

BREAKING THE STRANGLEHOLD OF PARTISANSHIP

I used to be very political, contending for partisan causes, thinking God was on my side. I do not think that way anymore. I have since learned that God is not behind partisan struggles on either side that tear people and the nation apart, and engaging in it harms our soul and right standing with God.

There are consequences we may not have considered. For one thing, though partisanship gives us a sounding board to articulate moral causes, at the same time it works to divide people and form biases. Fear and ignorance holds us back from seeing good in people so that we do not cross over to make them friends.

Another thing we may not have considered is that partisan loyalties puts us in a compromising position and robs us of critical thinking to the point it may impair moral judgment. This is in accord with the playbook of the spirit of the world, which spirit promotes a gospel of hate and rebellion, but the gospel of God's love overpowers it. The battle lines are drawn: "*Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*" (Jas. 4:4 NKJV). Even if we win on an issue, the victory is hollow if in the process we incur more hostilities.

My heart was troubled by the intense political polarization and inflammatory language used against people on both sides of the political spectrum. I could not see God in any of this. Each took some truth and mixed error in it. This is the spirit of the world drawing us into it. I saw that people who gave credence to it became a spokesman for it. The result was two irreconcilable forces fighting each other, each claiming at times to stand for God. The good news is that the LORD does not leave us unaware, because when the god of this world comes in like a flood, He lifts up a standard against him (Isa.59:19) to deliver us: "*Blessed is the man who walks not in The counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD...*" (Psa. 1:1-2 NKJV). I stopped giving ear to divisive dialog and turned to the Lord for understanding, for He has the answers, knowing the end from the beginning (Rev. 1:8). I heard for years the admonition not to love the world, but then the time came for me to act upon it. Only by pulling away from the worldly system is it possible to get the mind of God, see clearly, and learn to judge righteously. I could not straddle the fence any more: I had to choose which side I wanted to be on. This turned out to be a defining moment in my walk with the Lord because then revelation, for this day in particular, began to flow in earnest. God wanted to talk, and now He had my attention.

What matters to God is not the political party, because each plays a role in advancing the worldly system. What matters to God is the kingdom we pledge loyalty to and represent. Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You can not serve God and mammon*" (Matt. 6:24 NKJV). If we choose the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, we make ourselves a friend of God.

On the other hand, if we align ourselves with the kingdom of the world, or comingle our faith with it, that friendship with God is put to the test. It comes in an instant when we pledge support for a political party platform. God said, "*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with Me?...*" (Jas. 4:4 NKJV paraphrased). This is because friendship with the world can put a muzzle over our mouth for political or material advantage, blinding us to truth. Sooner or later, something will come down the pike or be said that deviates from our moral values. What are we going to do? Keep silent? Twist the truth to our advantage? Or stand alone with God? If we stand for righteousness, we risk alienating friends in political

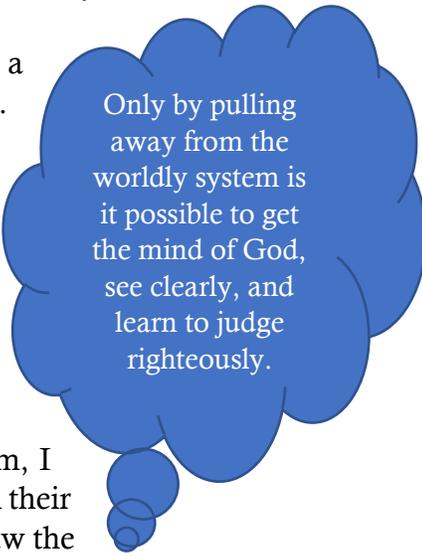
and/or social circles. On the flip side, if we stand up for partisan policies, we risk alienating our friendship with God, the worst case scenario, because we then begin to take on the spirit of the world. Instead of peacemaking, we find ourselves spreading partisan talking points that may not be true and in a language that is offensive, searing, and inflammatory. We can't love like this.

So when I pulled away from the political battlefield and took a stand with God, He delivered me from the stranglehold of partisanship. I did not know then, but reversing course would be a transformative event (2 Cor. 6:17-18). I would no longer be molded or shaped to conform to the standards of the world, but to the righteousness of God. He began to show me what it means to be in the world, but not of the world. First off, I quickly noticed greater freedom not only to love people across the political spectrum, but also with it power to position myself from evil deeds and words, clinging to the good, yet hating the evil.

When I looked at people on the other side of my belief system, I did not see them as enemies anymore. I had filtered everything through their worldview, but now I look at them through our shared humanity. I saw the struggles of people lost in the vortex of public opinion, the injustices of the oppressed, etc., but this time through God's eyes. I found myself becoming more merciful, compassionate, empathic and less judgmental and self-righteous. With no effort on my part, tears flowed where they had never flowed before for people I did not know. That transformative event I referred to in the preceding paragraph was God making my heart flesh (Ezk. 11:19-20).

