

Mere Partisans

More Common Ground— Less Battleground

By Dan Ofstedal – September 15, 2025 ¹

“I get down on my knees and pray, we don’t get fooled again.”—The Who

Note: This post is not an expression of any particular political view.

1. **Partisanship is an ancient problem**, dating back to ancient Greece and Rome. For example, Roman statesman Cicero nailed it when he said “Nothing is more destructive than the hatred of political factions.” The American Founding Fathers repeatedly warned against partisanship. For example: John Adams, “A division of the republic into two great parties is to be dreaded as the great political evil.” Jesus’ consistent teaching was to transcend group identities, whether national, religious, or political. This wasn’t to deny that differences exist, but to point to our greater “oneness.” So let’s take heed, and wake up from our partisan slumber.
2. **In America, we have it pretty good**, especially compared to ancient Greece and Rome. Yes, of course it could be better, and we have a pretty good record of making it better. But voices on either side can make it seem that things are pretty bad, and getting worse. They don’t appreciate what we have, and instead only complain. Don’t listen to those whose overall message is negative, and complaining is always negative.
3. **We have so much more in common than not**. First, we are all mortal, and very soon none of us will even be here. Moreover, we all want the same things: good health, good relationships, safety, meaningful experiences, to feel we are part of something constructive, etc. In contrast, all we have that divides us is our opinions about how to achieve those things. Listen to people with constructive, thoughtful ideas. Ignore the rest.
4. **The “powers that be” have incentive to divide**. Politicians have an ulterior motive to divide because demonizing the “others” is a highly effective way to hook the ego of potential supporters. They use fear to control, and it works. Tech leaders also benefit because “enragement leads to engagement” on their social media platforms. And they have said so themselves. This division caused by social media isn’t a bug, it’s a feature. So copy/pasting caricatures of political opponents on social media plays into the hands of those who benefit from your anger or outrage.

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5. **Here is a test** of a leader who cares about the country versus caring solely about power: Is the leader's message one of inclusivity, even while advocating for a particular set of policies? Or do their words demonize and divide? And the same test can be applied, of course, to the proposed and implemented policies themselves.
6. **If you belong strictly to one political tribe**, you are part of the problem, not any solution. There is simply no reason to agree with every position of any politician or party. If you do, you have been brainwashed. I have noticed that politicians and parties often shift positions, and their followers change with them, in lock-step.
7. **Humility** in leaders, and in our choice of leaders, is essential. As Socrates said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing that you know nothing." There exist various political philosophies, and all of them have strengths and weaknesses. The same could be said for politicians (and the rest of us). The simple fact is that we are all often wrong. To not recognize this is hubris. And keep in mind that Jesus put humility at the center of his vision for human life and community. It wasn't just a virtue among others—it was the doorway into the kingdom of God.
8. **Your thinking mind (ego) is not ultimately who you are.** Anyone who is religious or spiritual recognizes this. So why cling so tightly to your superficial sense of self, or needing to be right? Why identify so strongly with it? Instead, realize that you are something else, whether a soul, part of the God, or whatever. And remember that everyone else is exactly the same as you on this higher level. From there it is easier to understand the point of view of others.
9. **You can keep your cherished political opinions.** You can and should have political views based on your principles. Just remember the big picture, that you have more in common with your political foes than you differ on, and don't be so easily manipulated. Again, if you think of your fellow Americans you disagree with as enemies, less than you, or always wrong, you have lost the big picture, as well as the plot. But don't feel bad, it happens to most of us at some point.
10. **Here are some psychological/spiritual tools** to improve dialogue and ease divisive thinking:
 - a. Remind yourself daily that we have so much more in common than not. This is not a metaphysical claim; it is self-evident.
 - b. If you are upset/outraged, that means you are taking things personally, which is a common but unfortunate form of delusion. Wake up from that. Nothing others think, say, or do is about you.
 - c. If you think the "other side" is doing anything other than what they should be doing, you are, once again, deluded. This will seem counter-intuitive, because your ego doesn't want

you to let go of the feeling of upset and self-righteousness. But when you do let go of that emotion, you will see the situation more clearly and objectively. Then, you are working with reality, rather than against it. There may be some action for you to take, and if so it will be more clear-eyed, and more effective. This is the wisdom of mystics and philosophers, largely unheeded.

11. Partisanship is fear-based thinking. It is also lack/scarcity thinking, and victim thinking, where “somebody else” is always to blame. And we will never come together to solve problems from that mind-set. Our leaders are simply a reflection of our collective thinking and consciousness. And as Plato said, “The community which has the greatest unity is the best governed.” So let’s get together, remember that we have so much more in common than not, and “don’t get fooled again.”

1. Partisanship is blind loyalty to party, and the muddled thinking that follows—such as judging arguments not on their merits, but on who makes them. This is different from simply belonging to or being active in a political party.
2. A few relevant examples: “Love your enemies.” (Matthew 5:44); “That they all may be One.” (John 17:21); The parable of the Good Samaritan features a despised “out-group” member as the hero of the story who demonstrates compassion. (Luke 10:25–37) Finally, and remarkably, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand” (Matthew 12:25).
3. A few relevant examples: “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35); “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14); At the Last Supper, he washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:1–17), taking the role of a servant.
4. For much more about this, see my piece “Sticks and Stones: the Freedom of Not Taking Things Personally”

Final note: my title, “Mere Partisanship” is an echo of the 1952 book “Mere Christianity” by C.S. Lewis, which also sought to find common ground, in that case among Christians.