

## Let your moral conscience guide you

Written by By Reverend Dr. Gerald L. Durley Pastor, Providence Missionary Baptist Church Atlanta, Georgia  
Wednesday, 06 June 2012 00:00

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Over the last several days there have been many deep, soul-searching dialogues and conversations concerning President Obama's statement that "he" has evolved to assuming the position of recognizing same-sex marriage. He announced that after prayerful meditations, meaningful conversations with numerous friends and colleagues who are homosexuals; and thoughtful, inspiring discussions within his family "he" has come to realize the value and importance of all human beings (i.e. American citizens) whom he took an oath to serve as their president.

The statement highlighting his personal position on the issue of same-sex marriage has literally ignited a debate unparalleled in the Christian community and the nation as a whole. There are those who adamantly oppose the President's personal posture on the sanctioning of same-sex marriage. There are some who are relatively comfortable with the concept of same-sex civil unions and legal partnerships, but not the usage of the term 'marriage' to promote the idea that same-sex couples, who are recognized by the government (i.e. city, county, state, et al.), have shared identified rights and mutual benefits. Still others are of the mindset that the church should not be involved in the relationships of those who choose to live an accepted lifestyle under cultural and civic standards. Often, it is felt by Christian clergy that there is a moral and spiritual obligation to counsel those seeking to get married in the Christian faith.

Needless to state, there are a number of different and diverse opinions on this timely subject. It is timely because, as the President so eloquently shared, this is an important, sensitive, significant issue impacting millions of American lives and it is not going to go away. It is therefore imperative for those of us in the faith community to share our opinions, from our different perspectives with the President. It is equally as important for President Obama to share his personal convictions with us. Communication solicits understanding, respect, and trust when honest dialogue is encouraged and allowed to prevail.

It is vital that we, in the Christian church, understand and accept the fact that we are governed by the tenets of the Bible. It is further necessary for each of us who has any sphere of influence within our congregation and community to understand that we live in a "democracy." We do not live in a "theocracy." In a theocratically controlled nation the country is governed by a divine ruler or counsel of divine spiritual officials. In a democratically governed country the people

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have the right and responsibility to choose for themselves the issues which impact the welfare of their individual and collective lives.

President Obama made a statement expressing his personal position on same-sex marriage. In recent communication with the President, I am pleased that he decided to make a personal statement on this matter; to clarify his position for all to know exactly where he stands. As Christian clergy, we have an obligation to share with those whom we are called to serve. Our understanding, from a faith perspective, on this and other critical matters, we must educate and create an environment of awareness and disseminate the facts and perceptions of same-sex marriage as it relates to church and state from our perspective. To adequately inform anyone about this single issue, which has been articulated by the President, it is critical to place it in its proper perspective to the other significant statements, opinions, and accomplishments of President Obama.

The President did not articulate his views as a pastor, preacher, minister, or any other religious office, but as the President of all of the people of the United States, which is what the president of a democracy is sworn to do. We must understand fully that this was his personal assessment and stance regarding same-sex marriage. In a democracy, every citizen is entitled to state his/her thinking on a particular subject. The United States has fought wars, at home and abroad, to defend one's right to maintain his/her personal convictions. As an American citizen, he has the right to his personal views, on any topic, and we should respect his right to hold those views.

We, ministers of the Gospel, have shared with the President our concerns and positions on same-sex marriage. We have unreservedly stated that our mission and calling are grounded on the Word of God as defined in the Bible. We are commissioned, as church leaders, to uphold the tenet that Christian marriage is between a man and a woman. To the President's tremendous credit, he emphatically appreciated the position and role of those clergy who articulated their personal and professionally held views on marriage. He respected and encouraged each clergy person to follow his/her own beliefs and that in no way, nor at any time, would he ever impose his view on the church or on political leaders across America. In fact, he insisted that clergy pursue their faith mandates. In a democracy there is the sharing of different positions and hopefully the garnering of mutual respect among those in the discussion whether they find agreement or not.

For me, as a minister of the Gospel, it is resoundingly clear that we have been chosen to love and respect everyone regardless of our sexual differences. We are not to, in any way, maliciously discriminate against people who may differ from our theological position. I am fully cognizant of the fact that in our society discrimination based on race, creed, sexual preference, gender, economic status, political views, etc. is alive and flourishing. Homophobia and gay bashing are real and extremely hurtful; however, we as a faith community must actively speak out against any such hateful behavior toward any of God's children.

We, as African-American citizens, must not be "swept" into the politically divisive dialogue about not supporting a president who is exercising his right as an American citizen. His personal views must be respected by those in our congregations even when there is difference of

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opinion. The President has emphasized repeatedly that he does not plan to impose his personal views about same-sex marriage on church or legislative bodies of governance.

It is clear that we should not judge a person's ability to successfully govern a nation based purely on a single personal issue, but rather evaluate the accomplishments which have positively influenced and impacted those who are the recipients of the decisions which have been made.

As the bar of judgment and decision making is put in place on this president, it is necessary to regard the issue of same-sex marriage in juxtaposition to President Obama's overall service record, which broadly encompasses:

1. The capturing of Osama Bin Laden;
2. Implementing an agreed upon settlement to end wars in the Middle East and withdraw U.S. troops;
3. The securing of U.S. borders, while reviewing immigration reform;
4. Seeking to improve the economy and sustain jobs within the automotive industry;
5. Health Care Reform to address the severe needs of uninsured and underinsured American citizens including 7 million African Americans;
6. The reduction of unemployment and job stimulation;
7. Recognition of and the discussion of the significance of the middle class to the viability of the nation;
8. Recognizing that an educated country is critical—Reviewing college students financial burdens;
9. Establishing financial guidelines for financial institution to assure fiscal stability.

These and other accomplishments, by President Obama, should be discussed rather than highlighting his single, personal position on same-sex marriages which will not in and of itself impact his ability to govern the nation.

As African Americans, we consider our faith an integral part of our existence, therefore we believe and trust the Word of God; however, the President's statement in no way should challenge our commitment to assist in his re-election or his qualifications to be Commander-in-Chief. It is incumbent on every American to take a stance and decide whether we will be a myopic, one issue people on re-electing the President, or allow him to be the President of all of the people and to share his personal views on this topic.

I am suggesting that each person make a critical decision and decide that President Obama

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has, once again, conducted himself in a manner in which all Americans can be equally represented. I have found internal peace to confidently continue to fully endorse and support the 44th President of the United States of America although our opinions on same-sex marriage may differ. At this point in history we, as a nation, must not become consumed in emotionally charged, politically motivated religious interpretations, by some, regarding President Obama's position on same-sex marriage. Americans must continue to remain actively involved in the political process. To refrain from voting and stay at home is not an option. Voting is your moral responsibility in a democracy.

May God guide your conscience during these delicate faith-challenging, personally stretching political moments of growth and development for our country.