You too can break free from the torrent of partisan messaging and evil speaking. The first step in reversing course is to recognize the limitations imposed by partisan barriers, and the second step is to distance yourself from the worldly system and its political apparatus. Then put the Lord Jesus in the center of your life, and He will navigate the troubled waters for you, for He said, "...I am the light of the world. He wh follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12 NKJV). We still do many of the same things we have always done, but the difference is we are not walking lockstep with the world's values and philosophies, but with the Lord's. There is greater liberty in the latter. We can feed upon His Word and get strength and revelation that will direct our path. Continuing on this path, we acknowledge Him wherever we go, whatever we do, asking Him questions throughout the day, seeking His guidance. "*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths*" (Prov. 3:6 NKJV). Then when we encounter people and circumstances and issues that run counter to the Biblical values we are feeding upon, the Lord makes a way of escape for us so that we can triumph in every place (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 2:14). Jesus is our very powerful but invisible friend, our constant companion who never leaves our side, the friend that sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24).

No longer strangled by the restraints of partisanship, my hope is that we can interact freely with political rivals without abandoning core values, sharing what we believe in a principled fashion without deep-seated ill will. Perhaps we can find areas we even agree and build on, rather than tear down what we do not agree on. With nothing to hold us back, we can speak the truth, and when there is injustice or corruption, we will not hold our peace. Then in times of uncertainty and hardship, people may be more receptive to hear about the goodness of God from our lips, and as they open up and share their fears, we can point them to the Answer.



Only by pulling away from the worldly system is it possible to get the mind of God, see clearly, and learn to judge righteously.

Abraham Lincoln understood he had to move beyond partisan barriers if he wanted to win over people of differing viewpoints. So he engaged his rivals and learned from some of them. He did not surrender his party affiliation, but neither did he let it control who he was. He is an example of a man driven by a moral cause that was greater than partisan allegiance. Lincoln did not let partisan fears stop him. Though demonized, belittled, viewed as weak and indecisive, and excoriated in the press, he did not personally counter attack. Instead when he did respond, he was deferential to his enemies. In his first inaugural speech, after surviving an assassination attempt, he displayed no animosity, saying at that time, “We are not enemies, but friends.”

America was facing a moral crisis so severe it threatened to destroy it, and only moral power could save it. Lincoln understood moral power, having immersed himself from his youth in Scripture. With it, he moved mountains of opposition, conquered the hearts of men to accomplish God’s greater purpose, and changed the world. See Message entitled “*Lincoln’s Message to America in Adversity.*” [Click here: http://www.freeatlastministries.us/web/articles.aspx](http://www.freeatlastministries.us/web/articles.aspx)

The fruit of his engagement was love, and that is what is missing today with partisan causes, because we cannot love people we judge or condemn, nor can we reach them for God. We become like those we judge... “...for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Rom. 2:1 NKJV). This is where the ruler of darkness wants us to be so that we do not break through the rubble to higher ground. Therefore, it is helpful to know the downside of partisanship and how it hurts our cause before we can escape from it.

First, partisanship shuts people out and creates ill will. On its face, partiality discriminates. In simple terms, when partisanship cuts off debate, and blocks the input, ideas, petitions, and legitimate needs of people represented by competing constituencies, it fosters ill will. A stranglehold of partisanship creates factions with each seeking to build a consensus according to an agreed upon agenda. Battle lines are then formed putting both sides on the offensive causing enmities. Words are spoken to further intensify the separation. We think we are advancing when we hold our opponent’s feet to the ground and never compromise, but we are actually losing ground. President Harry Truman said,

I have been fiercely partisan in politics and always militantly liberal. I will be that way as long as I live. Yet I think we would lose something important to our political life if the conservatives were all in one party and the liberals all in the other. This would make us a nation divided either into two opposing and irreconcilable camps or into even smaller and more contentious groups.¹

Jesus said “*a house divided against itself shall not stand*” (Matt. 12:25). This is what we are experiencing today: in President Truman’s words, a nation “divided into two opposing and irreconcilable camps.”

Second, partisanship sows discord. At its worst, partisanship can harness hate as a political force and paralyze government. In a hotly contested and divisive political atmosphere, eager to get views affirmed by the public, some partisans employ disparaging terms to define their political opponents. This stirs up negative passions, creates enmities, and divides the nation. As people feed on partisan messaging, they begin to believe it and form biases about their political opponents. It does not occur to them that the messaging to which they are hearkening is based on assumptions that may not be true, but borrowed from

¹ Jon Meacham, *The Soul of America*, p. 268.

misleading and false information. You can see how discordant this becomes to the national discourse, in obscuring the real issues impacting people's lives. This is the rudiments of the world the Bible admonishes us not to be a part of (Col. 2:8).

