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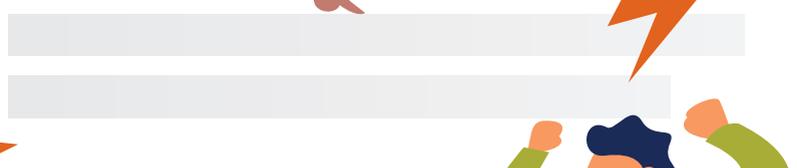
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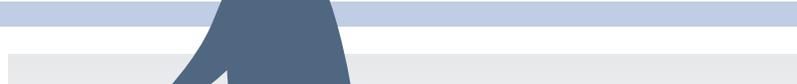
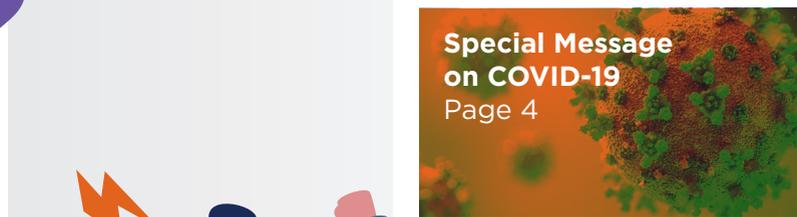


Beyond Civility

By John Inazu



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Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



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We originally intended this issue to focus on the matter of civility in our public and personal lives. That focus remains, but the context has changed. The following articles were written before the coronavirus descended upon our nation. Since COVID-19 has become a standard part of our vocabulary and a global reality, our shared public life has a new urgency not only for civility but for something far more substantial.

As I write this, the global death toll is 129,000. By the time you read it, the death toll will be much higher. Our nation has joined the world in confronting a crisis.

A crisis is a moment of revelation. This virus has revealed our fragility and our common humanity. As the Preacher of Ecclesiastes soberly and even somberly observes: “I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Time and chance have today taken the form of a virus. A thing so small that it is questionably considered a life form, but so significant that it has unquestionably affected life. The coronavirus has

devastated nations wealthy and weak alike.

We currently have no cure and no vaccine. Our best defense is God’s grace and the communal will to respond. God’s common grace has placed humans in society for our mutual good. While Christians share in this common grace, we also have the special grace given through Christ who promised to us that “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). His grace is a unique provision for the Church’s unity and mission.

However, our collective will to respond depends upon a fundamental belief in community. As G.K. Chesterton put it, “We men and women are all in the same boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each other a terrible and tragic loyalty.”

In this moment, we owe each other a terrible loyalty.

Continued on Page 6

Here is the great paradox: In order to enact physical distancing, we need spiritual solidarity. A single virus requires a multitude of coordinated responses. We need to trust each other. We need to work together and lay aside our personal convenience for corporate good. The call for civility in this situation takes on life and death ramifications.

This is because the reality of our common humanity does not automatically lead to unity. Polarization is like powerful magnets placed throughout our ideological spectrum. They pull us apart and clump us into tribes. We have a hard time breaking away from the magnetic security of being with like-minded people, who reinforce our like-mindedness. Efforts to move toward others must labor against that pull. Such labor is exhausting.

The Pew Research Center has a staggering interactive chart on political polarization, illustrating the shift in political values over the past two decades. It shows that Americans have become more ideologically consistent in their political values, and those values have become more strongly associated with partisanship. Where there was once greater overlap, there is now a wide gap.

A pandemic requires believers to model how to transcend differences that seem insurmountable for the unity that reveals itself as crucial.

Jim Baucom, who wrote the article “Why I Don’t Preach *Partisan* Politics” for this magazine, told us that when he shared this data during a Sunday service, his church literally gasped.

The divisions between Republicans and Democrats on fundamental political values — on government, race, immigration, national security, environmental protection and other areas — reached record levels during Barack Obama’s presidency. In Donald Trump’s presidency, these gaps have grown even larger, Pew Research Center reported in 2017.

In more recent studies, the Pew Research Center has

shown how Republicans and Democrats place their trust in two nearly inverse news media environments. We’re not consuming the same content, nor are we interpreting it in the same way. Unfortunately, we have seen that our differences have often led to distrust, and distrust has sometimes soured into disdain. This has played out on a national and global scale but also on the personal level, with division in our families and in our churches.

The coronavirus crisis has highlighted many fault lines in our democracy, but it has also revealed a tremendous capacity to work for the common good. Our prayer is for God to do an extraordinary work to produce unity. We have been and will continue calling our congregations to remember that we are in the world but not of it. Just as Jesus responded to Pilate, “my kingdom is not of this world,” and Paul declared to the Philippians, “our citizenship is in heaven,” we belong to a different kingdom, and we belong to each other. Our higher allegiance ought to be our greatest strength and defining characteristic. We may be Democrats or Republicans for a season of life, perhaps 70 years, but we will be part of God’s kingdom that lasts forever.

The coronavirus has strained the economy, mental health, education, at-risk populations, community life, and more. Our efforts must be broad and also prolonged. Such is the case with civility, but even more the case for the deeper Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. A pandemic requires believers to model how to transcend differences that seem insurmountable for the unity that reveals itself as crucial.

This magazine issue is designed to help us make sense of this cultural moment, to encourage perseverance in a frustrating time, and to give us biblical tools to engage in a manner that demonstrates our primary allegiance to King Jesus Christ. **E**



Crossing the Partisan Divide

“ In a free society where you don't fear being locked up for our opinions, true moral courage isn't standing up to the people with whom you disagree. It's standing up to the people with whom you agree — on behalf of those with whom you disagree. Are you strong enough to do that? That, I believe, is one way we can live up to Jesus' teaching to love our enemies.”

