

Do We Want Civil Conversation—or Civil War?

Last weekend, President Trump's spokeswoman, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, stopped at the Red Hen in Lexington, Virginia, to enjoy dinner with a group of family and friends. The rest of her story will go down in history. The owner of the small farm-to-table restaurant, Stephanie Wilkinson, felt that having a White House employee in her establishment was a violation of her political convictions. So she asked Sanders and her party to leave.

Wilkinson told The Washington Post that her gay staff members felt violated by President Trump's decision to bar transgender people from the U.S. military. They didn't want a Trump staff member under the same roof with them.

"We just felt there are moments in time when people need to live their convictions. This appeared to be one," Wilkinson said.

Sanders politely left the restaurant. But a war of words ensued. Last Saturday California congresswoman Maxine Waters, a Democrat who has called for Trump's impeachment numerous times, said at a rally in Los Angeles that citizens should publicly harass members of Trump's staff.

"If you see anybody from that Cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station, you get out and you create a crowd," Waters said. "And you push back on them. And you tell them they're not welcome anymore, anywhere."

It almost sounded like Waters was calling for mob attacks. Then on Monday, columnist Michelle Goldberg of The New York Times defended the practice of "public shaming," and said Sanders got what she deserved at the Red Hen restaurant because she supports Trump.

I don't remember a time in my life when the anger level was this high in our country. We have almost reached riot level.

Are restaurants going to start asking for party affiliation when patrons ask to be seated? Will members of the U.S. military be "shamed" if they walk into a theater? How long before someone feels he is justified in assassinating a political official in the name of "democracy"?

We need to pray for peace in America. We are more polarized than ever. During our Civil War more than 150 years ago, we were divided into blue and gray camps. Today we are blue and red. And people on both sides seem ready to fight.

My biggest concern is how Christians will position themselves in the midst of this heightened hostility. Will we bring reconciliation? Or will we fuel the flames until both sides explode? Here are a few pointers that will help us to become agents of peace:

1. Subdue your anger toward your political enemies. Do you find yourself blowing up when you watch newscasts or when you discuss politics with co-workers? Remember this: Proverbs 29:11 (NASB) says, "A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back." The Bible calls angry people fools!
2. You don't have to comment about everything. One reason the anger level is so high today is that we have so many social media platforms to spew our thoughtless words. Actually, the best strategy may be to zip your lips. We should consider the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 5:2: "Do not be quick to speak with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore may your words be few." And remember: That applies to tweeting, too.
3. You don't have to take sides in every argument. It is possible to be on the right side of an issue and still

be very wrong because of your attitude. You can angrily defend your right position, yet you can lose God's blessing because you didn't show love or act with wisdom. We want to look at issues through our Republican or Democratic lens, or through our conservative or liberal agendas, but God's kingdom transcends political parties.

4. Wash your mouth out. Celebrities on both sides of the political divide have resorted to profane and vulgar public comments to get their points across. Comedians Kathy Griffin and Samantha Bee began fueling this fire, then Roseanne Barr's TV show was canceled because of her racist comments about former Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett. Then actor Robert DeNiro dropped his vulgarity on President Trump at the Tony Awards in June—and was cheered for it.

I'm not surprised when celebrities spew profanity. But I'm amazed when I hear verbal venom coming from Christians. Every time we lash out at our enemies we are driving a deeper wedge between Jesus and the people who need Him. My 90-year-old mother taught me that if I don't have anything nice to say, I should keep my mouth shut. I hope good manners don't die with her.

5. Pray that God will set a guard over President Trump's mouth. After the June 22 incident at the Red Hen with Sanders, President Trump took the low road by tweeting about the restaurant in an insulting way. His taunting didn't help things. Even though he is surrounded by Christian advisers, he has yet to dial down his caustic language. When he uses crude or childish words in his tweets, he actually helps those he opposes.

It is no secret that our president can be impulsive and short-tempered. A man in his position should use discretion, or else his impetuous words can close doors and ruin diplomacy. The

psalmist prayed: "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). Pray this for our president.

Our country is in a dangerous position in this hour. Fuses are short, nerves are on edge, and fists are clenched. Violence could break out at any moment in this atmosphere of rage. May it never be said that God's people fueled this fire. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you control your anger, and ask Him to use you as a peacemaker in these troubled times.