

A Regrettable Experience

I have officiated competitive soccer games for 34 years. Although most games have been enjoyable occasionally I experience a tough game. Usually, it is a hotly contested match when expectations on both teams are sky high. Spectators are close to the field so whatever comments they make affect those on the field. Early in the game a difficult, critical call goes against one of the teams. It may have been the right call but emotions are high so the referee takes the heat, usually initially from the coach. When a second call goes against the same team the coach goes crazy, thinking his team is being cheated. By now the players follow the lead of their coach, objecting to calls made by the officials. Comments from the spectators escalate, moving from “Are you blind,” “you are missing a good game, ref.” or “call it both ways, ref” to much worse.



As the tensions increase a difficult call or two goes against the other team. Quickly the game deteriorates into a display of poor sportsmanship from both teams. For the remainder of the game every call causes one side or the other to react strenuously. There is nothing a referee can do to calm down the game. It is a miserable experience.

As a referee you can't wait for the final whistle so you can get in your car and head home. As you reach your car you feel badly for the players. The game atmosphere ruined what should have been a beautiful game. There is no winner in a situation like this.

Why do I go into such a full explanation about a dysfunctional soccer game? I think our country is going through similar polarized thinking and strained emotions. We have been conditioned to assume extreme positions on just about everything. We blame others for our problems. We only seem to respect those who agree with us. Tensions are high. Media coverage and social media are being used to divide us rather than to share the joys of life. It, too, creates a miserable experience.

So, what does the Bible say about respecting others with a different point of view? Several verses come to mind:

- *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves (Philippians 2:3).*
- *Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:17).*
- *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1-2).*
- *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good (Titus 3:10).*

The division in our world ultimately leads us into a feeling of hopelessness. It pits us against our neighbor. We dislike people if they think differently than us on issues. This is true of issues that don't directly affect us or are beyond our control.

This atmosphere robs us of our sense of peace and joy. God desires otherwise: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).* Rise above how the world handles differences of opinion. Love and respect people for who they are. Don't let the world become like a soccer game where everyone loses and there is no joy in what should be beautiful. We choose how we react to our world. God wants better for us.

Question: How can you rise above the tensions in our world today, and focus on how we can love, respect and help others?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to love and respect others, and to do our part to make this world better because of our faith in you. Amen.