

September 21, 2020



3 MAKE EVERY
EFFORT TO KEEP THE
UNITY OF THE SPIRIT
THROUGH THE BOND
OF PEACE.

Good afternoon, Atwater Baptist Church!

I have been thinking a lot about the “temperature” of our culture lately and would like to think out loud with you for a bit in this letter.

I've noticed recently on my Facebook feed that whenever someone disagrees with anyone else, it seems that the assumption is that the person they disagree with is either a.) stupid, or b.) evil, or c.) both. This polarization has created rifts between long-time friends and even family members who used to be able to have spirited conversations about controversial subjects without endangering their friendship/relationship.

It must be possible for women and men of good faith to have honest disagreements about critical issues without one or the other necessarily being stupid or evil. What are the variables that might result in someone arriving at a different conclusion from me after we both have had a chance to look at the very same circumstances?

The list I've come up with is surely not exhaustive, but I believe it is a good start. Each of these, to one extent or another, could result in different perspectives on different issues.

- Knowledge
- Wisdom
- Experience
- Values
- The Fear of God

Almost without exception, whatever topic might be on the table, differences in these variables would almost always result in arriving at different places on that topic. These variables are inextricably connected (for example, knowledge is often acquired through experience; wisdom is gained by applying values and learning from mistakes, etc.) so it is hard to define them without referencing the others.

I grew up as a Baby Boomer and possess an inherent optimism because of my experience of growing up amidst relative prosperity. Those my senior, having lived through the great depression, will look at issues related to financial security, health care, and other related issues differently than I. Those my junior have been impacted by financial and societal events that cause them to see things a third way. Does that make any of us stupid or evil?

Some see the role of government as creating and preserving an environment where individuals can make their own futures with a minimalistic footprint on our society, while others see the role of government as responsible for equalizing inequities and providing for the basic needs of its citizens. Unfortunately, it can't do both simultaneously, so we have profound disagreements in the political arena. These differences don't make any of us stupid or evil.

The challenge for me, and my challenge to you, is to look to see the underlying variable upon which my "opponent" is basing his/her opinion and argument and to be able to see beyond the assumption that "if only you were as smart as me" or "if only you were as moral as me" you would obviously agree with me. Our country and our churches will need to learn to have healthy, respectful conversations about issues that tend to divide us if we are ever to live into the Apostle Paul's admonition that we endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Grace and Peace!

Steve Bils
Executive Minister
American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast