

Loving Our Enemies in an Election Year

By guest author Stu Austin

It should not come as a surprise that we find ourselves in a crisis this election cycle. In America and many countries around the world, the crisis is best described as political polarization. Arthur Brooks highlighted this reality in a recent TED talk. Brooks states, "A majority of people in our country today who are politically active believe that they are motivated by love but the other side is motivated by hate. Most people are walking around saying, 'You know, my ideology is based on basic benevolence, I want to help people, but the other guys, and they are evil and out to get me.'"

As we move through the political conventions, the rhetoric is only going to increase. The tweets and Face Book postings are going to get nastier and those who are attempting to prognosticate what the Presidential candidates really mean or will do if they get elected are only going to get louder.

However, for those who call Jesus their Lord and Savior, we are called to be people who live above this discourse. In fact we are called to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us."

A new standard:

We must appreciate that the command to love our enemies, is a Kingdom of God value. For Jesus came to inaugurate His Kingdom with a countercultural value system. How else can the world be changed if Christians do not let God's grace flow through them into the brokenness and hate around us. We can have a preserving, restorative, redeeming affect in our relationships, families, communities, schools, work places, and even political elections. We have to ask ourselves: "If I refuse to love an individual because of their political position, or life style, or race, how can I claim that I have experienced grace? Because of the nature of the Kingdom of God, when the grace of Jesus sinks in, we should be among the least offended and most loving people in the world. For too many, Christians are seen as the most offensive and least loving people in the world.

What does it look like to love our enemies? I want to address this question in as practical terms as possible. And I will draw upon the insights of Scott Sauls as they are presented in his book, "Jesus Outside the Lines." I want address how to love those that differ ideologically, a part of the LGBTQ community, as well as those who are part of a different race, class and culture.

Is it possible to profoundly disagree with someone and love that person deeply at the same time? Is it possible to hold deep convictions and simultaneously embrace those who reject your deep convictions?

Jesus tells us the answer is yes. Let me draw your attention to Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler found in Luke 18. Two significant details must not be overlooked. First, Scripture tells us that Jesus looked at the man and He loved him. Second, the man walked away from Jesus feeling sad. Not judged. Not ticked off. Sad. He walked away in the tension of the paradox – enslaved by his affluence, yet sensing that by walking away from Jesus he might be forfeiting an even greater, more life giving form of wealth. The take away: What matters more to us – that we successfully put others in their place or that we are known to love well? That we win culture wars with carefully constructed arguments and political power plays or that we win hearts with humility, truth and love?

How do we love those involved in the LGBTQ community? Madeleine L'Engle once said, that "We draw people to Christ by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

Scott Sauls proposes some "what if" questions: What if we affirmed along with the Bible that being unmarried and celibate (like Paul and Jesus) is a noble and fruitful calling? What if we affirmed along with Paul that the calling to singleness, though less common, is still "a far better" calling than marriage because it frees single men and women to devote themselves fully to the Lord's concerns. What if we got rid of the term "single" in the church and embraced a renewed biblical vision for the church as a surrogate family where every person, married and divorced and single, has access to spiritual friendships as deep as that of David and Jonathan, whose mutual accessibility, transparency, and loyalty rivaled the love between a man and a woman?

In regards to race/class and cultural tensions:

The challenge is that we shouldn't try to deny that there are differences. It is important to note that the group most likely to deny the reality of cultural differences are white people. Tim Keller shared how a black friend of his said, "you know what bugs me about white people, and you don't think that you have a culture. White Christians are constantly doing things in a white way, but you don't think of it as the white way, rather as the way or the right way." The reality is cultural and racial differences matter and the more homogenous a congregation is the more likely there will be enormous blind spots. I am of the mindset that we can best serve our brothers and sisters of different cultures and races is to be someone who will listen. To be someone who will say, I have no way of knowing your experience, will you tell me about your life.

So where do we find the power to truly love our enemies?

May we be mindful that when Jesus was dying on the cross, He knew He was doing it for sinners like us, but He was also thinking I want to make space in my life and Kingdom for those who will open their heart. He was sacrificing His life so that we could be with Him. When we realize that He did that for us, it gives us hope for the

future and I can turn around and do it for someone else no matter their political ideology, race, culture or life style choice.

-Pastor Stu