Arthur Brooks, president emeritus of American Enterprise Institute, at the National Prayer Breakfast

“ A table is a place of welcome, a place where bread is broken and friendships are forged. In a political landscape dominated by polarization, hostility and misunderstanding, we believe it's critical for Christians to model how to have a firm opinion and host free discussion at the same time. Evangelicals of different stripes cannot continue to shout one another down, bully those who disagree, or exclude one another and refuse to listen.”

Timothy Dalrymple, president and CEO of Christianity Today, in his editorial, “The Flag in the Whirlwind”

Christian Witness and Coronavirus

“ Jesus calls us to be his hands, feet and voice to those who suffer illness. Sometimes, for us, this may mean consulting professionals who possess knowledge beyond our own expertise. It may mean taking precautionary measures in consideration of public health concerns. But it should never mean ostracizing those who desire to meet the Risen King. Instead of running away, we should move toward the ailing with the gospel.”

Stephen Ko, senior pastor at New York Chinese Alliance Church, in a Christianity Today article “Coronavirus Fears Mean We Need More Communion, Not Less”

“ I pray that the coronavirus advances no further, but should it continue its advance, will Christians differentiate ourselves from the rest of the world in our response? Will we be the voice of peace in the midst of panic? Will we be the ones who serve one another and share resources, or will we horde and isolate? Will we have hope when others despair? Our response will not only be a matter of the soul, it may very well be what makes a difference in our communities.”

Larry Hackman, executive pastor of Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church in Gig Harbor, Washington

I'm grateful to have met Rev. Kim at the WEA General Assembly last year. Praying for wisdom and grace in his leadership role at @NAEvangelicals during these not-so-easy times in the US.
Wissam al-Saliby @walsaliby





pastor

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EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

MAY 19–21, 2020

Amplify Conference

Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College

[AmplifyConference.tv](https://www.amplifyconference.tv)

At this annual evangelism conference, church and lay leaders will focus on accelerating the mission of the Church in an age of distraction, busyness and confusion. The 2020 conference will be held virtually.

SEPTEMBER 2020

Creation Care Prayer Breakfast

Washington, DC

Evangelical Environmental Network
CreationCare.org/ccpb.html

NAE President Walter Kim will give the keynote address at the Creation Care Prayer Breakfast, which will bring Christians together to pray for our stewardship of God's creation. Exact date TBD.



JUNE 14, 2020

Pray Together Sunday

National Association of Evangelicals
[NAE.net/praytogether](https://www.nae.net/praytogether)

Spiritual unity in Christ cannot be undone by a virus or pandemic. Whether in church buildings, homes or online meetings, we will come together seeking God's intervention in our lives and asking for strength to care for the most vulnerable, serve our neighbors in Jesus' name and share the gospel with all who have not heard.



SEPTEMBER 23, 2020

See You At The Pole

National Network of Youth Ministries
[SYATP.com](https://www.syatp.com)

Since 1990, students have gathered around their school's flagpole to pray for their school, friends, families, churches and communities.



SEPTEMBER 24–26, 2020

Focus 2020

Orlando, FL

Missio Nexus
[MissioNexus.org/focus-2020](https://www.MissioNexus.org/focus-2020)

The annual Mission Leaders Conference inspires mission leaders to catalyze relationships, collaboration and ideas within the Great Commission community.

SEPTEMBER 30–OCTOBER 3, 2020

CCDA National Conference

Kansas City, MO

Christian Community Development Association
[CCDA.org](https://www.CCDA.org)

The national conference of the Christian Community Development Association offers believers connection, instruction and inspiration as they seek to love their neighbors in practical and effective ways.

SEPTEMBER 5, 2020

Together 2020

Washington, DC

PULSE

[TogetherGeneration.com](https://www.TogetherGeneration.com)

Together 2020 is about calling this generation back to Jesus, who suffered and died so that death would never win again. This Labor Day weekend, you're invited to gather — in person or online — to lift up Jesus so that a hurting world will know the hope that comes from him.



Find additional Evangelical Calendar opportunities online at [NAE.net/calendar](https://www.NAE.net/calendar).

WORTH NOTING

✔ Inauguration Ceremony Marks New Chapter for NAE

On March 4, 2020, the National Association of Evangelicals hosted an inauguration ceremony for NAE President Walter Kim at the Capital Turnaround in Washington, D.C. The event also installed new board leadership, including John Jenkins, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Glenarden, as NAE board chair; and Jo Anne Lyon, general superintendent emerita of The Wesleyan Church, as NAE vice chair.

During his inaugural address, Kim noted Jesus' inaugural address found in Luke 4:14-21. "God commissioned Jesus to proclaim good news to the world. As you may know, the phrase 'proclaim good news' translates a Greek word that is the basis of the English word 'evangelical.' Evangelicals are good news people. When Jesus came to proclaim good news, he came as the first evangelical. Of course, he didn't simply proclaim good news. He is the good news."

"The first evangelical, the first proclaimer of good news sought out the poor, the prisoner, the oppressed. Evangelicals have long followed Jesus in the marriage of gospel truth and gospel justice," he said.

Kim also referenced President Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address given 155 years ago to the day. "Every

age has its malice; every generation has its need for charity; every person is given a task by God. The NAE has work to do. We are good news people compelled to transform, by God's grace, our national narrative of racism to the gospel narrative of reconciliation. The true just and lasting peace to which Lincoln alludes is found only through the good news of Jesus."



NAE Vice Chair Jo Anne Lyon, right, prays for Walter Kim and his family during the NAE inauguration ceremony, held at Capital Turnaround in Washington, D.C.

Watch a welcome message from Walter Kim at [NAE.net/welcome](https://www.nae.net/welcome).