Third, partisanship corrupts morals. Devotion to a political party is driven by a love of money, position, and economic power, Satan's greatest weapon (Matt. 4:8-10). For the love of money and power, political expediency becomes more important than people, more important than moral values, and more important than truth. In time, the love of money and power hides corruption, immoral behaviors, and illegal acts, which in the end manifests the abuse of power.

Fourth, strict partisanship seeps into the Church and divides God's people. Pinning our hopes on a political party and its platform does not dramatically alter the political landscape nor stop the vitriol tearing the nation apart; in fact, it is more likely to reinforce the division. Should this spirit get into the Church, it will sow discord and divide God's people so they cannot do the good they desire. In its purest sense of the word, partisanship cannot be a Christian virtue for several reasons:

(1) When devotion to partisan positions conflicts with moral values established in God's written Word, it will stand between the believer and God. *"To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress"* (Prov. 28:21 NKJV). When we think we are advancing the Kingdom by taking the position of "them" versus "us," we do not realize we are left on the sidelines. How can God speak to a divided nation through us? The political party representing our political preference is not the main thing God looks for. The main thing God looks to see is whose side we are on when people are slandered or mistreated in the political process. Do we decide the case on the basis of God's righteousness or on the basis of the party platform? Do we call out corruption and profanity or do we give it a pass?

(2) Because brothers and sisters in the Lord do not always think alike politically, partisanship in the Church alienates believers as well. Saints strongly aligned with partisan causes keep their distance from those who do not embrace their political views, and they use God's Word to back them up. If one dares to depart from the consensus opinion, he may find himself ostracized. When partisanship locks out brothers and sisters who do not agree with us, we are infected with the spirit of the world. Moreover, we deprive ourselves of the spiritual gifts God put in them to equip us for the ministry (Eph. 4:12-14).

(3) Divided saints cannot pray in agreement. Consider the division that existed among Christians during the Civil War days. What separated them? Conflicts among themselves, partisan differences, economic priorities, which blinded them to the larger issue of the day—the immoral injustice of slavery. Christians were divided among themselves. Some wanted to preserve the union, while others wanted to separate from the union to test state's rights so that they could keep slavery a prosperous industry. If you look further, you will see that the underlying rationale was not to restore the holy cause of liberty and set the slave free as God demanded, but to determine who was worthy of freedom based solely upon economic and political grounds.

Both used Biblical grounds to justify their position, just like many of us justify partisan loyalties today. While Christians in the South used the Bible to justify slavery, in the North they used the Bible to condemn supporters of slavery for its cruelty and injustice. Yet they consented to war against their brother not primarily because of the injustice to the slaves, but for the economic threat slavery posed if it was extended into the North. So even abolitionists harbored racist attitudes. As "free" workers, abolitionists feared they might lose their paying jobs to slaves, or become slaves themselves who work without pay, because they are deemed "property" of the state! These two camps inflamed partisan debates. President Abraham Lincoln saw through it and addressed the hypocrisy in his Second Inaugural Address saying,

“Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces...” How was God to answer their prayers soaked in partisan rivalries to extend or contain slave states when next to them were enslaved people praying for emancipation? His answer was to promote the prayers of the destitute (Psa. 102:16) and free the slaves.

Similarly, how can God answer our prayers for the nation that are soaked in partisan rivalries? Many corporate prayers for the nation are blocked. Because of competing alliances, we cannot agree. On political issues, such as the economy, we can disagree, but when it comes to the principles of the Kingdom of God, we should be on the same page, and we will be if we put moral considerations ahead of political gain.

So before we can pray corporately for the nation’s ills, our first prayer must be for the unity of the saints. Pray that the Lord will break the spirit of partisanship dividing the faithful so that we can come together in one mind and judgment. If we are chained together by partisan strongholds and unresolved offenses, the battle lines will always be drawn on the basis of “them” vs. “us,” the antithesis of unity. Above all, never is it more imperative that we pray for our church leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Why? Because partisan discord creates a vacuum of moral leadership and impairs the work of the ministry in the earth as well as spiritual life in the body.

Jesus said that when we stand praying, if we harbor anything against someone, to forgive him (Mk. 11:25). If we want our prayers answered, each one of us must come to grips with the walls that divide us from others, whether unforgiveness from grudges, envy, jealousy, or political views, and be reconciled to each other. With confession and forgiveness, we will be on the same team no longer fighting each other, but the common enemy, and the devil will lose his advantage because he knows unity among the saints speaks his defeat, for greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4). So you can see how onerous it is to your spiritual life and ministry to not settle quickly with your adversary when you have the opportunity (Matt. 5:25).

God is moving us into another dimension, but we must come together. The transition has already begun with a shift in the spirit. We are looking at a time when truth is no longer a standard, but what people want it to be. God is faithful to make a way of escape for His people, and it begins with separating from worldly philosophies and recommitting to the philosophies of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the only One who has overcome the world and all it stands for (Jn. 16:33), the only One with the truth, the only One we can trust, and the only One who will keep us safe and lead us on a straight path to our destiny.

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