

In his final chapter, Davis shares his definition of “civility” and his hopes for how the Church, and individual members of it, can contribute positively to a resurgence of said civility. I’ll confess up front, as this book was published in 2010 and we have seen a *regression* in civility since then over the last 15 years, I am not overly optimistic at this time for a return to civility. *However*, that does not mean that we do not continue to push forward and keep trying. The Good News is that civility is, in part, what we see modeled in the way that Jesus lived his life and interacted with all people; those who loved him and followed him as well as those who considered him an enemy. The good news is that the model Jesus set, whom we claim to be disciples of, is a model we can follow instead of continuing to fall prey to the social pressures of the society and culture in which we find ourselves. It is precisely because we are disciples of Jesus that we relentlessly and tirelessly, with full hope and faith in its coming to fruition, pursue civility. Davis is absolutely correct when he says that it starts with us.

What is this “civility” that we have been thinking about throughout this entire book? Davis says, “I like to define civility as the *exercise of patience, integrity, humility, and respect in civil conversation, even (or especially) with those with whom we disagree*”.<sup>1</sup> This returns us to the point I made in the previous paragraph. With only a few notable exceptions, Jesus consistently practiced patience, integrity, humility, and respect in his conversations not just with those whom he healed and those who followed him, but also with the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees; those with whom he disagreed. I then re-iterate that the Church, and those individuals within it, those who are disciples of Jesus, find themselves once again squarely in the spotlight as needing to take a primary leadership role in leading all societies, not just the United States, into the practice of civility. Davis talks about how he intentionally chose the adjectives he chose. “Patience requires that we take the time to understand our opponent’s position, rather than dismissing it out of hand, trivializing it, or attributing to him our own slanted reinterpretation of his beliefs.”<sup>2</sup> Any cursory look at a social media application or even most news outlets, mainstream or not, will show how our culture at large has abjectly failed at practicing patience. We have a long way to go. Integrity “is the commitment to representing our own positions and those of our opponents truthfully”.<sup>3</sup> Again, we can immediately see how, in 2025, throughout the past 15 years since Davis wrote this book we, as a society, have gone further and further *away* from practicing integrity. But that does not mean that we do not seek to return to the practice thereof. Humility “recommends that we enter every public conversation open to the possibility that we could change our minds, that we could be persuaded to think something different than we believe now”.<sup>4</sup> This too has been, almost, completely missing from our society over the last 15 years. Pride and arrogance have been the law of the land, and the leading values of our culture and society, thereby contributing to the rancor and divisiveness we are currently experiencing. We also do not have to try very hard to recognize that mutual respect has also been missing over the last 15 years and even longer. Therefore, it is up to Jesus’ disciples, us, to practice mutual respect as a witness to the rest of the country.

The important thing to remember as regards civility is that it has absolutely nothing to do with *agreement*. Civility is how we treat one another in the midst of our continued disagreement. So, the expectation is not that we come to an agreement. The expectation is that we treat one other better than we have been. The Presbyterian Church (USA) firmly believes and espouses this sentiment

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, James Calvin. *In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite America on Seven Moral Issues That Divide Us*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; 2010. pp 159

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p 159

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p 159

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p 160

with our commitment to mutual forbearance and the firm belief that people of good character and faith can disagree and live well in community. Davis quotes Os Guinness who says, “what we are looking for [in civility] is not so much truths that can unite us as terms on which we can negotiate and by which we can live with the differences that divide us”.<sup>5</sup> This means that we are pursuing compromise and consensus but oftentimes, civility might mean we are simply fighting for a way to co-exist even without compromise and consensus. Our own denomination saw the reality of this civil co-existence in the final report of the task force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. “They insisted that it was neither realistic nor theologically necessary that everyone in the church agree. What they did recommend was a more civil and loving way of ‘being together,’ of listening to and respecting one another, insisting that ‘the quality of our life together ... is compelling testimony to the truth and power of the gospel we proclaim’”.<sup>6</sup> Gospel. Good News. Jesus. The way forward, the way towards civility is discipleship. Let us all choose to follow in the footsteps of the one whom we proclaim as Lord and Savior; as Messiah. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Davis, James Calvin. In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite America on Seven Moral Issues That Divide Us. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; 2010. pp 161

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p 167