

Voices: A call for ceasefire in America's culture war

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America is divided. It's one of those statements we repeat over and over again because every conversation about our surroundings circles back to it.



Jake Raabe

More than anything else, we're divided along political lines and ready to take down "the other"—be they cruel, heartless conservatives or ignorant, snowflake liberals. My team is good and always correct. The other team is bad and always wrong. The culture war mentality is strong: We declare a side ("left" or "right"), and we advance its cause against the godless other side at all costs.

In our current climate, it seems nothing is worse than being a member of the other "team." A quick browse of the Facebook comments on various Baptist Standard articles demonstrates this. Most often, those who want to disparage an article don't do so with a significant appeal to Scripture or a careful response to the issue at hand. Rather, if the article is perceived to have a leftward slant, words like "liberal" and "leftist" get thrown out as insults. If the article is perceived to slant to the right, the word "fundamentalist" gets used the same way.

Not just here, but across the Internet, Christians are faster to criticize something as being on the wrong side of the political aisle than to examine it objectively according to Scripture. It seems Christians have allowed political identity to become more important than Christian identity.

Not listening



The problem with this culture-war mentality—the idea that my group is the correct one and is fighting the other group—is that it doesn't lend itself to listening. In war, you don't stop to listen to the enemy. You don't hear his or her point of view, consider it and adjust your worldview accordingly. No, in the culture war, there is only attack.

Brothers and sisters, it's time to lay our arms down. We aren't at war with each other, and thinking our side is always correct is arrogant.

In my last semester at college, I took a class on Baptist history. The first day of the course, it became clear the guy who sat beside me was about as right-leaning politically and theologically as they come. Recognizing him as an unthoughtful fundamentalist—after all, I used to think like that, before I really studied Scripture—I wrote him off. When he spoke, I didn't pay much attention; after all, if he were thoughtful and intelligent, he would think the same things as I do, right?

Kind of a jerk

I was kind of a jerk to Matt, but he always was nice to me. Over the course of the semester, I learned he was a veteran, and he volunteered at the VA and did church programming [aimed to help veterans suffering from PTSD](#). I

learned he was married and had two young children. And, most importantly, I learned he was thoughtful and intelligent. Today, he's a great friend whose thoughts I respect more than almost anyone's.

I assumed that, because he didn't think like me, I didn't have to listen to him. I was wrong. I thought I was in a culture war, and he was my enemy. It wasn't until his kindness convinced me to lay my "weapons" of argument and hostility down that I realized he was my brother in Christ.

I had a plank in my eye, and I was reaching for the speck in his.

Shamefully backwards

We're good friends now. He's still a self-proclaimed Calvinist fundamentalist, and I'm writing a book about my Arminianism and got my start writing because of my support for the Jill Stein presidential campaign. We're on different sides of the political and theological "aisle," but that's less important than our shared conviction in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Too often, we think of ourselves first as Republicans and Democrats who happen to be Christians as well. This is shamefully backwards. We are followers of Christ, children of the one God, who may happen to vote one way more often than the other. The kingdom of God is diverse.

It's time to lay down our arms and start caring as much about our own personal shortcomings than about others. President Trump got elected because a huge portion of the country felt they weren't being listened to or were being misrepresented. (My friend Sam wrote [one of my favorite pieces](#) on the Internet about this). More division won't overcome the problems that division has caused.

Take a liberal out to lunch. Get coffee with a conservative. No one person or side has all of the answers. Lay down your arms, and keep your eyes

plank-free.

That's what our country needs right now.

Jake Raabe is a student at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.