✔ Pray Together Sunday

The National Association of Evangelicals encourages churches to take part in our annual Pray Together Sunday, which will be held Sunday, June 14, 2020. This year's theme is "For Such a Time as This." We are facing an invisible virus that is causing suffering on a global scale. At a time when we need each other, we find ourselves physically distant from friends, neighbors, co-workers and fellow church members. But our spiritual unity in Christ cannot be undone by any virus or pandemic.

To this end, we invite churches across America to join together in prayer for the healing of our nation and our world. Whether in church buildings, homes or online meetings, we will come together seeking God's

intervention in our lives and asking for strength to care for the most vulnerable, serve our neighbors in Jesus' name and share the gospel with all who have not heard. May the Church of Jesus Christ be a light to a hurting world and rise up for such a time as this.

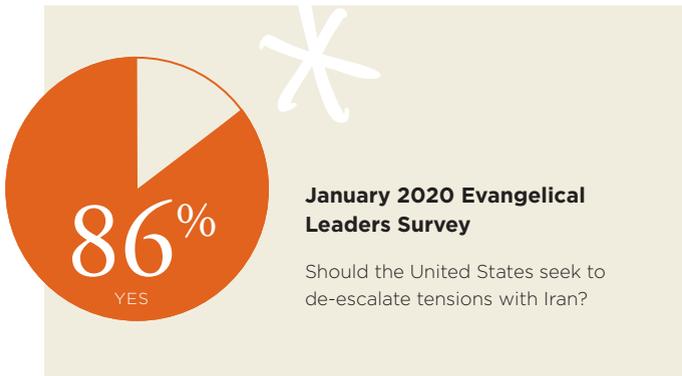


Register your church and receive free resources at [NAE.net/praytogether](https://www.nae.net/praytogether).

✓ De-escalating U.S.-Iran Tensions

The decades-long conflict between Iran and the United States resurfaced in early 2020 with the death of an Iranian general by a U.S. drone attack, prompting speculation of what might come next. Many American evangelical leaders know Iranian Christians and churches. In the January 2020 Evangelical Leaders Survey, they shared concern over the widespread suffering among Iranian people.

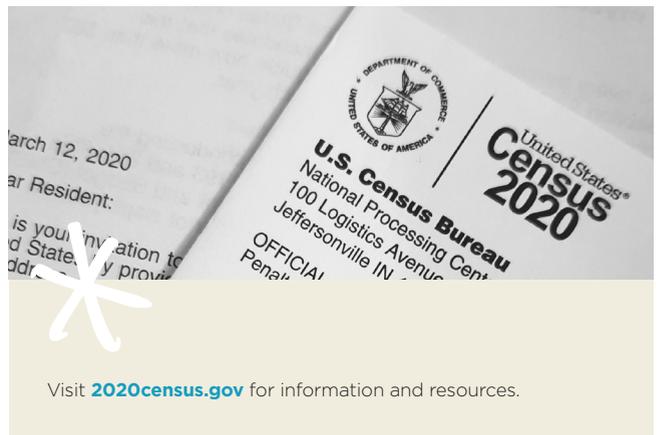
Leaders also emphasized the biblical imperative of peace-making. Steve Jones, president of The Missionary Church, said, “Jesus called us to be peacemakers, so we should want that for our country as well, remembering that the Scripture includes the phrase, ‘as far as it depends on you’ (Romans 12:18). Lasting peace between parties requires the willing participation of both. Therefore, we should always offer a pathway to peace that is good-hearted and sincere, but doesn’t violate principles of reciprocity, integrity and verifiability.”



✓ U.S. Census 2020

Census data impact decisions at the national, state, tribal and local levels — from congressional representation to the annual allocation of more than \$675 billion. Businesses, nonprofits and churches also use census data to plan programs and services. The National Association of Evangelicals has advocated for adequate funding for a reliable census and encourages its members to get involved.

The official Census Day was April 1, and many people have already participated by phone, mail or online. However, from May to July, Census takers will begin visiting homes that haven’t responded to the 2020 Census to help make sure everyone is counted. Faith leaders are trusted voices in their communities and can help answer questions and encourage participation. Responses to the 2020 Census are confidential, secure and protected by federal law. They cannot be used against respondents in any way.



✓ Nonprofit Parking Tax Repealed

At the end of 2019, the U.S. Congress repealed the 21 percent tax on parking and transportation benefits provided by churches and other nonprofits to their employees. The National Association of Evangelicals worked with a broad coalition of religious and charitable nonprofits to push for the repeal.

Besides the expense, what was concerning is that “requiring churches to file these forms was seen by many as the camel’s nose under the tent of government intrusion,” Galen Carey, NAE vice president of government relations, told McClatchy News.

The NAE advocates that Congress take the next step in tax reform by supporting the universal charitable deduction, which would encourage every taxpayer, regardless of income, to give to charitable causes.



Galen Carey is vice president of government relations of the National Association of Evangelicals.



Does the Golden Rule Apply to Politics?

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...”
—Matthew 7:12

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus announced the coming of God’s kingdom and invited his followers to rethink their thinking in light of the remarkable opportunity to live under the rule of God. Those who follow the way of Jesus find their relationships transformed as they learn to love, serve and forgive even those who mistreat them.

Loving our enemies is a high bar for anyone, and especially for politicians whose careers depend on defeating other candidates at the polls. But what about the Golden Rule? Is it reasonable to expect our leaders to offer others the courtesy, respect and cooperation that they would want others to show to them?

Before casting stones and lamenting the behavior of politicians, we should first consider whether, as followers of Jesus, we are applying the Golden Rule in our own lives: in our marriage, family, workplace, neighborhood and church relationships. Then consider if, when we enter the public square as voters and advocates, we treat our opponents as we would want to be treated.

