

The Gospel & True Citizenship: *Agreeing to Disagree Well*

1 Peter 2:16-17

"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor."

Introduction: To disagree is human. To do it well is something different altogether. In our first year of marriage, Erin and I had the most disagreements we've had in almost 20 years of marriage, perhaps combined. Unfortunately, these disagreements led to high frustration points, silent treatments, and overall waste of time of not being united together. It's not that we do not have different opinions, thoughts, and views of things now, but these do not lead to arguments or separations. *What's happened over the years? What's changed?* Erin has learned to simply agree with me in everything! NOPE, that is NOT what has changed. One of the foundational perspectives that changed in my thinking was **how I interacted with my wife during disagreement**. You see, in my prideful youth I thought that if I could **win the interaction**, it was all ok. Yes she was frustrated with an action of mine, or the fact that I'd say "I'll be home in a few minutes" and saunter home in 30, but there was always an explanation, always a reason, rarely an examination of the actual issue, which was a lack of trust building because I was NOT being a man of my word. I could out-talk and out-argue Erin, think quicker on my feet, and commence a verbal judo routine that would leave her speechless (and rightfully upset). Praise the Lord for a gracious wife who helped me see that every time I'd "**win**" this way, I was losing. Every time I'd try to outtalk her, she felt more and more disrespected, unloved, and frustrated. Learning how to communicate, listen, and understand has been vital to the health of our marriage since then, which allows us to disagree well and work through our frustrations.

Our news, everyday, is filled with polarizing argumentation, with much talking and little listening and even less understanding. Though this is nothing new, its problematic when those who follow Christ and are part of God's church engage in the exact same ways, with those outside of the church and those within. This kind of interaction leads to a **foolishness** ("*If one gives an answer before **he hears**, it is his **folly and shame**" - Prov. 18:13), **lack of wisdom** ("*The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.*" - Prov. 15:30-31, cf. 19:20), and **stirs up anger** ("*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up strife.*" - Prov. 15:1). When it comes to our understanding of God's Word, we are told to "**Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger**" (James 1:11), so that we could be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:19). When it comes to **worship**, we are instructed to "*Guard your steps when you go the house of God. To draw near **to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash 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, let your words be few.**" (Ecc. 5:1-2).**

Perhaps the best, most compact passage that speaks to this need is **2 Timothy 2:22-26**:

"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

*Have **nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies**; you know they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant **must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.**"*

Notice the principles of communication and facing disagreement well:

- **The Heart is Always the Target** - In order to truly be purposeful in the gospel when it comes to disagreement or opposition, we must do so from a **pure heart**. Opposition reveals what's in our heart, as we do not like when someone says what we believe is wrong. In the context of 2 Timothy, these were disagreements over doctrine and false teaching **in church**, which means the stakes were high and outcomes were vital. Note as well the **goal** was that God would **grant repentance**, which would mean an change in mindset, attitude, and action. **Romans 2:4** says that it's the "*kindness of God that leads to repentance*", meaning that He alone can grant it, but also that the motive is **kindness**. It also means that lasting change is not simply winning someone to your argument, but leading them to the truth so that God will change them from the inside out.
- **Wise Avoidance is Needed** - When any conversation turns from rational, logical, and peaceful exchange and moves into emotionally charged arguments, unhelpful quarrels follow. Foolish, ignorant, and controversial subjects for the sake of arguing are merely **deflections from what is most important**. If the heart is the target truly, and ideas have consequences, we are always seeking to get down to the personal, not simply the ethereal. **REMEMBER, no one can be argued into the Kingdom of God, since He must change the mind and heart**, so we must be wise when a discussion is no longer helpful for the goal.
- **Kindness is Essential** - Kindness and patience are character qualities that God Himself shows to mankind (2 Pet. 3:9), withholding what we deserve and giving us what we do not. These two attributes allow us to remember that **evil is real, mankind hates the light, and truth is needed**, but will not be immediately accepted. It realizes that though others will react in impatience and unkindness, it is distinctive of a **gospel driven life dependant on the grace of God** that allows us to walk by the Spirit and exercise the fruit of the Spirit in kindness and patience. When we are kind and patient, we stay objective, stop arguing out of anger or frustration, and keep the best outcome of another in mind.
- **Correction Correctly is a Must** - Correction will come with both believers and unbelievers. "*With patience a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue will break a bone*" (Prov. 25:15). Correction comes when we have **foundational truth**, not shifting personal opinions. If you hear people talk today, truth is found in personal rights, opinions, and preferences. This is changing definitions and leading to canceling out today what was acceptable yesterday. When truth is **life sand on a beach, its easily moved, blown away, and changed**. That is why the Word of God is **bedrock**, foundational cement, and unchanging. Correction of thinking is needed because **truth is NOT relative, can be known, and is objectively given through the source of Divine Revelation!** The living Word is both written and embodied in Jesus Christ! Because we know the truth, we can correct, but it must be done **gently**, like teaching your 16 year old how to drive or our elders how to use the Church App on their phones. Ignorant opposition requires **gentle correction**, even in the midst of opposition.

Now what does this have to do with 1 Peter and living as a citizen? Look again at 2 Timothy 2:24. It says "*the Lord's servant must not be...*" Now go back to 1 Peter 2.

We must maintain a PERSPECTIVE OF TRUE FREEDOM (1 Pet. 2:16)

Live as people **who are free**, not using your **freedom** as a cover-up for evil, but **living as servants of God**

The Gospel Frees us From: As Christians living in the U.S.A, we enjoy political freedom, but as believers of Jesus Christ, we enjoy freedom at a much more profound level. We talked the last few weeks that a believer's role as a citizen is to remember our **primary citizenship is in heaven**, that our interaction is in **good works** rather than trying to change the morality of a country through legislation, that **government cannot change people** but has a narrow but God given role in culture (restrain evil, uphold good, punish disobedient), and we are **to submit and pray** for them. We are to do all of this as **those free in Christ, but also servants of God**. This seeming paradox is the source of great freedom. Remember what we are free from:

We are **free from sin** (Rom. 6:6, 17, 19) - we once were enslaved to our sin, but the bondage of sin is broken in Christ

Law's penalty (Gal. 3:13) - Christ became a curse for us on the cross, so we are free from the curse of the law which we broke

Satan's bondage (Rom. 16:20; Col. 1:13) - we once were in the kingdom of darkness but have been transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son

The world's control (1 Cor. 9:19, Gal. 4:3--5) - we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world, under the Prince of the power of this present darkness

Death's power (Rom. 8:38-39) - Christ broke us out of the separation that comes from sin and death, so that we don't have to fear death, whether physical, spiritual, or eternal

The Gospel Enslaves us To:

We are now **slaves of righteousness** (Rom. 6:18-19) - no longer slaves of sin, we are bound to Christ so that we can obey and move toward holiness

Slaves of God (Rom. 6:22) - this means we are not only becoming more holy, but our eternal state is secure.

Bondservants of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 7:22). Slavery to Christ is the greatest freedom anyone can every experience or enjoy. We are freed to obey, to stop living for ourselves, and live for his glory in all of life. This is so important to remember as Christians living in a free, democratic nation like the U.S. We are free, but we are still slaves. The fact that Jesus is our Master and Lord should mark our lives.

Gospel Freedom Allows us To: Our freedom does not allow us to veil disobedience, particularly with governments, but rather embrace the fact that we are **God's servants and slaves**. This frees us to be able to:

Disagree well - The gospel frees us to disagree on areas that the Bible does not define or clarify. Disagreement is inevitable since we do not live in **legalism**, which seeks to define all the white spaces of Scripture, but rather in wisdom and faith. Unity in God's church comes through the Holy Spirit, through our commitment to the same Lord, the same God, the same gospel, and the same Scripture. Political affiliation or type of schooling do not define us.

"Where everybody thinks the same, nobody think very much." - Rosaria Butterfield

Listen Humbly - Listening is an active discipline, not a passive one. Listening well demands humility since I must recognize the value of the person speaking, see him/her as having value surpassing my own, and desire to actually **hear what they have to say**. The overall culture around us listens poorly, so we talk more, filling up the space with many words which lends itself to much foolishness. (Prov. 10:19). We will do good when we listen to each other more, talk less, and do more.

"Each of us will spend 13 years of our life talking. In a year, we could author 264 books of over 200 pages, just with our words. On the Day of Judgment people will give an account of every careless word they speak (Matt. 12:36). What do you spend your words on?" - Dustin Bengé

People don't care what you know until they know that you care

This is especially true as we share the gospel with unbelievers. We have to understand a few things about those who do not know Christ. 1) **We don't judge those outside of Christ** (1 Cor. 5:12-13), holding them to the same standard of morality we would to another member of the church. Those outside of Christ are living according to the light they know, which is NOT seeking to honor or obey Christ but to live according to whatever morality they have created in their own mind; 2) **Unbelievers CANNOT hear and understand the truth until God grants them ears to hear** - *"Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God"* (John 8:47). When we present truth from a Biblical worldview, we are talking about apples and people are hearing elephants. Until God grants faith, they CANNOT hear, yet we also know that faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of God (Rom. 10:14-17), and people need preachers so they can hear. 3) **The gospel is embodied, not just announced** - If God wanted all people everywhere to hear the gospel in announcement, He could have made the sky a big high definition screen and show plaster Scripture above us. But he sent people to embody the gospel, people with testimonies and opened eyes and redeemed lives.

