

Series: One Nation under God: Politics and Christianity
Title: “What the Christian Faith says about Hannity & Colmes”
Text: Psalm 133:1
Key Word: Principles
Proposition: Everyone can reform political differences by these principles of moral unity.

(9:15 Service) The Great Debaters, starring Denzel Washington is a drama based on the true story of Melvin B. Tolson, a professor at Wiley College in Texas. In 1935, he inspired students to form the school's first debate team, which went on to challenge Harvard in the national championship. Dr. Tolson was also a political activist who according to his critics occasionally employed questionable methods. Rev. Farmer, a local pastor initiates a conversation on Dr. Olson's methods. Let's eavesdrop on this dinner party conversation. (42 sec. clip)

Friends, I am not judging our political differences, I am concerned about the methods. For the past couple of weeks we have been learning that God wants our relationship with Jesus Christ to impact every arena of life, even the political arena. Last week, Pastor Bonita gave us some practical tips to impact this arena. She reminded us of our dual citizenship in heaven and in this world. She pointed out that we must influence our world with Godly values and be an example of Christ in all we do. She urged us to respect all authority, even those who possess a different perspective. She called us to fervently pray. She reminded us to vote, and sometimes our vote is not enough. We must express our views and ideas in order for our democratic society to function as it was intended.

Certainly the media express their views and ideas in order to influence our culture. Radio has conservative Rush Limbaugh and liberal, Thom Hartman, Sean Hannity & Bernie Ward, Neil Boortz & Randi Rhodes, and we can't forget Billie Cunningham and Rachel Maddow. TV news has conservative Bill O'Reilly and liberal Chris Matthews, conservative Laura Ingraham and liberal Katie Couric, and conservative Sean Hannity and liberal Alan Colmes. I am concerned that the methods of both sides of the political spectrum incite divisiveness rather than stimulating moral unity.

I am concerned that such divisiveness seeps into the Christian community. I am pro-life, but I also know sincere Christ-followers who are pro-choice. I am also opposed to capital punishment, but there are some fine Christians who are in favor of it. I am opposed to the nuclear arms race, but there are some wonderful Christians who feel that these arms are necessary for the defense of our country. I support a just war theory, but I also respect other Christians who support pacifism. I believe that it is significantly divisive when some say, "This is the Christian position on a certain political issue, implying that any other political viewpoint is not Christian and thereby those who hold this opposing position can not be Christian." One's political positions do not determine one's salvation; our salvation, our position in God's kingdom is entirely dependent upon our trust in Jesus Christ who alone died on a cross for our sins and for our freedom from the power of sin. It is this faith-relationship that determines our inheritance into God's Kingdom.

I am concerned that name-calling, shaming, and ridicule are overused in promoting political agendas. Such behavior limits the potential hearing of truth. It stifles understanding and stalls positive growth. God said, *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.”* (Psalm 133:1) I love what Nelson Mandela said, *“Where people of goodwill get together and transcend their differences for the common good, peaceful and just solutions can be found, even for those problems that seem most intractable.”*

Friends, I believe it is time for building bridges of moral unity across the divide of political differences. It is time for reform in the ways in which we engage in political and public discourse so that peaceful and just solutions can be found for the most difficult problems. It is time to transcend political differences for the common good of all humanity. It is time for a change where political and selfish ambition is laid aside for the sake of men and women, rich and poor, black, white, Hispanic, Asians, rural folk, suburban folk, urban folk, Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, and Independents. So how can such reform take place? Here are some Biblical principles for such reform.

Recognize only one Master. Jesus said, *“Don’t ever let anyone call you ‘Rabbi’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters.”* (Matt. 23:8) Jesus recognized that people desire positions of leadership in communities, business and even in the church. Sometimes this desire can become dangerous if love for the position grows stronger than loyalty to God.

Sadly, He saw this in the Scribes and Pharisees. So He warned them to keep Him and Him alone as the final authority. We must not allow our personal circumstances or preferences to shape our political and moral views. Only Jesus and His teachings should shape our views.

Next, everything must be shared. Luke, a Christ-centered physician recorded in the book of Acts that the early Christians, “*were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owed was not their own; they shared everything they had.*” (Acts 4:32) Yes, they had their differences of opinion especially regarding the acceptance of non-Jewish converts to Christianity, but they had a spiritual unity centered on their loyalty to and love for God and one another expressed in sharing and giving away their possessions. Without this unity the early church would not have survived. They would not allow a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty. Unlike communism where “sharing” is forced by law, this was voluntary sharing. It was not a forced “distribution of wealth.” This sharing didn’t involve all private property, but only what was needed. It was not a membership requirement in order to be a part of the church. Their unified voluntary generosity made them attractive. Their sharing made them a beacon of hope in a world of hopelessness.