Facts, Name Calling & Motives

A key challenge is to fairly state the facts and arguments that work against our advocacy positions. It is easy, and all too common, to caricature the most extreme and indefensible version of the policy alternative that we oppose, while presenting our own option in the best possible light. This approach seems to work in fundraising and mobilizing the base, though usually not in lobbying with professional staff who know all sides of an issue. But it can be infuriating to be on the receiving end of such treatment, especially when those who exaggerate and mischaracterize our position have a larger megaphone. Their lies offend us. Is there any reason to think that our lies don’t offend them?

Name calling is a favorite tactic. Political opponents may be called racist, sexist, socialist, homophobic, liberal, elitist or totalitarian, depending on which boogeyman a particular audience most detests. Some go a step further and personalize the slander by using nicknames or labels that attack and

disrespect the person and not just their ideas. In the political world, physical violence is thankfully rare, but verbal abuse has become commonplace.

Impugning motives is a closely related practice. We claim to know not only what objectionable outcomes would ensue from others' plans, but why they propose them. We say that opponents want to corrupt our children, or take food from the hungry, or open our borders to terrorists. If they want these things, they must be evil, and they must be stopped.

All of us have mixed motives, and only God knows the heart. "Judge not, that you be not judged," counseled Jesus. In most cases our political disagreements are over priorities and strategies. We may differ over the best way to educate children, or provide health care, or grow the economy. But most of the time we can find broad agreement on such goals as having a safe and prosperous nation that is at peace with its neighbors, in which all citizens can live in freedom and dignity. Few people go into politics or public service with the goal of making others miserable.

Do we really think our nation, or our churches, will be better off if we conform to the world's standards in politics?



A Dose of Humility

In a time when information (or misinformation) on any topic is only a few clicks away, it is tempting to think that we know more than we do. Predicting the impact of public policy decisions involves making assumptions about human behavior and future conditions that are in many cases unknowable. Economic forecasts are notoriously unreliable. We may think that a particular law will solve a vexing issue, only to find that the unintended consequences are worse than the original problem.

Personnel decisions also can have surprising consequences. Justice Antonin Scalia, for example, was

popular among conservatives but authored one of the most damaging Supreme Court decisions undermining the First Amendment protection of the free exercise of religion, in *Employment Division v. Smith*. Anyone who works in politics or public policy needs a large dose of humility.

Political Expediency or Jesus' Teaching?

What would happen if Christians led the way in applying the Golden Rule in our political and public policy engagement? Would our policy agenda suffer? In the short term, perhaps it would. Advocacy organizations might find it harder to raise funds. Others might take advantage of our generosity. But is political expediency a good reason to disregard the teaching of Jesus? What if we decided to obey Jesus in all areas of life, and leave the results to him? Do we really think our nation, or our churches, will be better off if we conform to the world's standards in politics? What does our history teach us in this regard?

The National Association of Evangelicals offers a resource for those who would like to consider an alternative to politics as food fight or culture war. "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility" articulates a biblical basis and method for Christian civic engagement. It offers a sober-minded analysis of the structures of public life, and then lays out eight areas of concern in which evangelicals can make a difference through principled and irenic public engagement.

We invite feedback and dialogue on the best way to advance our common concerns in a way that blesses all of our neighbors, including those who may disagree with our strategies. We seek, in everything, to do for others what we would have them to do for us. **E**



GOLDEN RULE
2020
A CALL FOR DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN POLITICS

The Golden Rule 2020 campaign was created by a wide range of Christian leaders who believe that applying the ethical principal of the Golden Rule will bring dignity and respect to our political interactions. Visit GoldenRule2020.org to sign the Golden Rule pledge and receive resources for individuals and churches.





John Inazu is the Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion at Washington University in St. Louis. This article draws from the introduction to *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference*.

Beyond Civility

Why Pleasantries Are Simply Not Enough





Last year, The Atlantic’s Adam Serwer warned of “the false promise of civility” in an article entitled, “Civility is Overrated.” He has a point. Civility, by itself, does not change hearts and minds. And it doesn’t restore the social fabric or establish justice among the nations. Indeed, as Serwer noted, civility is sometimes invoked by evildoers to mask their transgressions or temper their critics.

Take the political demagogue who shakes all the right hands, the church pastor whose outward charms mask inner demons, the neighborly churchgoer whom Martin Luther King famously labeled the “white moderate.” Too often, civility is a ploy by the powerful to defend an unhealthy or unjust status quo. American evangelicalism is not immune from this danger, especially when Western civility norms are claimed as gospel imperatives.

And yet I still think Christians are called to something like civility. Not compromise, passiveness or capitulation. Not niceness, likeability or even winsomeness. The civility to which Christians are called is something closer to the costly engagement that Scripture counsels us to pursue with other image-bearers.

This kind of engagement is what Tim Keller and I advocate for in our book, “Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference.” With 10 friends who contributed essays — artists, pastors, scholars and ministry leaders — we explore how Christians can engage with others who have deep and irresolvable differences over the things that matter most.



Humility, Patience and Tolerance

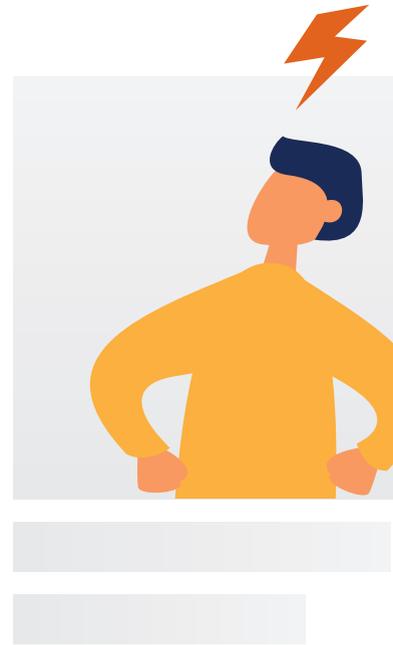
We believe the answer starts with the embodied practices of humility, patience and tolerance. These practices are fully consonant with a gospel witness in a deeply divided age. In fact, they not only make space for the gospel but also point, respectively, to the three Christian virtues of faith, hope and love.

