



FAITH

matters

March 2, 2026

Romans 14:19 *“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual up-building.”*

Anyone brave enough to watch the news these days hears much about oligarchy, socialism, existential threats, traditional values, culture wars and the like. Numerous sources advise us that America is polarized and divided as never before.

Unfortunately for those of us who like to think the people with whom we disagree are unreasonable, illogical and irrational there's even more bad news. In his 2009 book, *Reasonable Disagreement: A Theory of Political Morality*, UC Santa Barbra philosophy professor Christopher McMahon argues that a “zone of reasonable disagreement” surrounds most questions.(1) The fact that every political issue has a range of reasonable positions makes consensus virtually impossible. Even after exhaustive deliberation, reasonable people are still going to disagree.

Likewise, according to MIT professor Kevin Dorst our differences result from a process of “rational

polarization.”(2) We more selectively scrutinize the news sources we suspect represent the other side. Thus, any flaw we find re-enforces our given position. People may act rationally and think logically but arrive at very different points of view.

If the professors are right (and I suspect they are) the people who disagree with us on political, social and cultural issues aren't nuts after all. We hear from all quarters that “diversity” is one of our great national strengths. Then why is it often difficult to accept differing opinions? Perhaps it's just human nature to think our way is the best way; to always want the last word and to try and “enlighten” those who harbor different beliefs.

For me tolerance is often a willingness to forgive those who share my opinions but are more outspoken and boisterous when expressing them. In other venues tolerance is a mandatory public affirmation of various political and social positions where tacit approval is no longer acceptable. Neither of these provide an easy avenue for civil dialogue.

Webster defines tolerance as “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own”.(3) I believe this is a simple, straight forward but difficult standard to which we should nevertheless aspire.

Fortunately, the Bible provides sage wisdom on this issue. There must have been no shortage of pontificators back then as Scripture is replete with passages which promote unity by encouraging sympathetic listening and thoughtful speech. Several examples are presented below.

Ephesians 4:29 *“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, so that your word may give grace to those who hear.”*

Proverbs 15:1 *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

James 1:19 *“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;”*

Ecclesiastes 9:17 *“The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”*

It's now the first week in March and spring weather will eventually arrive. I am hopeful that the warmer temperatures may thaw our partisan inclinations and lead us to more readily seek common ground and mutual understanding. Perhaps that is unrealistic expectation for 2026. It is after all another election year likely to inflame passions once again.

However, there are signs of hope. Last month four former governors of Michigan, two from each party, met in Lansing to push for civil discourse amid rising political tensions. According to organizers, the goal of this forum was to “turn down the temperature and come together as Michiganders so that we can solve problems in a civil manner.”(4)

Maybe there was a good reason we elected these guys after all. Certainly this effort is to be applauded. It may not be easy, but we should strive to apply the same spirit in our own lives and communities. Let me close with this thought, which comes not from a clergyman or statesman, but from one of America's pioneer scientists.

“Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the wrong. Sometime in life you will have been all of these.”

George Washington Carver

~Written by Jim Trent

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8190 Lincoln Rd. Beulah, MI 49617
231.882.4241
www.benziestandrews.com



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