

Voices: What makes us Christian?

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I remember passing by the Democratic booth at the state fair when I was very young. I knew almost nothing about politics or world affairs at that age, but I prayed fervently for those Democrats as I walked by, because I knew Democrats were bad and they weren't Christians.



Kyndall Rae Rothaus Rarely can we recognize the hell-bound at first glance, but here I was, tiny little girl, facing an entire group of adults who had self-selected to be on the side of evil. I assumed they just didn't know any better, so I prayed for their souls, that they would come to love Jesus.

I don't know where I got the idea all Democrats were going to hell. I doubt any adult put it to me that bluntly. But I was an odd child who took things far more seriously than most children. I absorbed what adults said, probably without the grown-ups knowing I was listening. My mind always was active, drawing conclusions, and when the conclusions were sad, I felt it deeply and also felt responsible for doing my part to fix it. Hence my childhood mission to convert Democrats with my private prayers.

(I didn't just target Democrats. I also wrote Bible verses on slips of paper and left them on random porches in my neighborhood.)



Fast-forwarding

Fast-forward to when I turned 18. I was with one of my best friends as she was registering to vote in Oklahoma, and she didn't know whether to check Republican or Democrat. I was taken aback at how uninformed she was. I'm sorry to confess I might have laughed at her. I blamed her ignorance on the fact she didn't have nearly as much exposure to Christianity growing up as I did. And so I explained with poised authority that the only right option was "Republican."

Fast-forward to my early 20s. I met some amazing Christians who deeply inspired me with their sincerity, their compassion and their commitment to Jesus. I didn't find out until much later they were Democrats. This was disconcerting, to say the least. I had to reckon with the fact as far as I could tell, there were people on the "other side" who somehow shared my faith.

Fast-forward to 2008. I found myself thinking Sen. Obama's speeches made good sense much of the time, even though he was pro-choice. I remember watching his family walk out with him to accept the presidency and seeing all the beaming, tear-filled faces in the crowd and feeling the weight of this historic moment and thinking that regardless of whether you agreed with his politics, this was a fantastic breakthrough in American history.

I could go on, but the point is, I had to reckon with seeing good on the "other side." Meanwhile the world around me was becoming increasingly entrenched in its polarization.

“Not really Christian”

I spent the last few years of my life as the pastor of a quiet little church on the outskirts of San Antonio. In a big city like that, it often felt like our little congregation was largely invisible. We inconspicuously said our prayers, celebrated births and baptisms, sang hymns, did mission work in Moldova and the Eastern Congo, volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, and so on.

When I transitioned to being the pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, I learned I'd moved to a church with a reputation. On the one hand, Lake Shore is known for its active participation in compassionate ministries all over Waco. On the other hand, I've been told there is a rumor around town we are “not really Christian.”

Of course, we are flawed, just like any church. We are made up of sinners, just like any church. Like most churches in Waco, we also read the Bible, preach the gospel, give our tithe, teach Sunday school, pray for each other and for the world, baptize believers, confess our sins, seek to follow Jesus, take communion and sing “Amazing Grace.”

No. 1 priority

If I had to boil it down, I would say our No. 1 priority is to love God and love our neighbor. We're rather convinced that is the most important thing we do. Who knows where we got that idea, but it has stuck. We also try to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. We care about the least of these, about visiting the sick and feeding the hungry.

It's odd to think I'm now a part of a group that gets labeled as barely Christian, a group some Christians mock and other Christians pray for when the only significant thing that has happened to my relationship to Jesus over time is that it has deepened.

I am convinced the suspicions people have about us at Lake Shore are not

spiritual but political. After all, the detractors don't know our hearts. But Lake Shore is known to have a larger percentage of "liberal" constituents than your average Waco church. Thus we must not really be Christian.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump must be a champion of Christian values and ideals because he appears to support most of the Republican platform.

I'm not interested in a superiority game in which we try to prove whose Christianity is better. I'm not in the Christian faith to win or to prove myself. That's not why I'm writing this piece.

Politics do not make us Christian

I am in the Christian faith because I love God, and I want to love my neighbor and because I am convinced God loves us all. The only reason I am writing this piece is to remind us that politics do not make us Christian. Christ is what unites us. Not Donald Trump. Not political campaigns. Not being on this side or that side of an issue.

We are united by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's start there, and see where else we might have common ground, despite our political differences. Let's all re-examine what it means to vote "Christian." Let's be open to learning and averse to entrenchment.

Let's be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Let's be merciful, for God is merciful. Let us consider how we may stir one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the day approaching.

Let us get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Let us in humility value others above ourselves, not looking to our own interests but each of us to the interests of the others. In our relationships with one another, let us have the same mindset

as Christ Jesus.

Let us love one another, for God is love.

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