The first of these practices, humility, recognizes that in a world of deep differences about fundamental issues, Christians and non-Christians alike are not always able to prove why they are right and others are wrong. Christians are able to exercise humility in public life because we recognize the limits of human reason, including our own, and because we know we have been saved by faith, not by our moral actions or goodness. That confident faith anchors our relationship with God, but it does not supply unwavering certainty in all matters.

Patience encourages listening, understanding and empathy. Patience with others may not always bridge ideological distance; we are unlikely to find agreement on all of the difficult issues that divide us. But careful listening, sympathetic understanding and thoughtful questioning can help us draw closer to others as we come to recognize the shared experiences that unite us and the different experiences that divide us. We can find common ground even when we don't agree on the common good. Christians can be patient with others, because we place our hope in a story whose end is already known.

Tolerance is a practical enduring of beliefs and practices that we do not share. It does not mean accepting those beliefs or approving of those practices. In fact, the demand for acceptance is a philosophical impossibility. Every one of us holds views about important matters that others find clearly misguided. There is no way that anyone can embrace all the differing and mutually incompatible beliefs in society today. But we can do the hard work of distinguishing people from ideas, of pursuing relationships with people created in God's image while recognizing that we will not approve of all their beliefs or actions. Christians can demonstrate tolerance for others because our love of neighbor flows from our love of God, and our love of God is grounded in the truth of the gospel.

All three of these practices — humility, patience and tolerance — encounter stiff resistance in an era of sound bites and echo chambers, where news channels and social media personalities trade nuance for popularity. Too often, Christians

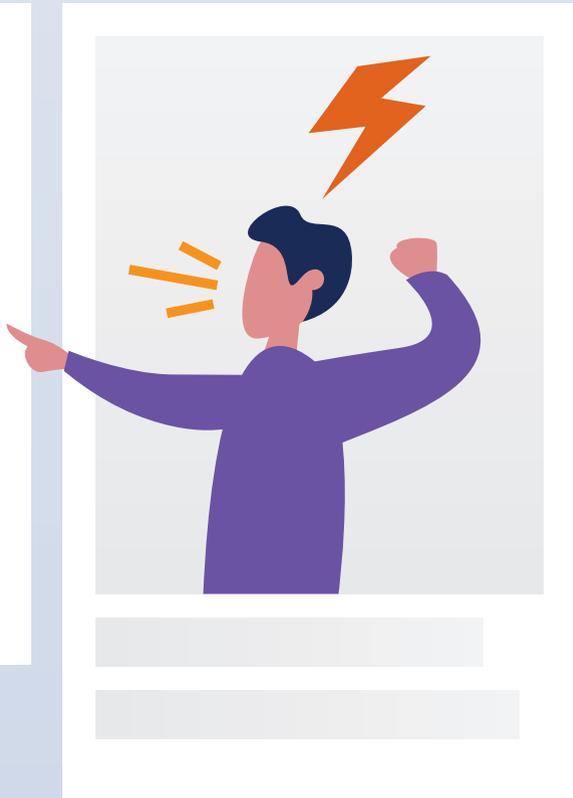


Tolerance is a practical enduring of beliefs and practices that we do not share. It does not mean accepting those beliefs or approving of those practices.

are caught up in these very same currents. But if our culture cannot form people who can speak with both conviction and empathy across deep differences, then it becomes even more important for the Church to use its theological and spiritual resources to produce such people. Let us be shaped and reshaped into people whose every thought and action is characterized by faith, hope and love — and who then speak and act in the world with humility, patience and tolerance.

From Tolerance to Love

In fact, when we are motivated by the love of Christ, we can do far more than simply tolerate. Think about your relationships with friends who hold beliefs different from your own. You don't just tolerate them. You laugh, cry,



celebrate and mourn with them. You risk a kind of personal vulnerability that requires more than just coexisting together in the same space. And what about those who overtly reject you or even show hostility to you? The answer is the same. Jesus doesn't tell us to tolerate our enemies. He says to love them. And thank God that Jesus does not merely tolerate us — he embraces us across the greatest difference of all.

Christians should be leading the way toward engaging with others across difference, because we are called to embody the love that Jesus has shown to us. We should do so with confident hope rather than stifling anxiety, regardless of the political and cultural context that we confront. We should risk entering uncertain and messy spaces. We should risk connecting with others in more tangible and more vulnerable ways, beginning with ordinary acts like sharing a meal or simply having a conversation.

Some people may cast aspersions on us for the company we keep or the places we go. They did that to Jesus, too. And Jesus engaged the world, not just at the possible risk of his comfort or reputation but at the sure and certain cost of his life.

“He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner,” they murmured threateningly when Jesus went to the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:7), but he still went. “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans,” the apostle John underscored in Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:9), but Jesus still spoke to the woman at the well. “Today you will be with me in Paradise,” Jesus told the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), and then he died. Through our confidence in the gospel and in the Author and Perfecter of our faith, we seek to live as Jesus lived in a world of difference. ❸





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Why I Don't Preach *Partisan* Politics

The initial inquiry for this article was whether I might be willing to write about why I don't preach politics. My response was to laugh first and then to offer a qualified response: "Yes, but only if I can alter the title with the modifier 'partisan.'" I don't preach *partisan* politics.

