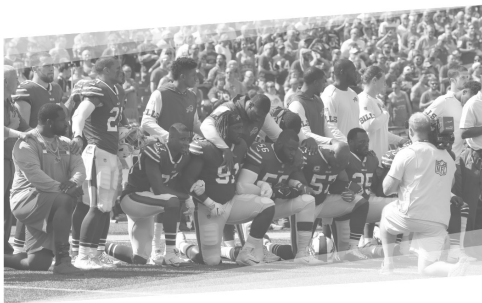


A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
**POLITICIZED
CULTURE**



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NAVIGATING A POLITICIZED CULTURE



I think most of us lament how just about everything in our culture has become politicized. We can attribute that to the fact that we live in a nation that is divided. The clash of worldviews is more apparent than ever before.

Why is This Happening?

In a recent column, Daniel Foster points the finger to social media. The title of his column is, "Everything All

the Time.” His perspective is simple. “It is no longer the case that technologies of communication merely accelerate the public discourse, they now ensure that every possible public discourse happens simultaneously.” In other words, we don’t hear these comments one after another. We hear every comment all at the same time.

We have always had conflicts and differences of opinion in this republic. But these seem to have intensified because of the means of our communication. We could work through our differences “at a pace consistent with social cohesion.” Now we “get a no-holds-barred battle royale in which all things are always at stake.”

Football and the national anthem provide a good example. We were told that Colin Kaepernick did not have a job in the NFL because he was either: (a) a

terrible quarterback, or (b) was being blackballed by the NFL owners. Foster argues that the truth was obviously in between: he is a middling NFL talent who might have a job if he didn't come with so much baggage.

Politics has also been a part of education, especially higher education, for some time. Political correctness led to attempts to prevent certain professors from gaining tenure and kept certain speakers from even being allowed to speak on campus. Universities may say they believe in free speech, but I think we all know that certain religious views and political views are essentially banned from the academy.

Politics has now become part of the business world. Just like on college campuses, we see that certain social and political views are not allowed in the corporate world. Just ask employees

at Google and Mozilla who lost their jobs because one wrote a memo about gender and diversity and the other gave a donation to support traditional marriage. No wonder America is so polarized.

The military might be one arena that you could assume would not be politicized. Unfortunately, we have seen how even the military has been affected by the political environment we find ourselves in today.

Think of the controversy that erupted when a Gold Star wife and a member of Congress complained about the way President Trump talked on the phone to her about the loss of her son. Before it was over, you had the media, members of Congress, and key figures in the Trump administration making comments and charges about what was supposed to be a desire to console

a mother who lost her son.

In a recent column, Ben Shapiro reminds us that when we politicize a sacred space in our culture it is a serious problem. He believes it is serious “because no culture can exist without certain cultural capital—trust—and that trust exists only when there are certain spaces in which we can assume agreement without having to ask.”

When there is shared agreement, there is communication and less friction. If every issue becomes contentious, then the chances for miscommunication increase. Also the cost of transactions increases dramatically.

One of the cultural taboos (until recently) has been the politicization of Gold Star families. Their loved ones have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and they certainly deserve to be left alone to grieve and rebuild their lives. They

should not be at the center of politicized statements.

President George W. Bush provides a good example of how to respond. You might remember that he was the target of a Gold Star mother by the name of Cindy Sheehan. Instead of opposing her or reacting to her, he allowed her to make harsh political statements and did not respond.

It is worth remembering she alleged that Bush went to war for oil. She even said that Bush sent her son to die to make his oil friends rich. She also camped out near his home in Crawford, Texas to protest him. He showed character and restraint.

Perhaps there is a lesson for us to learn. In this politicized environment, we need to be peacemakers as people of integrity and civility. We should practice restraint because it is often better to

turn the other cheek. Sometimes it is better not to respond or retaliate. After all, that is what the Bible tells us to do.

Biblical Principles of Civility

What we are seeing in our society can also be seen in Western civilization. It is the loss of civility. The two words share the same etymology. The root word means to be “a member of the household.” Just as there are certain rules that allow family members to live peacefully within a household, so too, there are rules of civility that allow us to live peacefully within a society. Those rules have collapsed in the 21st century.

How can we summarize the principles of civility? I believe Jesus simply expressed the goal of civility when he taught “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). If we truly love our neighbors, then we

should be governed by moral standards that express concern for others and limit our own freedom.

Perhaps that is why civility is on the decline. More and more people live for themselves and do not feel they are morally accountable to anyone (even God) for their actions or behavior. We live in a world of selfishness and narcissism and we aren't about to let anyone limit our freedom to be ourselves.

Civility also acknowledges the value of another person. Politeness and manners are not merely to make social life easier. We are to treat each other with respect and afford them the dignity they deserve as people created in the image of God. It is improper not to treat them with the dignity they deserve.

Again, this may help answer why civility is on the decline and political

divisions seem to be growing. An increasing majority in our society no longer believes in moral absolutes. A significant number do not believe in God and therefore do not believe we are created in God's image. The moral restraints that existed in the past are loosened. As this crisis of morality and theology unfolds, so does barbarism and decadence. Civility is what is lost from society.

At the heart of civility is the biblical command to love your neighbor as yourself. While it is relatively easy to love people who are your friends or people who are nice to you, the real test of Christian love comes when you are with strangers or with people who are not civil to you. When we find ourselves being criticized in social media or face-to-face, we should still treat these critics with dignity and respect even if they are not civil to us. Even if they are

not gracious toward us, we should not repay them with incivility.

Our duty to be civil to others should not depend on whether we like them or agree with their moral or political perspectives. They may be disagreeable, and we are free to disagree with them, but we should do so by giving grace. Often such a gentle response can change a discussion or dialogue. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that, "A gentle answer turns away wrath."

Civility also demands that we not retaliate. The Apostle Paul teaches in Romans (12:9, 14, 21) we are to "Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." Paul goes on to say that we should "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." Finally, he concludes, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Civility also requires humility. A civil

person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, one should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right and that he is wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

Civility also requires that we watch what we say. The Bible clearly warns us of the danger of the tongue in James 3:5-8. We should watch what we say and what we write.

We should work to cleanse our language of harsh, critical, and condemning words. We should rid ourselves of nasty and vulgar language. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of

the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

In summary, we should be a positive example as we engage the world. We should do so with courage, compassion, character, and civility.

End Notes

¹ Daniel Foster, “Everything All the Time,” *National Review*, 16 October 2017, <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2017-10-15-2050/everything-all-time>.

² Ben Shapiro, “Gold Star Families Are Sacrosanct,” *National Review*, 24 October 2017, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/453028/honoring-gold-star-families-protecting-innocents-some-things-must-remain-sacred>

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