

United We Stand, Divided We Fall

Our current political problems mirror sharp social and cultural divisions within the American people. Since the 1960s the U.S. has entered “culture wars” over issues like gun rights, abortion, and LGBTQ rights. Public opinion is polarized and often mapped onto partisanship. For example, **gun control** is hotly contested: Pew reports that a **majority of Democrats** support strict limits on high-capacity magazines or assault weapons, while **Republicans are much less motivated**. On **abortion**, 63% of Americans now think it should be legal in most cases, but opinions split along demographic lines. About 73% of white evangelical Protestants favor bans (illegal in most cases), whereas 86% of religiously unaffiliated adults favor legalization. Likewise, **LGBTQ and transgender rights** are polarized: Pew finds “*sharply different views*” by party, 80% of Republicans say a person’s gender is fixed at birth, compared to 64% of Democrats who disagree. When asked if society has “gone too far” accepting transgender people, **57% of Republicans** say yes versus only 12% of Democrats.

These examples show how American citizens are deeply divided on core moral and identity issues. Researchers note that Americans even have some overlapping policy preferences (e.g. large minorities of both parties support background checks or abortion rights), but in practice only one side of each issue is politically active. These social fissures feed into politics: legislators and activists push the most extreme demands of each base. In turn, Congress’s deadlocks reflect voters’ unwillingness to compromise. As one analysis observes, Americans may share many policy goals in principle, but “*only one side [in each culture war] feels it must put the issue on the political agenda*”. Thus, our polarized voting public is reflected in a polarized government. Cultural conflicts over guns, abortion and LGBTQ rights have become so entrenched that they now shape budgets and foreign policy (e.g. aid cuts tied to abortion politics, defense debates driven by partisan ideology). The “mirror of the American people” is seen in Washington, leaders deadlocked on issues that divide ordinary Americans.

The Government as a Mirror of Society

Because voters are so divided, Congress has come to mirror those cleavages. Studies of polarization find that the congressional parties now align closely with social identities and values. When people on both sides of an issue stay home or cast protest votes rather than compromise, politicians do the same. For example, the same Carnegie study finds that **majorities of Democrats and Republicans even share some policy preferences**, but only one side pursues each issue, producing gridlock [carnegieendowment.org](https://www.carnegieendowment.org). In practice, this means legislative leaders often cater to their base’s cultural anxieties instead of seeking national consensus. For instance, during debt

fight both parties believed they were protecting “their” voters, resulting in brinkmanship where “the best way to win is to hurt the country as much as you can,” according to Senate floor speeches npr.org. In other words, politics has become *reflective* of society’s bitter partisan and cultural identity wars. Our policymakers cannot bind up social wounds, and our people in turn reward uncompromising behavior. Political scientists warn that this vicious cycle, “hyperpartisanship” in Congress combined with “inertia”, has left the legislature almost dysfunctional brookings.edu. The result is not just domestic stalemate but a leaderless America on the world stage: allies sense the U.S. cannot act, and rivals take advantage of our internal disunity. Thus the very problems that limit American power abroad, soaring debt and legislative paralysis, are ultimately “mirrors” of the fractures within American society itself brookings.edu npr.org.

Moral Lesson: Hardened Hearts

The pattern of self-defeating division in American public life is powerfully reminiscent of a recurring moral and spiritual warning throughout the Bible: the danger of a **hardened heart**. From Genesis to Revelation, a hardened heart is a **symbol of spiritual blindness, pride**, and the **willful rejection of truth**, even in the face of reason, compassion, or divine intervention. It is a refusal to listen, to love, and to change, a condition of moral paralysis that cripples individuals and nations alike.

In **Mark 3:5**, Jesus, grieved and angered, looked upon the Pharisees “with anger... deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts” because they were more committed to law and tradition than to mercy. They refused to allow a man’s hand to be healed on the Sabbath. This moment reveals the **inversion of values** that comes with a hardened heart: rules take precedence over people, and power is preferred over compassion. This is no different from today’s leaders who weaponize policy to serve partisan interests while communities suffer.

Similarly, in **Romans 2:5**, Paul warns:

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath.”

This passage emphasizes that a hardened heart isn’t just passive resistance, it’s an **active moral decay**. It leads to consequences not only spiritual but societal. Like an infected wound left untreated, hardness of heart festers beneath the surface, eventually erupting in judgment or collapse.

In the Old Testament, the motif is equally strong. **Ezekiel 36:26** offers a hopeful counterpart:

“I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

This symbolic exchange, from unfeeling stone to responsive flesh, this is the **radical transformation** that God desires: a society driven not by ego or entitlement but by empathy and moral conviction. A heart of flesh is one that **feels, responds, and heals**.

| Symbol | Biblical Meaning | Modern Application |
|---|--|---|
| Heart of Stone | Coldness, pride, rigidity, resistance to truth | Ideological rigidity, cancel culture, unwillingness to dialogue |
| Heart of Flesh | Empathy, renewal, moral sensitivity | Active compassion, policy based on shared human dignity, bipartisan cooperation |
| Pharaoh's Heart | Repeatedly hardened despite plagues (Exodus 7–11) | Leaders who double down on harmful policies even amid national crises |
| Blinded Eyes & Deaf Ears (Isaiah 6:10; Matthew 13:15) | People spiritually unable to hear truth or change course | Misinformation bubbles, selective outrage, tribalism in politics and media |

In **Matthew 13:15**, Jesus references Isaiah's warning about the people's calloused condition:

"For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed."

This echoes the American condition today: the rise of **ideological echo chambers**, confirmation bias, and political tribalism that blinds entire segments of the population from even acknowledging shared reality. It's not just that we disagree, it's that we've **lost the capacity to even hear one another**.

Contrast the Pharisees with the tax collector **Zacchaeus** (Luke 19:1–10). When Jesus approached him, Zacchaeus immediately softened, his heart opened to truth and justice. He repented, gave away wealth, and restored what he'd taken. This story reveals that even the most corrupt can change when they choose humility and listen.

Likewise, **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr, cried out in Acts 7:60:

"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

He forgave those stoning him. His heart was not hardened by hate or injustice, but open and merciful, imitating Christ even in death. This stands in stark contrast to modern politics, where opponents are demonized, and forgiveness is treated as weakness.

A Nation of Stone or Flesh?

Today's America is plagued by **partisan rage, performative politics, and unwillingness to yield for the common good**. Tax cuts for the wealthy persist despite rising inequality. Budget deadlines are missed over cultural battles. Legislators stall aid or infrastructure because of perceived political advantage. Citizens echo this, rejoicing in their "team's" wins, even if it worsens collective suffering. It is, as Jesus described, like a house divided against itself — **"it cannot stand"** (Mark 3:25).

A hardened heart in biblical terms leads to judgment: collapse of kingdoms, exile, spiritual silence. But a softened heart invites **revival**, both spiritually and socially. As Jesus taught in the Beatitudes:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

We must ask ourselves: **Are we peacemakers, or do we cherish our animosities?**

The prophetic call of Scripture is clear. From **Hosea 10:12**:

"Break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you."

This is not merely a personal command, but a national one. It's time to **break up the hardened soil of our politics and hearts**. Until we do, policy paralysis and cultural war will continue to corrode both our democracy and our humanity.

In the end, a hardened heart is not just a personal failing, it is a **national risk**. We must choose whether to remain entombed in stone or to become vessels of empathy, capable of working across differences, listening through disagreement, and sacrificing for a shared future.

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." — **Hebrews 3:15**