

## Breaking Down the Dividing Wall

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*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Eph 2:14-16)*

**I**'VE NEVER BEEN ONE to follow politics very closely, not having much of a stomach for the infighting and bickering, and having developed a rather jaundiced perspective that they are all corrupt. I do my civic and Christian duty to vote but usually feel that I am merely voting for the lesser of two evils.

Even with this confessed ignorance of much of what transpires in the political world, I can't help but feel that despite terms like "landslide" and "mandate" being applied to the 2024 election, the country seems more divided than ever. Gone is any semblance of "working across the aisle." Conservatives and Liberals hold their individual press conferences to rail against each other and only sit across the aisle from one another if they must.

Lest you begin to think that this article is a political op-ed, I assure you that it is not. Rather, I see parallels between our present political climate and that of Jesus' day, and I believe there is a lesson to be learned. During the first century, when Israel was subjugated to Rome, there were at least two schools of thought as to how to best preserve the nation and Mosaic Law; try to get along with Rome and avoid rocking the boat or completely overthrow Roman rule and re-establish Israel as a sovereign nation.

The first group is exemplified in the following passage:

*So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." (John 11:47-50)*

The second group consisted of what was loosely referred to as the zealots, of whom Josephus laid most of the blame for the Jewish / Roman War.

Each of these groups felt that they were the true defenders of Israel and the Law of Moses, just as today

both liberals and conservatives claim to be lovers America and defenders of the constitution (I'll leave it to the reader to associate the liberals or conservatives with either the "let's get along" rulers or the zealots).

The unrest and turmoil that was rampant during Christ's lifetime and the subsequent decades would not have been resolved by the appointment of either a Zealot or a Roman-sympathizing High Priest (or King). Likewise, the division in our nation will not be resolved by the election of a conservative or liberal administration.

During the early first century the political corruption was deemed to be so bad that one group of Israelites, the Essenes, packed their bags and headed for the hills. Yet there was at least one instance in Scripture in which a Roman sympathizer and zealot came together for a common cause.

Matthew, the disciple of Jesus, was a tax collector (Matt 9:9-13), and as such was viewed by those who viewed themselves as more loyal to Israel as having "sold out" to the Romans. He was a Jew gathering taxes from his fellow countrymen for the Romans. Even the term "tax collector" was used in a pejorative manner ("why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?").

On the other end of the spectrum was Simon the Zealot. We don't know much about this Simon, but being called "the Zealot" surely seems to associate him with those Israelites advocating overthrowing Roman rule.

Both disciples were members of The Twelve. They weren't fringe members of the crowd who followed Jesus for a show of miracles and a free lunch. Jesus chose them to be among His Twelve!

The person of Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom united these two individuals from opposite ends of the political spectrum. And herein, I believe, is the only credible and lasting resolution to the present-day division in our country and our world. It's not the next administration or charismatic leader; it's the person of Jesus Christ and the uniting message of his Kingdom.

Given the severity of the division in our nation and world, the task seems daunting. Yet we are not individually called to take on the entire task, but to simply do what we can. No individual can elect a politician, yet we all know that "Your Vote Counts." Likewise, no individual or church can heal all the division in the world, but your participation counts.

Yes, we should prayerfully exercise our civic rights to vote for the godliest leadership available. But the Great Commission is not to go into all the world and make conservatives (or liberals) of all nations, but disciples of Jesus. Our primary focus is not on transferring Democrats to the Republican Party (or vice versa), but to transfer people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col 1:12-13). ✝