and not over something for the sake of offending!

Public officials push views
Michael Soetaert
Springfield

Thankfully (**Steve Helms**) has agreed to take down his **poster**, thus ending another episode of religious intolerance in the Ozarks, just like past episodes with the city of Republic and the Humansville School District, to name a few. Thus ending another episode of public officials trying to push their religious views on the public, generally at the public's expense. **Helms** is quoted as saying, "It was never my intention to do anything wrong." And I believe him. Unfortunately, his idea of right and wrong is based on his particular religious convictions and not that annoying document, the U.S. Constitution. Darn those forefathers! They're at it again. Thankfully we're through ... until the next time. In order to avoid a next time, in order to keep our politicians and educators focused on their real work, I propose a simple test.

Ready? Here it is: Would you have the same tolerance for other religions? Any religion? Would **Helms** have gotten the same support if his **poster** would've included not the Ten Commandments, but, say, the Sharia Law of Islam? Or perhaps the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism? Or – Heaven forbid – The Nine Satanic Statements? Or how about if he had had a statue of the Virgin Mary? Or Tibetan Prayer Flags? My guess is that we support **Helms** only because we like his particular flavor of religion, or at least we think we do. If we're not willing to support them all, or none at all, that folks, is religious intolerance. That is what our forefathers were trying to prevent. Of course, there are those who say this is acceptable because our country was founded on "Christian principles." Never mind that the Ten Commandments are Jewish. (Why is it that nobody puts up a **poster** of the Beatitudes?) And, mostly, never mind that the United States wasn't founded on Christian principles.

But, hey, don't take my word for it. As far as that goes, don't take anybody's word for it, not your pastor, not your teacher, not the neighbor next door, not even your parents or your spouse. Read it for yourself. Read Jefferson. Read Adams. Read Payne. And read Franklin. Then, when it comes to matters of the Constitution, you won't have to claim that you never intended "to do anything wrong", because you will know what the right thing is.

Breaking of law hypocritical?
Dean McClanahan
Springfield

Circuit Clerk **Steve Helms** stands by his **poster**. If I insisted the Ten Commandments be posted in all schools, libraries and government buildings, and I was unable to live by the law without breaking one or more on a daily basis, would that make me a hypocrite?

Personally, I prefer Galatians 5:18; if you are led by the spirit you are not under the law.

Founding Fathers sought God
Ross Ragland
Springfield

I was saddened to read the article regarding the distress expressed by Gary Wright concerning the **poster** which he saw in the waiting area of Circuit Clerk **Steve Helms'** waiting room. Having seen that **poster** before, it was very obvious to me that the theme was patriotism, which is shown by all the pictures of the flag, heroes of

9/11, as well as our military.

It would seem that Mr. Wright is not too familiar with either the history of our great nation or the Bible. We live in a country that was founded on scriptural principles, whether he likes it or not. A little research on some of the writings of our Founding Fathers would reveal that God was very prominent in their thoughts and in their decision-making process regarding the founding of the United States of America. Here is a quotation from George Washington: "It is impossible to righteously govern the world without God and the Bible."

John Adams, in making a statement regarding our newly signed Constitution, said: "We have no government armed in power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other." I believe that an in-depth study of the laws originally passed to govern the affairs of our nation were based on these same Ten Commandments that Mr. Wright says are offending to him.

And does not the first amendment to the Constitution guarantee us our civil liberty in the area of the unrestricted practice of religion? "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ..."

Mr. Dave Coonrod has suggested that Greene County's judges could decide the matter. I would submit that we are already in a great deal of trouble in this country because we have let judges interpret the Constitution, rather than enforce the laws, which is, I think, supposed to be their primary function.

I would like to offer another quotation from one of the greatest presidents this country has ever had, Abraham Lincoln: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in number, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown.

"But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these things were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

"Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us."

I fear that Mr. Wright is expressing that very attitude in his rampage against Mr. **Helms**, who obviously understands our need to remember the place that God once had in the establishment of our great country, as well as the troubles that we are now facing as a result of that forgetfulness warned against by Lincoln.

History reveals past abuse Bruce Galloway Ozark

Political appointee Mr. **Helms** dressed a public area of the Greene County courthouse with a **poster** referencing the attack on America by radical Moslems. The **poster** displays the Jewish Ten Commandments, accepted by most contemporary Christians as applicable to our faith. The issue: whether the sign should be displayed in the room where the public meets the law clerks. Setting constitutional principle aside, history tells us the debate is a bit more complicated, and should be a bit more practical.

Over 100 years ago, churches of different beliefs banded together and constructed the foundations of the public school system in rural Missouri. Rural public schools began in the buildings of mostly Protestant churches, often rotating from Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist and so on, from year to year. The founders of rural public education pursued application of the belief that individuals should educate themselves as to their Christian faith. With that history, many contemporary Christians perceive the rancor over the display of their statements of faith in public institutions with understandable incredulity. And yet, there is another, practical lesson from our shared history.

In parts of Missouri and most of the South, citizens of the early 1960s still entered courts of law through one of two doors: the front and the rear. The rear door welcomed blacks to a supposedly blind justice system. As they walked past the coloreds-only bathrooms and began the climb up the darkened, colored-only staircase leading to the courtrooms, they probably suspected a separate and unequal justice waited. Their fears escaped the majority, because the majority felt welcomed, and any case, most of the majority believed they acted fairly regardless of the color-only signs.

With hindsight the truth seems obvious now. When a courthouse welcomes most citizens and withholds its welcome to others, then it promises that a separate and unequal justice waits. The effect on the citizen is the same whether or not the promise of unequal justice is reality or perception. Some people will believe they or their loved one did not get a fair hearing in a court of law.

If they perceive that Christians did that to them, what does history tell us they will make of that?

Timing of issue raises question Charles D. Huff Springfield

The timing of the **poster** in Mr. **Helm**'s office is mighty fishy. Gee, great way to get attention stirred up (with) this stupid Christian persecution fantasy when it's election time. Wonder if all these good church people would be so pro First Amendment if it was something that offended them, last time I looked hypocrisy was a pretty big sin. Other candidates deserve space, too Jane Sellars Springfield

Thank you, editors, for the Voices piece on **Steve Helms** and his posting of the Ten Commandments in his reception area. You are absolutely correct, that is not the place for such a **poster** to be placed. My problem, however, comes with the point that now Mr. **Helms** has had at least two very nice, informative articles about his upcoming candidacy free of charge. When will the News-Leader provide comparable free space for the other circuit court candidates?

No one forced to look at poster Bob Mosier Mountain Grove

Just because one individual hangs a **poster** in his office, doesn't mean the state is favoring one religion over another. If he made his employees have those same **posters** in their offices, against their will, or if he compelled the public to give some kind of lip service to his faith, then that would be infringing on separation of church and state, and that would be wrong.

Tell me how that picture is hurting anyone? Does it offend them? Every one of us has been offended by something at one point in our lives. You just deal with it and move on. If he hung something about the Koran, Buddhist, or something from an atheist's point of view, who cares? It is just a picture. It can do no harm to anyone. It

should be his right to hang what he wants, as long as he doesn't try to force others to do the same.