



The Separation of
CHURCH
AND
HATE

OUR CONVERSATION CONTINUED

CIVILITY
Shane Philip
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

At the beginning of the year we did a series called Separation of Church and Hate because we knew that this would be perhaps the most polarizing election of our lives and wanted to prepare our church for that historical time. It seems that all of that got lost with our present reality. So, this week we are revisiting an earlier study called **Civility**. In the past we could respectfully disagree with someone, but now there is so much anger that we have lost the art of constructive and kind conversation. The purpose of this study is to teach us how to disagree politically and love unconditionally – how to change the way we respond to one another. After all, everyone we encounter is sacred to God and formed in His image.

QUESTION: How do you think you are managing this time of isolation?

QUESTION: In what ways have you turned isolation into times of healing solitude?

SCRIPTURE¹

James 1:19-21 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

OBSERVATION

When we began a new year in January, we were excited about closing the chapter on whatever struggles we had endured in 2019, and we made new resolutions for who we wanted to be in the coming year. We could never have foreseen what we would soon be facing. No one would ever have guessed that the world would shut down in a global pandemic – or that the worst unemployment since the great depression was coming – or that there would be political and racial protests and civil unrest in many of our cities. Our country shifted without warning or any opportunity for preparation.

QUESTION: Why do you think politics is such a divisive subject?

APPLICATION

Twenty years ago we envisioned a multi-generational, multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic Crossing congregation sitting together and worshiping God – this also included people with diverse political opinions. The truth is that republicans were absolutely convinced that Jesus would be one of them because of His values; democrats said He would be a democrat because of His care and concern for people. Can you imagine how many people we could have turned away from our church and, perhaps, Christ Himself, with that kind of divisive hypocrisy? So, we made the decision that we would dedicate our lives to raising the banner of Christ and not the flags of republicans or democrats. Jesus is calling us today to engage our “faith life filter” ahead of our “political filter” which only brings conflict. Here's

¹ All scripture is NIV unless otherwise indicated

the thing about conflict: We both want the very same thing. We want EXACTLY what the person we're having the conflict with wants. Both parties want to be heard and understood.

QUESTION: How can you engage your "faith life filter" ahead of your "political" filter?

Whenever we are having an argument our minds start shutting down, our ears stop listening, and our hearts get hard. St. James says, in order to produce the righteousness God desires, we have to respond differently.

1) We need to be quick to listen. Isn't that exactly what we want others to do for us? Most of us do the opposite - thinking about what we are going to say next and not hearing what the other person. We need to listen to people who experience the world differently than we do – listen to their stories, their experiences, why they believe as they do, and listen to people who don't look like us. Sometimes we wonder why they would "do that," or "think that" or "believe that" or "say that." We'll never know if we aren't listening.

QUESTION: How well are you listening to your spouse, your children, your friends? How could you improve your relationships with them by listening more intently to what they are saying?

2) We need to be slow to speak. The minute we start speaking, we stop listening and stop learning. We have our agenda – but God's agenda can quickly get lost if we are speaking and not listening. Frederick Buechner² said, "Although kindness is not holiness, it is awfully close." Here are four questions we need to ask ourselves when considering whether kindness is a part of our speech: **a) Is what we're going to say true?** We all use hyperbole to make a point, but is it actually truth? **b) Is what we're going to say helpful?** It may be true, but if it doesn't encourage someone, it isn't of God. **c) Is what we're going to say personal?** Is it intended to wound another? Jesus' brother James speaks of moral filth, (dishonor) and evil (malice). Is this what we intend? **d) Is what we're going to say loving?** Are we loving the way Jesus taught us? If we pause for a moment and pass our thoughts through our faith filter, we can speak kind words which can heal relationships.

QUESTION: Which of these four questions prompt you to rethink how you approach conversations?

3) We need to be slow to anger. This is both a result and a decision. If we are quick to listen and slow to speak, we are less likely to be angry. Some of us blow up and feel better – others clam up and sulk. In the past we could respectfully disagree with someone, but now there is so much anger involved in political conversation we can't think straight. Instead of criticizing content we've begun criticizing character; instead of disagreeing, we've decided the other person is an idiot because he disagrees with us! Now we are judging people and we know what God thinks about that. Jesus became angry at the money changers, but it was because they were disrespecting God's temple. He showed righteous anger and not what we are talking about. Our human anger produces only what we desire because we know we are right and want others to know it, too. This goes against what God desires. He wants us to get rid of dishonoring others, malice, and getting even. He loves humility and honoring His values.

QUESTION: Is there someone in your life with whom you have a contentious relationship? What are you doing to repair that situation?

QUESTION: Tell us about a conversation YOU have had recently with a republican or democrat that angered you. How did that turn out?

QUESTION: What can you do to short-circuit your anger?

The answer is we need to engage in civil conversations that represent Jesus. When we lead with the kindness of Christ, we don't hinder the faith of others. St. Paul demonstrated how to confront a situation with grace and civility when he arrived in Athens and needed to confront the people about many false gods being worshiped there. He didn't say, "You are so stupid for having so many false gods that you ran out of names for them!" Instead, he said, "I can see that you are very religious and even have an altar to an unknown God. Let me tell you about Him." This began a civil conversation. What a great example of God's wisdom and grace and kindness. Finally, in today's circumstances, be encouraged. **"Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. I am with you."**³

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we know that our society is in a mess because of political disagreements. This is not the world You created for us, so help us return to civility, so that we can represent Your Son in a loving way which results in righteousness and harmony. In Jesus' name. Amen.

² Author of [Telling the Truth](#). Yale Divinity School and Presbyterian minister.

³ Ibid.



QUESTIONS

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