

THE MORAL DILEMMA

1 CORINTHIANS 13 - PRAY

A prominent Christian publication did an article on how problematic it can be for pastors to endorse politicians and tether their pulpit to party platforms. I gave it a quick read that morning and retweeted it with an affirming memory that somebody in the congregation once told me they knew I held to strong convictions, yet they didn't have the slightest clue who I voted for...
...and they liked it that way.

When I came back later that day, the popular publication with tens of thousands of followers had retweeted my tweet.

Among the replies were ones like:

"You're a sheep if you think the left isn't out to destroy your church and your freedoms, and you aren't leading your church accordingly."

Also:

"If you aren't actively speaking out and condemning Trump and those that support him, you're a fool."

This only affirmed my stance!

Because what did each side want?

The church should be a place that endorses my personal convictions. And those other half of folks that lean the other way due to their convictions? Forget 'em.

But the ONE body of Christ is going to have people from BOTH parties.

If that makes your skin crawl, I've got bad news - Heaven is going to be hellish for you.

Because Heaven is going to be diverse...

The deeper reason so many people had a visceral reaction to the article I retweeted is that we've bought into the lie that has made it into the church that **unity is sameness**. Down to our voting. But that's a lie.

BIBLICAL unity is harmony that is found in diversity.

And **Biblical community** is where there is diversity, and people who may think differently than you and even vote differently than you are unified by the Lordship of Jesus.

Meanwhile in **tribes** as we've come to define them in our modern culture - you're only allowed to believe what the tribe believes.

A **moral dilemma** is by definition a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two courses of action, neither of which clearly lines up with morality.

What do we do that as faithful Christians?

How do we navigate these waters as followers of Christ?

Compassion & Conviction - Justin Giboney:

“There is no single Christian policy or political plan. To act like there is one, or to wish that there was one, would be to make the old mistake of thinking that the kingdom of God is like human kingdoms. The goal is not to have all Christians share the same exact politics, but to have all Christians think Christianly about politics.”

1 Corinthians 13 - for all its famous thoughts on love, I want to focus verse 11 – **“when I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.”**

When we look back on our distant childhoods – for many of us politics was the LAST thing on our minds. And man - sometimes as an adult it seems like going back to that and putting away the frustration of politics would be ideal.

But we can't punt politics or put it away. To do so is to passively admit we are OK with the status quo and cool with ignoring the direction of scripture. Among these instructions...

In **Jeremiah 29** we see God command His people: “to work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile.”

Micah 6:8 & our **great requirement** – to love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God. To DO JUSTICE? That takes overturning the very systems that are hurting people that need our mercy. And in our nation especially, that takes politics.

And then keep reading into the Gospels and one of the two greatest commandments given by Jesus? Love your neighbor.

To let go of politics is to let go of a powerful tool to work for prosperity, do justice and practically and systemically love our neighbor, all of which God tells His people to do.

We can't let go of politics because politics determine policies.
Policies affect people.

And the Bible tells us again and again in 100 different ways – people matter to God.

But ultimately politics is a **tool**. And in the hands of different people it may get used differently.

We know that we're commanded biblically to work for the peace of our nation.

We know we are called to care for the poor.

And yet there's more than one way to do each politically.

And again - you could say that one goal of this series isn't for all Christians to think the same about politics. But that we would all think Christianly about politics.

When we mix our faith with politics, 1 Corinthians 13 and many other verses like it remind us that what we often chalk up as **contending in the faith** is really no more than being **contentious in the flesh**. We think we're contending for God's glory but we're being noisy gongs. That's not anointed. That's annoying.

President Bill Clinton told the Christian author Philip Yancey after a breakfast with a dozen religious pastors and figures:

“I’ve been in politics long enough to expect criticism and hostility... but I was unprepared for the hatred I get from Christians. Why do Christians hate so much?”

Jesus said we’d be known by our love. And when the Church’s witness in the political arena is one of hate, it’s clear that we are no longer in step with or being disciplined by the one who said we would be known for our love, even love for our enemy. How does this happen? And why?

The Pull of Polarization and The Direction of Discipleship.

*“When I was a child I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child.
But when I grew up I put away childish things.”*

I believe God wants us to put away some childish tendencies and impulses that get in the way of our witness and rob us of the love 1 Corinthians 13 describes.

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

The brain is made up of three major parts:

First you’ve got the **brain stem**, which is the smallest part of our brain that regulates some of the basic bodily functions like breathing, digestion, heart rate, and alike.

Right past the brain stem is the **cerebellum** which helps regulate the more voluntary functions like speech and posture and alike.

Finally there’s the **cerebrum**. The cerebrum is complex, but there’s two parts of note tonight: First the amygdala, which deals with emotions that are impulsive, automatic, and even unconscious. The **amygdala** is where fear is rooted. It’s where we have triggered responses and bias – the impulses of our flesh.

And beyond that is the **prefrontal cortex**. The prefrontal cortex is where nuanced, complex thought and emotion are processed. It’s where we journey when feeling empathy, practicing forgiveness, practicing self control, and doing things that go counter to our flesh. The whole “deny yourself and take up your cross” stuff.

But while the prefrontal cortex is the largest part of the brain, it’s the least used. And it’s entirely possible to go your whole life without using it and live fueled by the amygdala.

It’s how we largely start at birth and as a child. Things like complex choices, navigating the grey, self control, and feeling empathy are hard for young children for this very reason. So children readily accept binaries of good and bad. The world is black and white. Good and evil. And one result of this kind of thinking is that we drift into polarization and tribalism.