Apart from disengaging from the culture entirely, I don't think it is possible to sidestep politics. Any pastor who avoids preaching about anything politicians talk about will have decided not to address anything relevant to anyone who is listening. I've been accused (wrongly) of "preaching politics" whenever I have addressed biblical issues like racism, the sanctity of human life, the environment, hospitality to strangers, or even civility (love). I usually know I am getting it right when I am catching it from all sides. But I don't preach *partisan* politics, despite my own political inclinations.

Not of This Cosmos

The reason I avoid political partisanship is because, quite literally, I know it is one of Satan's most powerful instruments to conform the Church to the world. Jesus was clear in stating

that "his kingdom was not of this *cosmos*" (John 18:36) and in praying that his followers would be unified "in the *cosmos*, but not of it" (John 17:14–19). The Greek word **κόσμος** (*cosmōs*) is rightly translated "the social order of the world," the very stuff of *partisan* politics.

This is what Jesus resisted when Satan took him to a high mountain and offered him the "kingdoms of the *cosmos* and their glory" if Jesus would submit to him (Matthew 4:8–11). If the kingdoms of the world were Satan's to give, then they are still his purview.

When these "cosmetics" are worn by the Church, and the social order of the Church looks like that of the world, the Church loses both its moral influence and its freedom to speak truth to worldly power of every stripe. Jesus plainly directed his followers to avoid this social order of the world with all its power plays (Matthew 20:25–28).



Christ's Appointees

There are legitimate reasons for Christians to disfellowship, but partisan politics are not among them. Paul establishes that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20) and that we are “Christ’s ambassadors” imploring the world to “be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Every local church is an embassy of the kingdom of God, and every member is an emissary of Heaven with a missionary visa to the world. Our redemptive prayer is that the kingdom of God would be visible “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

I glimpse that each week when I recognize that those attending the inside-the-beltway church I pastor have not placed themselves on opposite sides of the aisle according to their worldly politics any more than they have segregated themselves by race, gender or social class. On any given weekend, it is common to see appointees of the last (Democratic) administration seated beside those of the present (Republican) one, for instance. They come to be shaped by the word of God, not the way of the world. For them, there are plenty of tempting places to be conformed to the *cosmos*, but only one transforming place to be cruciformed to Christ.

Temples of Political Ideology

Paul counsels us that our “true and proper worship” is to be “transformed by the renewal of our minds, not conformed to the pattern of this world” (Romans 12:1–2). I wonder how this is possible if we take the bait of Satan and make our churches partisan temples of political ideology.

I recognized a long time ago that no political party — whatever its ever-shifting posture or platform at any given point in time — has a monopoly on truth and virtue. People on both political poles believe that their party is rationally moral, but precious little of partisan politics is rational at all, and there are vast ethical inconsistencies in the platforms of both American political parties. Why would we even consider conforming our churches and pulpits to this?

Yet, sincere people come to their pastors constantly and say, in essence, “Please baptize my political preferences and make them sacred.” These people hope in vain for an aligned world that always makes sense, one that will rescue them from the struggles of cognitive dissonance that are unavoidable in the shadow of Christ’s cross.

When our members say, “We don’t like when you preach

politics,” they usually mean that we just challenged their comfortable assumptions about how the world should work for them. If we stuck to preaching *their* politics — whoever they might be — they’d judge us apolitical purveyors of truth. That’s why churches are sorting themselves out in the partisan pattern of this world, and that’s why many pastors preach partisan politics. It’s easy.

I don’t preach partisan politics, because nothing would please Satan more than to get his foot in the door of my church in his quest to conform it to his will.

Living in the Deep State

When I was first called to this large church on the edge of the nation’s capital 18 years ago, a grizzled veteran U.S. senator walked up to me after my first sermon and said sternly, “Start praying, you’ve just been dropped in behind enemy lines.” I didn’t know how to respond, then, but now I would. I started praying a long time ago, because I was dropped behind enemy lines the moment I drew my first breath.

We all live and minister in the same “deep state” — the condition of fallenness, fear and shame. Whenever we begin to believe that we are merely fighting those on whichever side of the aisle, we have forgotten that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

I preach politics, because I can’t avoid real issues as Christ’s ambassador in a world he is redeeming. I don’t preach *partisan* politics, because nothing would please Satan more than to get his foot in the door of my church in his quest to conform it to his will. I preach God’s infallible word, and it has a way of offending us all, sometimes, as it reminds us again and again that we navigate a world that cannot make sense. Alas, that world is not my home. **E**



An International Perspective on U.S. Christians and Politics

I write from outside of the United States, but looking in with great interest. I pastor a church in my home country of New Zealand, but having also pastored in Northern California and obtained a doctoral degree from Bethel University in Minnesota, I am not unfamiliar with American life.

From an outsider’s perspective, the heightened partisan divide in America is disturbing. Some will dismiss this as an American issue and not the business of those beyond its borders. However, we live in a global village; when Americans sneeze, the rest of the world catches a cold!

Media reporting on U.S. evangelicalism has an impact on the perception of evangelical movements and ministries around the world. Undiscerning commentators assume we’re part of the same monolithic whole.

The word “evangelical” stands for belief in the authority and relevance of the Bible, unabashed proclamation of the gospel, the centrality and efficacy of the cross, and a clarion call to radical conversion. Lazy journalism may be to blame for ill-defining evangelicals as a political bloc, but it’s not hard to grasp how they’ve formed such a view with the partisan alignment of some high-profile leaders of evangelical ministries. In my home country, an invitation to a well-known evangelist is now questioned due to his reported political endorsements. Bible-believing Christians are increasingly regarded with suspicion in local media as having an assumed political bias.

As fellow evangelicals, we applaud the engagement of American Christians in the public square. For too long, evangelicals misunderstood separation of church and state to mean non-involvement in national governance. We have a valid voice, and a divine mandate to speak prophetically.