Next, Form relationships with ordinary people. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, “*Don’t try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people.*” (Romans 12:16) Those who bear the name of Jesus Christ follow in his steps, avoid all pride and snobbishness. We know that we humans typically judge a person by his

appearance or station, whereas God judges by the heart. Being a Christ-follower has nothing to do with rank, or wealth or birth.

While in Athens last week, the Lord revealed to me that good can be found in the most unexpected people. Our work team was assisted by a young man in his early twenties, whom I will call Steve. Steve lived in the community and regularly volunteers to work in order to earn credits toward a donated used car. Steve was a good worker, eager to do whatever was necessary to fix a water link outside a house trailer. He volunteered to get on his knees and dig mud out of the hole in search of the linking pipe. He stepped up to remove some debris in order to dig another hole. I believe our team could sense that this young man had a good heart.

I asked him about a grimacing tattoo on his upper arms. He told us that it represents his dark-side, a side that could release hostility. Every time he feels this side raising its ugly head he turns from the source of his hostility and walks away. He said that once he gave his heart to Jesus and the Holy Spirit came into his life he has God's power to say no to this hostility. I realized something beautiful that day. When I allow myself to work alongside of someone different than I, someone who challenges my stereotypes, I see God and His goodness. Forming relationships with ordinary people builds bridges of understanding.

Next, overflow others with encouragement. Paul again wrote to the Romans, *“So, then let us...build each other up.”* (Rom. 14:19)

Max Lucado discovered the importance of healthy counsel in a triathlon. After the 1.2 mile swim and the 56 mile bike ride, he didn't have much energy left for the 13.1 mile run. Neither did the fellow jogging next to him. He asked him how he was doing and soon regretted posing the question.

"This stinks. This race is the dumbest decision I've ever made." This man had more complaints than political pundits. After a while, Max said, "Goodbye." He knew if he listened too long, he'd start agreeing with him.

Max caught up with a 66-year-old grandmother. Her tone was just the opposite. "You'll finish this," she encouraged. "It's hot, but at least it's not raining. One step at a time...don't forget to hydrate...stay in there." He ran next to her until his heart was lifted and his legs were aching. He finally had to slow down. "No problem." She waved and kept going. Which of these two describes the counsel you seek? Which counsel reforms from within?

Run to God for help. Paul wrote, "*May God...help you live in complete harmony.*" (Rom. 15:5) As Christ-followers, we desire to impact our world with good. Sometimes that involves rolling up our sleeves and working in politics. In our democratic society this is where the issues are discussed and the decisions made. In the practice of politics there are many routes to achieve the same goal. So even though Democrat and Republican politicians have similar goals, they differ in their political strategies to achieve those goals.

For example, we hear a lot about poverty and the economic crisis these days. Both sides of the aisle agree that government has a key role to play in decreasing poverty. I say decreasing because; Jesus said that we will always have the poor among us. So I believe that no matter how hard we try we can never eliminate it. We all agree that the best way to address poverty is to create more jobs. But here starts the great divide.

Republicans typically contend that best way to produce meaningful work is for the government to cut regulations and lower taxes, thus allowing businesses to prosper and create new jobs.

Democrats typically contend that this wouldn't work because the unemployed are not trained for most industrial or technological jobs. In addition, many companies do not want to invest in suburban and urban areas where most of the unemployed live. So Democrats want the government to invest in education, job-training, massive work-job programs so people could be employed immediately where they live at jobs they could handle. Yet critics say, this doesn't solve the problem and the administrative overhead is costly and the programs typically don't work. So even though Christians want to help the poor become more self-sufficient and contributing members of society, they debate the strategy for accomplishing this goal. It seems to me that this divide would call us to run to God in prayer for wisdom and creativity, collaboration and perseverance to do that which is good for all.

Master love with a tender heart. Peter wrote, “*Be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.*” (1 Pet. 3:8) There is nothing like love to bridge the gap of the political differences. We can retain our political convictions and still be united with others by the bond of love. Melinda and I have a few opposing political differences. We talk about them. Sometimes we simply agree to disagree. But our political differences will not rupture of bond of love.

Yes, we can build bridges of moral unity across the chasm of political difference by practicing these principles of reform. **Recognize** only one Master, **Everything** must be shared. **Form** relationships with ordinary people; **Overflow** others with encouragement. **Run** to God for help. **Master** love with a tender heart. Now is the time for such **REFORM!** 1890