There were multiple studies done in the 90s of young schoolchildren that were made to wear different colored shirts throughout a summer program. Intergroup prejudices and bias formed based solely on the color of an assigned shirt.

Findings were the strongest in the 3-5 year old grouping.

Less so in the 6-9 year olds and then beyond.

Because as the brain develops we are able to see beyond this pull of polarization.

And how fitting that the shirts in the famous experiment were red and blue.

Because few things pull us into polarization like politics.

This pull of polarization is a regression.

In fact **Carl Jung** did a study of human development and found tribalism and polarization isn't progression, its regression. Polarization means the amygdala takes the reins and we revert to attacking or avoiding.

Polarization is regression.

Not just mentally in our brains. Spiritually in our hearts.

Polarization and tribalism is among the childish things we're called to put away as we follow Christ and walk in love.

Cable news? Makes its profit on polarization.

Social media? Makes its money off division.

But sadly statistics and surveys show again and again that the average Christian feeds FAR more off these two things than they do the Bible.

And the end result? Unloving behavior. Noisy gongs. Clanging cymbals.

Again - Polarization is regression.

To give into its pull is to step back into the childish unloving practices God tells us to put away.

The photo of **Michelle Obama & George Bush hugging**

Among the replies:

How could he hug that baby killer???

Beneath that:

Why would she show love to a warmonger??

It got me thinking-- when it comes to showing kindness to people who don't vote and behave and think like us, how is it that the politicians themselves are somehow outpacing the people in church pews?

But listen – this pull of polarization isn't unique to our imperfect two party system.

And I preach this as a knock on our constitutional republic and representative democracy.

Not at all - this is a tale as old as time.

If you pay attention when **JESUS** calls his disciples in the Gospels... from its outset, *discipleship was an anti-polarization movement.*

The time Jesus walked the earth the Jews were under Roman oppressive rule. There were groups and tribes within the Jews that proposed solutions and ways out of it...

The Pharisees – their solution was to keep the law perfectly. But Jesus and the Bible show us that they clung to their Jewish identity at the cost of their relevancy.

The Sadducees – They were often at odds with the Pharisees because they held a more figurative than literal interpretation of scripture. And they coped with Rome by compromising with Rome.

The Essenes – they were the smallest of the 4 Jewish groups. Rather than battle, they went to bunker down in isolation to live a life of purity. You don't actually read about them in the Bible because they go the way of believers today who detach and separate themselves from the world God called them to reach – they became irrelevant.

The Zealots – They were radicalized Pharisees and red hot patriots. They were political terrorists who thought their cause was righteous.

Among them was a sect called **the Sicarii**. They got their name from the small curved blades they carried. Sicarii literally means “dagger men.” They would use these to gut their political enemies and Roman sympathizers in public places to incite fear.

When Jesus stepped onto Roman soil, one of the reasons thousands followed him was because each of these groups wanted to see where he would fall in line.

What party would he join?

What platform would he fall in line with?

Jesus quickly shows that their solutions aren't the answer as much as they are all **moral dilemmas**, options that fall short and are incomplete.

To the Essenes, he offended them by spending time with the “sinners” and “unclean”

To the Pharisees, he refused to resort to their rule keeping.

To the Sadducees, he points again and again to the supernatural reality they denied.

To the Zealots, he refused to topple the powers in place.

To the Sicarii, he didn't use violence, instead calling for peace makers.

The Jewish people looking to see which platform Jesus would align with harkens back to the book of Joshua, when he's praying before the attack on Jericho, and when he's confronted by God's glorious presence – and he asks “whose side are you on, ours or theirs?”

God's answer- neither.

The implication? I don't choose sides. I reign above all things.

From the outset of their discipleship journey, he didn't just say no to membership in their groups, but he then called all who would be his disciple out of their groups to do life together as family.

He didn't make them choose a party or side. He invited them to choose him. The way, the truth, and the life. And in Him is unity amidst diversity.

Jesus chose a tax collector, Matthew, who the zealots and sicarii would have seen as an enemy more despicable than the Romans themselves. He was a Jew who chose Rome and status over his own people. He would have been a prime target of the zealot's violence...

...and Jesus puts him at tables next to Simon the Zealot.

You better believe he can do the same with two sides of a political aisle today.

The work of Jesus spiritually in us leads to reconciliation. (Put down 2 Corinthians 5)

The work of the enemy as defined by scripture? *Categorization*.

In Revelation 12 the Bible calls the Enemy the "*Accuser of the brethren*."

The Greek word for accuser is "*catégor*" – the word from which we get category.

Categorization is at the root of the pull of polarization. The enemy throws us different colored shirts and pulls us back into the childish ways God has called us out of.

We might shrug it off, but polarization isn't some annoyance or necessary evil.

It's plain evil.

And it's a childish practice God calls us to put away if we're going to follow Him.

Romans 12 tells us we're being disciplined daily. We're either conforming to the patterns of the world. Or we're being transformed by the truth of God. There's no neutral state.

Something is disciplining you daily... is it Jesus and his ministry or reconciliation?

Or is it a culture of polarization?

At the Last Supper when Jesus begins to tell the disciples that the time has come for his death, Jesus deals them a reminder, knowing the pull of polarization was waiting for them:

"I am the way, the truth and the life."

We want to position ourselves OVER people on some false moral high ground or high horse.

God calls us to be WITH them.

As we prepare to take communion I'm reminded the people of diverse backgrounds that sat at the table with him.

We don't know how Simon and Matthew's relationship developed. We don't get stories about the awkward beginnings and the process they worked through from there.

But we do know what it took – choosing Jesus. The way, the truth, and the life. And having the faith in Him to walk in unity with those that aren't like us.

It all starts with choosing Jesus.