However, many of us around the world struggle to understand the lack of civility and Christian grace that currently manifests in the cauldron of American politics, especially toward those of different shades on the political spectrum. The culture of vilification, name-calling and conspiratorial presumptions of those with different political views is disconcerting. That many who profess to love Jesus, and hold a high view of the Bible, also engage in such banter is incongruous with the values we evangelicals hold dear.

Isaiah warned of misguided accreditation of current affairs: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness . . .” (Isaiah 5:20).

Evangelicals refer to the Bible as the “word of God.” It shapes our worldview and how we live. It also encourages us to speak up when we see a brother or sister caught in inappropriate behavior; for to say or do nothing is tantamount to complicity. What advice, therefore, might a fellow evangelical offer his U.S. brothers and sisters amidst a divisive election cycle? Here are 10 ideas:

1. Speak to, and about, those of different political perspectives with grace and respect — as befitting of Christ-followers. It is possible to believe passionately and to disagree with others in a manner that is honoring. Name-calling and vilification of those who don’t share our view weaken our distinctiveness as ambassadors of God’s kingdom (Philippians 2:3–4).





2. Love and uphold the truth. Be wary of those who bend or distort the truth. Fact check what politicians and media commentators tell us — including those we support. Maintain an open mind until all facts are laid bare (John 8:32).
3. Get your news and political commentary from a variety of sources, rather than just one. Evangelicals think biblically and are cautious of deception. Filter all we hear through the lens of Scripture and think for ourselves (Colossians 2:8).
4. Be cautious of believing and retelling unsubstantiated conspiracy theories. Christians have suffered much over the centuries from false conspiracies; we ought not to perpetuate disinformation. Truth sets us free, Jesus said, not speculation and innuendo (Isaiah 8:12–13).
5. Work for reconciliation wherever there is discord. Blind and belligerent party politics destroys a nation. Followers of Jesus are more committed than most to finding negotiated resolutions amid conflict (2 Corinthians 5:18).
6. Accept that equally sincere Christ-followers may have different political ideologies, coming to different conclusions from reading the same Bible as you do. “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.” The kingdom of God supersedes party politics (Romans 12:2).
7. If you have influence in a Christian organization, encourage it to remain nonpartisan in its public policy engagement. Be cautious of those that appear to have “hitched their wagon” to one political ideology lest they damage their credibility (Acts 5:38–39).
8. Take seriously what the Bible says about justice, care of the poor and marginalized, and those without a home and/or nation. The Bible is replete with God’s displeasure upon those who mistreat the poor and homeless (Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 21:13, 28:27).
9. Recognize that Christian faith flourishes even under ungodly political regimes. It was born in conflict, matured amidst waves of persecution, and does its best work in low-profile love and service — rather than on the coattails of political power (2 Corinthians 4:5).
10. Remember, it is righteousness that exalts a nation, not the state of its economy or the security of its borders. God’s blessing falls on those who treat others well, especially those less fortunate (Proverbs 14:34).

At the end of the 19th century, Charles Sheldon penned a famous little book (“In His Steps”) based on a series of sermons delivered to his church in Topeka, Kansas. Parishioners were asked to pledge for one year to make no major decisions without first stopping to ask the question: “What would Jesus do?” Maybe in a political context, it might just be a good question for evangelicals to ask again in the year 2020! 🇺🇸

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Making a Way Out of No Way

Those words are emblazoned on the third floor of the National African American Museum of History and Culture in Washington, D.C. I've spent many hours in the museum working on a writing project about education policy, race, equity and politics.

The Expectations Project, the organization I lead, focuses on engaging people of faith to become policy advocates to improve America's low-income public schools. The systemic policy change we seek often seems insurmountable as opposing education factions can dig into their own ideals, unwilling to compromise. Policy and political change require both an eye on the long game and a very thick skin.

In the midst of my policy work and my writing, the African American Smithsonian museum has become a source of inspiration for me. I bring my laptop into that space and explore, reflect, pray and write.

The Making a Way Out of No Way exhibition has a myriad of examples illustrating how African Americans persevered, under dire circumstances, to change the face of our nation. These exhibits show the resilience, creativity and power of a people determined to make a better country, with their faith inspiring them to persist. Regardless of how Christians feel about the current rancor in today's political arena, we have an obligation to show the same resilience today. That's how real change happens.

My ancestors were willing to keep fighting, often in the name of Christ, to put an end to reprehensible policies like slavery, lynching and segregated public schools. And some died, martyred, in the name of societal change. I humbly stand on their shoulders because they blazed a trail for me. I would feel like a coward if I weren't willing to stand up for policy issues that make our nation better. Honestly, any self-sacrifices for my political engagement pale in comparison to what those portrayed in the museum faced. Those ancestors inspire and encourage me to stay the course.

Be strong and of good courage, my fellow Christians. We should engage in politics in a way that fundamentally changes the conversation. We should not cower from it. Christians should set the standard for the political debate, even when others seem to only bring acrimony and incivility.

Find your inspiration. I've found mine. Together, let's continue to make a way out of no way. **E**

Regardless of how Christians feel about the current rancor in today's political arena, we have an obligation to show the same resilience today. That's how real change happens.



Loving
capable
kind
worthy

Uncommon Decency

Kindness and gentleness should be especially characteristic of those of us who are Christians. We were created for kind and gentle living. Indeed, kindness and gentleness are two of the fruit-of-the-Spirit characteristics that the apostle Paul mentions in Galatians 5. When Christians fail to measure up to the standards of kindness and gentleness, we are not the people God meant us to be.

