

Critics: Man ‘living like Jesus’ should not have voted for Obama: Ed Dobson, formerly of Moral Majority

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When minister Ed Dobson set out to live like Jesus for a year, he didn't plan on stirring up controversy. Then again, Jesus stirred up plenty.

This architect of the religious right is in hot water with some conservatives over his statement that living like Jesus during 2008 influenced him to vote for Barack Obama—his first presidential vote ever for a Democrat.

In the early 1980s, Dobson helped found the now-defunct Moral Majority, and as an aide to the late Jerry Falwell he edited the *Fundamentalist Journal*.

He later became the pastor of a megachurch in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and in 1999 he and fellow Moral Majority alum Cal Thomas completed a book, *Blinded by Might*, criticizing religious conservatives' political involvement.

Dobson's admission that he drank an occasional beer while witnessing for Christ also has raised eyebrows at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Dobson is vice president for spiritual formation. School policy prohibits drinking by faculty and students.

The dustup prompted Cornerstone president Joseph Stowell to defend Dobson on an electronic campus bulletin board. Dobson explained his actions on the same board. "I feel sorry that I've caused any controversy, but I don't regret anything I did," said Dobson.

Others around the country also have criticized Dobson following his January 11 appearance on *Good Morning America Weekend* and a Religion News Service story about his journey on the *USA Today* Web site.

In his message to Cornerstone, issued January 8, Stowell supported the right of Dobson or any faculty member to “vote their conscience without censure or exclusion.” He also said because Dobson is a volunteer, he was not asked to sign the university’s lifestyle statement that prohibits drinking. Dobson, normally a nondrinker, said he allowed himself an occasional swig because Jesus drank wine and partied with sinners.

“Personally, I applaud Ed’s passionate pursuit of Jesus,” Stowell wrote. The controversy “should remind us that living in Jesus’ way is a worthy goal that is often risky and sometimes radical.”

Stowell later downplayed the controversy, saying only that it has “sparked a lot of interesting and constructive conversation.” He declined to elaborate on his statement to the Cornerstone community. “We’re grateful that he’s here and has been willing to give us this year,” Stowell said.

Dobson originally agreed to serve one year at Cornerstone and will step down when the semester ends in May. He recently left on a scheduled vacation until early March.

Dobson last year vowed to follow Jesus’ Jewish lifestyle as well as his teachings. He grew a bushy beard, kept a kosher diet and reread the Gospels every week.

During the *Good Morning America* interview, Dobson acknowledged that he has been criticized for linking his Obama vote to Jesus. While disagreeing with Obama on abortion, Dobson said the Democrat was the candidate closest to the spirit of Jesus’ teachings of compassion and peace.

“I understand, to some degree, their reaction,” Dobson said later. “I don’t have a lot of faith in any politician, no matter the party, and I really wrestled with voting for Mr. Obama, given that he is prochoice. But I concluded that wasn’t the only issue that was important, that I wanted to be pro-life from conception to the grave.”

Dobson emphasized that he is not saying everyone should have voted for Obama, or that Jesus would have. But he said the controversy clouded the main focus of his experience.

“I have come away deeply appreciative of the life and the sufferings and the resurrection of Jesus,” Dobson said.

One Cornerstone professor said he wished Dobson had not made his vote public, arguing that doing so was not germane to the Jesus lifestyle. "Given Obama's voting on abortion, those are some very un-Jesus-like votes," said Michael Wittmer, author of *Don't Stop Believing: Why Living Like Jesus Is Not Enough*. -Charles Honey, *Religion News Service*