



FROM CAPITOL HILL

Peacemaking in the Midst of Culture Wars

INCREASINGLY, THE CCCU and its institutions have found themselves in the midst of what have long been referred to as the “culture wars.” Intersecting with culture in one of its hubs in Washington, D.C., my job is to fight for every legislative and legal provision that allows our schools to be faithful to their Christ-centered missions. But I have wondered what it would look like to “win” this so-called war. Is it even possible? Ultimately I’ve determined that it is not – not because we will cede or acquiesce in our Christian character or calling, but rather because the very paradigm of the culture war is flawed.

A BROKEN PARADIGM AND MISDIRECTED WAR

The term “culture war” has been used by some as shorthand to imply that there is a battle to make societal laws reflect God’s laws. As America has transitioned from a Christian majority nation to a Christian minority nation and culture has changed all around us, it can feel that this was once the case but is no longer so. Yet intellectually we know that our nation’s laws have never fully reflected God’s laws. American laws once permitted the cruelty towards people of the First Nations, slavery, the oppression of racial minorities and inhumane working conditions for adults as well as children. Likewise, laws today do not fully reflect God’s laws.

We can take heart from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, however, that we need not put our hope in the laws of this land. In fact, Jesus affirms that we *will* be uncomfortable in this world as he sets the expectation that God’s laws and earthly laws will be juxtaposed. And while Jesus taught that humility, mercy and peacemaking will be rewarded in heaven, he did not seek to impose these values upon the culture of that

day through military might, government edict or even cultural dominance.

But the culture war paradigm fails to acknowledge that the counter-cultural nature of our faith means that we should not find ourselves at home in any culture because no culture in our broken world can fully reflect the kingdom of heaven. In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller writes that “[e]ach culture is dominated by its own set of idols... its ‘priesthoods,’ its totems and rituals.”

The paradigm also fails to fully describe who we are battling. Ephesians 6 reminds us that “we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” While the culture war paradigm signals that we’re warring against culture and those within it who hold different values, Ephesians 6 affirms that our enemies are not flesh and blood.

The culture war language of war and battle and winning and losing focuses us in the physical realm instead of the spiritual realm; it puts the end game on this world rather than the one to come – a place where the battle has already been won.

THE COST OF OUR MISDIRECTED EFFORTS

The attempt to conquer culture through the law has come at a cost. While it is imperative that Christians try to influence the culture through law, such efforts can also tempt us to believe the illusion that if we only get the laws right, hearts will follow. Yet we know that the story of Israel suggests that this is not the case. Even while their entire political nation was organized around God’s law, their hearts were not right before God.

In pursuing winning, we have sometimes made enemies of fellow flesh-and-blood

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people who are made in the image of God. By doing so, we have severed relationships instead of building them and alienated other image bearers instead of welcoming them. As David Kinnaman points out in his interview on page 53, “[T]he church has really misunderstood the means by which life-change happens. We tend to think if we could just persuade somebody, hit them over the head with a great Bible verse, that’s going to do it. Culture is not changed in that manner.”

A DIFFERENT WAY FORWARD

For all of us who have joined together to preserve the right of religious institutions to be faithful to their religious beliefs, we are indeed swimming upstream against culture’s current. So the question is: How do we best navigate those waters?

Though it is easier for me to be wary of some of America’s most obvious cultural idols like money, safety, happiness, achievement, sexual fulfillment and convenience, I’ve realized that my heart also is tempted to make an idol of our American form of government, particularly the aspects that have created privilege and power for Christians.

So how can we seek to wage battle against spiritual forces and to resist cultural idols not by conquering them but by living counter to them? What does it look like to live as exiles in Babylon and yet to seek the peace of the place to which we have been exiled? Christ's call to be peacemakers offers us a path forward.

The story on page 63 introduces the four-part peacemaking framework adopted by the Global Immersion Project: see, immerse, contend and restore. This framework is modeled after 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, which details how God saw us, immersed himself among us through Christ, and contended for us through the death of Christ on the cross so that we could be restored to him.

PEACEMAKING VS. PEACEKEEPING

Peacekeeping is a passive retention of the status quo. Peacemaking involves entering

into the conflict in order to make peace. Peacekeeping forces stand *against* something – against violence, against the warring factions. Peacemakers stand *for* something – for peace, for reconciliation, for a way forward.

In many ways, peacemaking is more difficult than winning. Peacemaking can be an uncertain process that requires listening to people who have different viewpoints and working with people who look differently, or think differently, or have different values. Peacemaking can be a humbling process that reminds us of our weaknesses and that we are not fully in control.

Yet in a warring culture – a culture where the U.S. military has been at war for more than 15 years; where the presidential election is a war of words; where the culture wars wage on – perhaps being peacemakers is the kind of radical counter-cultural living that can set Christ-followers apart.

In Washington, D.C., relationships are the coin of the realm. Few things get done outside of coalitions, and actual friendships with people can go a very long way. So as advocates on Capitol Hill, as we argue to the Supreme Court, as we attempt to persuade the public to support a pluralistic society and a marketplace of ideas that includes the Christian perspective, we will continue to offer our best ideas and employ our best strategies. But as we do so, we seek to do so in a way that builds and preserves relationships with people who are different than we are – to be peacemakers. Because ultimately we rest in the knowledge that our hope is not in these earthly efforts, but in Christ and Christ alone. **✚**


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