

January 11, 2008 Prayer Vigil Meditation and Prayer - A. Saperstein,  
on behalf of Evangelicals for Human Rights

- Good afternoon. Let me begin this afternoon with two readings from the New Testament.
- Jesus said:
  - **Luke 6:27-36** <sup>27</sup> . . . love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. <sup>30</sup> "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. <sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*. <sup>35</sup> "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *people*.
- The Apostle Paul said:
  - **Romans 12:17 - 13:1** <sup>7</sup> Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all people. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. <sup>19</sup> Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- As an evangelical follower of Jesus, and as one who embraces the teaching of the apostles, I am committed to the high call expressed above – the call not to be overcome by evil, but rather to overcome evil with good. In this aspiration, it is first and foremost my own scriptural tradition which constrains me to oppose the use of torture against any person at any time, including against my enemies or the enemies of my nation. I join today with a growing number of evangelical believers, including top leaders of the National Association of Evangelicals and many evangelical churches in America, in condemning the use of torture by our own or any government or group, irrespective of any potential gains there might be in employing it. We are persuaded that on any grounds – on theological grounds; on ethical grounds; on grounds of broadly accepted principles of human rights; on the grounds of well-established notions of the dignity of persons; on grounds in keeping with our deep commitment to the sanctity of life; on grounds of international legal codes and structures – on all these grounds, we must unequivocally oppose the use of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment under any and all circumstances.
- For the pragmatists among us, we would also argue that any apparent gains we might obtain in the short-term through the use of torture are offset by profound losses in the

long-term. For every enemy we may destroy through the use of torture, we will create hundreds more in the future through its use. We have nothing to gain through the use of torture.

- Nonetheless, let us not be naive and think that we have no enemies. Jesus was suffering under no illusions when he gave Himself up to the Roman authorities to be tortured and killed, and most of the very apostles who spoke against repaying evil for evil directly suffered torture and death at the hands of evil men. We must be willing ourselves to pay a price for doing good, and we must call our nation to do the same.
- Finally, as a Christian, I believe that God came to us in Christ, stooping down and making Himself vulnerable even to the point of being tortured and killed, so that His enemies might receive mercy. Let us, regardless of our religious tradition or convictions, consider the way of Jesus as we seek to lead our country forward in renouncing the use of torture in all circumstances and times. Let's pray together.

### Prayer

- Oh our merciful God in heaven, we come to you and ask first that you would change those of us who are gathered here – change us inside. Make us more like You; show us where we still hold in our hearts the cruelty and fear that lies at the heart of torture; and show us the way of repentance, forgiveness and change.
- Give us the courage as a people to exercise restraint, to treat our enemies as we ourselves would be treated, and to resist the ever-present temptation to take the easy and natural way of cruelty toward our enemies.
- Deliver us, oh God, from the fear of our enemies and lead us on the high and difficult road of loving them – of doing unto them what they have not been able or willing to do unto us.
- Make us people, oh God, who fear you more than we fear other human beings, and who fear the consequences of harming others unjustly more than the consequences of being harmed unjustly.
- Work in us and in our leaders, oh God, and make us able to do what is difficult, yet good. Change us, oh God, and make us more and more able to resist the unrighteous way, no matter how easy or practical it may appear.
- Show us the way to persuade others that honors those we seek to persuade, that honors You, and that does not betray the very sentiments for which we speak.
- And finally, we want to remember those who are prisoners and those who are ill-treated at the hands of our own or any government or group – Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and people of any or no faith – show Your mercy to those who suffer, and restrain the hands of those who inflict that suffering.
- We pray in your great, glorious and precious name. Amen.

---

Dr. Andrew D. Saperstein  
Associate Director, Reconciliation Program  
Yale Center for Faith and Culture  
Yale University Divinity School  
Tel.: (203) 432-9946  
[www.yale.edu/faith/reconciliation](http://www.yale.edu/faith/reconciliation)  
[andrew.saperstein@yale.edu](mailto:andrew.saperstein@yale.edu)