Not Civility Alone

Not that civility is the be-all and end-all of life. We will not solve all our problems simply by becoming more civil people. There are times when it is appropriate to manifest some very uncivil feelings. “Passionate intensity” is not always out of place. If I am going to be a more civil person, it cannot be because I have learned to ignore my convictions. As Martin Marty has observed, one of the real problems in modern life is that the people who are good at being civil often lack strong convictions, and people who have strong convictions often lack civility. I like that way of stating the issue. We need to find a way of combining a civil outlook with a “passionate intensity” about our convictions. The real challenge is to come up with a convicted civility.

“Inner” Civility

Civility is public politeness. It means that we display tact, moderation, refinement and good manners toward people who are different from us. It isn’t enough, though, to make an outward show of politeness. Being civil has an “inner” side as well. To be sure, for some people civility is only a form of playacting. Many people today think of civility as nothing more than an outward, often hypocritical shell. But this cynical understanding of civility is yet another sign of the decline of real civility. In the past civility was understood in much richer terms. To be civil was to genuinely care about the larger society. It required a heartfelt commitment to your fellow citizens. It was a willingness to promote the well-being of people who were very different, including people who



seriously disagreed with you on important matters. Civility wasn't merely an external show of politeness. It included an inner politeness as well.

Flourishing in Humanness

To be good citizens, we must learn to move beyond relationships that are based exclusively on familiarity and intimacy. We must learn how to behave among strangers, to treat people with courtesy not because we know them, but simply because we see them as human beings like ourselves. When we learn the skills of citizenship, Aristotle taught, we have begun to flourish in our humanness. Acorns do not realize their innate possibilities until they grow branches and sprout leaves. And people do not attain their full potential until they learn how to behave in the public square.

For some of us, “pursuit” is a very appropriate image. Civility is an elusive goal. We have to chase after it, and the chasing seems never to end. We think we have finally caught it — and then civility slips from our grasp again.

The Struggle for Civility

But how can we hold onto strongly felt convictions while still nurturing a spirit that is authentically kind and gentle? Is it possible to keep these things together? The answer is that it is not impossible — but it isn't easy. Convicted civility is something we have to work at. We have to work at it, because both sides of the equation are very important. Civility is important. And so is conviction.

The Bible itself recognizes the difficulty of maintaining convicted civility. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews lays the struggle out very clearly: we must “pursue peace with everyone,” he tells us, while we work at the same time to cultivate that “holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

For some of us, “pursuit” is a very appropriate image.

Civility is an elusive goal. We have to chase after it, and the chasing seems never to end. We think we have finally caught it — and then civility slips from our grasp again. Just when we think we have figured out how we're going to live with the latest cult or how to tolerate the most recent public display of sexual “freedom,” someone seems to up the ante; and the limits of our patience are tested all over again. So the pursuit goes on and on.

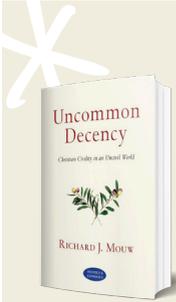
Promoting the Cause

There are two obvious ways to produce more people who combine strong convictions with a civil spirit: either we will have to help some civil people to become more convicted, or we will have to work at getting some convicted people to become more civil. Or both, since each of these strategies is important.

The first requires a kind of evangelism. We need to work at inviting the “nice” people in our society to ground their lives in robust convictions about the meaning of the gospel. But in order to do that, we have to be sure that we are doing our best to present discipleship as an attractive pattern of life.

This means that we must also devote our energies to the second strategy: learning as Christians to be a gentler and more respectful people. I admit that trying to make believers gentler and more “tolerant” will strike some Christians as wrong-headed. What about the devout, passionate people who picket abortion clinics and organize boycotts against offensive television programs?

They might worry that becoming civil will mean a weakening of their faith. I am convinced that this is not necessarily so. Developing a convicted civility can help us become more mature Christians. Cultivating civility can make strong Christian convictions even stronger. **E**



Richard Mouw writes wisely and helpfully about what Christians can appreciate about pluralism, the theological basis for civility and how we can communicate with people who disagree with us on the issues that matter most. This excerpt from “Uncommon Decency” © 2010 by Richard J. Mouw is used with permission of InterVarsity Press. Order at IVPress.com.



Love > Civility

Civility is hard work. Parents who attempt to teach toddlers or teenagers good manners will readily agree. So will citizens who listen to political discourse that builds barriers rather than bridges. Even our workplaces are not safe from incivility. Christine Porath, professor of management at Georgetown University, reported that 98 percent of workers have experienced rude behavior at work. My guess is that the other 2 percent didn't read the question closely.

We must labor at biting our tongue when we want to lash out. Civility can make us weary. But we do not tire easily of insults. I say this, because I've spent time studying honor and shame in social settings and political discourse. My doctoral dissertation from Harvard was on the rhetorical use of insults in the ancient Near East. However, one doesn't need a degree to recognize that humans have a long and distinguished record of rudeness.

We become indignant when someone dares to disagree with us, or worse, when they doubt us, when they doubt our motives, when they doubt our reasons and our Reason, and especially when they question the validity of our faith.

Christians have something more than restraint or good manners. We share the profound belief that we are all created in the image of God, and we all exist as creatures deeply damaged by sin. This glory and vulnerability summon us to treat each other with dignity and humility.

Love engages difficult and uncomfortable conversations with courage and tenacity.

Our faith goes beyond civility to the greater virtue of love. Christ calls us to love our neighbors as well as our enemies. We are called to love while practicing civility and to love even when injustices require words and actions that some may deem uncivil. Love engages difficult and uncomfortable conversations with courage and tenacity.

To a community polarized along theological and ethnic lines, Paul gave inspired advice that applies today: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:9–14).

May the Lord make us such a people for such a time as this. 🙏

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