

A Nation Divided Against Itself

Theme Introduction

A conversation stopper hangs on the lobby wall in the complex where I live. I walk by it every day on my way to pick up my mail, but deliberately stand with my back to it as I wait for the elevator.

It's a television monitor tuned nonstop, day and night, to a cable news station not known for its objective reporting. I try to ignore it, but sometimes I get on the elevator, muttering under my breath about something I couldn't tune out—if I'm alone, of course!

I watch as others' faces reflect the same tension. A few years ago, we might have commented on the wildfires on the West Coast, the stock market, or other news depicted on the screen. Now we stand in silence at the elevator, nervously sifting through the mail in our hands. Suddenly junk mail about my need for a perfect mattress or a new dentist in town absorbs my attention! No one wants to comment about the constant news stream because we can't be sure of anyone's political perspective. Weather is about the only safe topic we Minnesotans can fall back on.

This same tension pervades our whole nation—in the workplace, in churches, on school campuses, even in family gatherings. If you are sure someone agrees with you politically, you breathe a sigh of relief and relax. You might even talk about current political scenarios. But you do so with great care because the divides are growing deeper and the conversations more toxic.

How does one represent Christ well in the midst of such

turmoil—even hatred? How can we remain friends with those who disagree with us—sometimes violently? In the context of such toxicity, how can the gospel be considered relevant? Even if our only desire is to live consistent with biblical values and completely avoid the political scene, the divisive rhetoric attacks every command we believe God has given to His Church.

Desperate, Discerning Prayer

The apostle Paul knew quite a bit about living in a culture filled with turmoil and opposition. He offered godly wisdom to the Colossians, a church under attack from the infiltration of false teachers:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Col. 4:2–6).

Paul doesn't shy away from the gospel. He encourages conversation full of grace. And he frames it all with desperate, discerning prayer.

In this issue, David Kubal reminds us that, in our tense world, anger belongs to the Lord. His practical intercession points demonstrate that people of prayer help shape a nation's destiny. Kay Horner uses the backdrop of Lamentations to demonstrate that we are never without hope. Although our nation faces great challenges, God calls us to persevere in prayer. And Mercy Alarid warns us to avoid getting caught up in friendly fire against fellow believers. We need to know our true enemy!

By the way, I do try to engage my neighbors in the elevator. I find people are drawn to a smile and an interest in knowing their names. But I pray for an extraordinary season of revival and spiritual awakening that draws all of us to Jesus and His truth!

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