I was reminded this week of the story of Rosaria Butterfield, a Christian speaker, mom, wife, and thinker who at one point was a liberal, lesbian, feminist advocate of abortion, homosexual liberties and professor who hoped to convince Christian students of their narrowness and ignorance. Her testimony is one of radical change when, as a 37 year old Syracuse professor with a butch haircut and live in lover, was befriended by a couple in their 70's, a pastor and his wife. On the surface, they had nothing in common, but after Rosaria wrote an article critiquing Promise Keepers and receiving hate and fan mail, opened a letter from an older pastor who did not condemn, but rather asked questions.

*"My Christian life unfolded as I was just living my life, my normal life. In the normal course of life questions emerged that exceeded my **secular feminist worldview**. Those questions sat quietly in the crevices of my mind until I met a most unlikely friend: a Christian pastor. Had a pastor named Ken Smith not shared the gospel with me for **years and years, over and over again, not in some used car salesman way**, but in an organic, spontaneous and compassionate way, those questions might still be lodged in the crevices of my mind and i might never have met the most unlikely of friends, **Jesus Christ Himself.**"¹*

Through the course of their relationship, there was NOT agreement on life and world views, but there was loving exchange and openness to interact:

*"Ken and Floy invited the stranger in ---not to scapegoat me, but **listen and to learn and to dialogue**. Ken and Floy have a vulnerable and transparent faith. We didn't debate worldview; we talked about our personal truth and about 'what made us tick'. Ken and Floy **did not identify with me. They listened to me and identified with Christ**. They were willing to walk the long journey to me in Christian compassion...Before I ever set foot in a church, I spent two years meeting with K & F and on and off 'studying' Scripture and my heart."*

¹ Rosaria Butterfield, "The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert." p. 1

I love this. Purposeful, intentional, and loving pursuit that did not agree with lifestyle, worldview, or beliefs, but that communicated all of those through the portal of love and the vessel of gentle, kind, and patient compassion. This is one of the ways we must think about **evangelism and disciple making**: *not as drive by's, but through time soaked, thoughtful, patient conversation and the sharing of life.*

Learn Intently - We do not know it all. In fact, we should always take a posture of learning, both in knowledge, grace, but also the people we interact with. We learn much through disagreement, especially when our words are seasoned with grace. Most often, the issue someone is passionate about exposes an experience they've had, and in understanding where they are coming from, we are able to make inroads of truth and love.

*"Intellectual hospitality doesn't mean assent, blind adoption, or uncritical affirmation of every idea I stumble upon. It does mean that I **listen, seek to understand, that I pray for patience as well as courage.** It means that I **ask better questions**, and I work hard to **stay quiet** long enough to understand the answers." - Dr. Diana Glycer*

Love Relentlessly - In this time of tension filled, fear driven, anger right below the surface, frustrating time, we must remember what Peter commanded the church in chapter 1: "**having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again** (1 Peter. 1:22-23). Love covers a multitude of sin and disagreement. Love dictates that we look past disagreement, especially in the church, and see the person. Love of God, the truth, and others keeps us away from the "Yeah but's" and the "I think" kind of excuses.

*"Evangelicals need to learn how to be **charitable to one another.** That doesn't mean we don't draw lines in the sand. We do (and should). But one of the lines we draw in the sand is **love and charity.**" - J.T English*

*The wider our disagreements **inside** the local church on debatable political issues, the more testimony we can give to the gospels clarity and uniqueness – Mark Dever*

Conclusion: "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." This short, staccato type of conclusion usually is token or pithy, but these words are anything but. We give **honor, respect, courtesy, and kindness to all people**, especially those who disagree and oppose us. We love each other and are willing to agree on the gospel so that we can disagree on preferences and opinions in a loving way. We do all of this because we **fear the Lord**, knowing that He is in control of all things, giving us grace in the present and hope for the future, so we actually can make a "**defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.**" (1 Pet. 3:15-16)