

10 Rightly Handling Disagreements

Dr. Layton Talbert

IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT



1. GOD NEVER USES FLAWLESS VESSELS.

ACTS 15 ³⁶ And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do. ³⁷ And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. ³⁹ And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; ⁴⁰ And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

GOD NEVER USES FLAWLESS VESSELS.

- John Mark *had* deserted them early in their previous journey (Acts 15:38; 13:13).
- Barnabas was, by nature and temperament, a peace-maker (Acts 9:27)
- Barnabas was related to John Mark (Col. 4:10)
- Paul was previously disappointed with Barnabas's poor judgment (Gal. 2)

GOD NEVER USES FLAWLESS VESSELS.

Barnabas ... wanted to restore Mark to the ministry and serve in Cyprus. He was right.... God built up Mark into being the revered author of the Gospel of Mark! Paul wanted helpers that would not desert the cause under fire. He was right.... God provided Silas to go with him and in due time raised up Timothy and a number of other workers.

~ Stewart Custer, *Witness to Christ: A Commentary on Acts*, 226

GOD NEVER USES FLAWLESS VESSELS.

Paul and Barnabas could not agree, perhaps precisely because no basic principle of the faith was involved; it was a practical matter on which much could be said on both sides, and people of different temperaments would naturally give different weight to different considerations....

~David Gooding, *True to the Faith: Charting the Course through the Acts of the Apostles*, 221.

GOD NEVER USES FLAWLESS VESSELS.

Matthew Henry

Even those that are united to one and the same Jesus and sanctified by one and the same Spirit, have different apprehensions, different opinions, different views, and different sentiments in points of prudence. It will be so while we are in this state of darkness and imperfection; we shall never be all of a mind till we come to heaven.

GOD NEVER USES FLAWLESS VESSELS.

God only uses flawed vessels

... because that's all He has.

2.

GOD PROVIDENTIALLY USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO ADVANCE HIS KINGDOM.

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F. F. Bruce: *It was a pity that the present dispute was allowed to generate such mutual provocation, **but in the providence of God it was overruled for good....***

GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO ADVANCE HIS KINGDOM.

D. Bock: *... this is a major disagreement. **They reach a solid compromise and create two missions instead of one....** In sum, here is an example where a disagreement was so great that the ability to work side by side was affected. **What resulted was a solution that allowed the advance of the gospel to continue, but in a way that recognized a need for distinct ministries. Sometimes this is the best solution.***

GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO ADVANCE HIS KINGDOM.

Paul and Barnabas preserved their unity by dividing, and by how they treated each other after dividing.

GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO ADVANCE HIS KINGDOM.

- **Hiebert:** *We have no positive scriptural evidence that Paul and Barnabas ever worked together again.*
- **Custer:** *We must not think that Paul and Barnabas went off shaking their fists at one another. They were good and great men. They certainly agreed to disagree*
- 1 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:12-13

3. GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO GLORIFY HIMSELF.

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Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

THE DECIDING FACTOR IS NOT WHETHER I HAVE THE LIBERTY, BUT WHAT DECISION MOST GLORIFIES GOD IN ANY GIVEN SITUATION.

GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO GLORIFY HIMSELF.

Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food *the one for whom Christ died.* (Romans 14:15 NKJV)

REINING IN MY LIBERTY SO AS NOT TO GRIEVE A BROTHER IN CHRIST IS A GOSPEL-CENTERED, CROSS-CENTERED OBLIGATION.

1 Corinthians 10

²³ . . . all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. ²⁴ Let no man seek his own, but every man another's [good]. . . .
³¹ Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, **do all for the glory of God**

Romans 15

² Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. ³ For even Christ pleased not himself . . . ⁵ Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: ⁶ **that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God . . .**

GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO GLORIFY HIMSELF.

OUR DECISIONS IN VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES WILL DIFFER FROM EACH OTHER'S; IF THE DRIVING PRINCIPLE ON WHICH WE MAKE THOSE DECISIONS IS THE GOOD OF OTHERS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, THEN GOD WILL BE GLORIFIED EVEN BY OUR DIFFERENCES.

GOD USES OUR DIFFERENCES TO GLORIFY HIMSELF.**Derek Kidner on the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35**

God, who loves unity and truth, is no lover of uniformity. By his own order of Nazarites, he called some people, but not others, to an austerity not unlike that of the Rechabites, to make a particular point; and the fact that Jesus and John the Baptist glorified God by different lifestyles should open our minds to the reality and value of specialized callings....”

4.

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHY WE DISAGREE.

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Elisabeth Elliot: *It appears that God has deliberately left us in a quandary about many things. Why did He not summarize all the rules in one book, and all the basic doctrines in another? He could have eliminated the loopholes, prevented all the schisms over morality and false teaching that have plagued the church for two thousand years. Think of the squabbling and perplexity we would have been spared. And think of the crop of dwarfs He would have reared!*

5.

SOMETIMES IT'S APPROPRIATE TO DISAGREE (EVEN VIGOROUSLY).

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Divine use does not require, or necessarily imply, divine approval.

- **God uses Balaams** (Numbers 22-24).
- **God uses Samsons** (Judges 14-16).
- **God uses Jehoshaphats** (2 Chronicles 17-23).

JEHOSHAPHAT (2 CHRONICLES)

- One of only 8 godly kings in Judah (out of 20)
- One of only 3 kings in Judah compared to David (17:3-4)
- Very positive influence in Judah; instituted many great reforms (17:6-9; 19:4-11)
- God's presence/blessing evident on his reign (20:1-30)
- Scripture's overall evaluation is very positive (19:3; 20:32)

JEHOSHAPHAT (2 CHRONICLES)

- Defining Flaw: repeated association with the unrighteous kings of Israel (18:1-2ff.; 20:35-36/1 K. 22:48-49; 2 K. 3:6-12) in the interest of unity (18:3; 1 K. 22:4).
- In every instance, God sent a prophet to express His displeasure with Jehoshaphat (19:1-2; 20:37; 2 K. 3:13ff.).
- Legacy: enormous longterm damage to his own family and to the people of God, through his intermarriage and cooperation with the house of Ahab

SOMETIMES IT'S APPROPRIATE TO DISAGREE (EVEN VIGOROUSLY).

Divine use does not require, or necessarily imply, divine approval.

Personal godliness or divine usefulness does not exempt one from severe divine displeasure or from the censure and rebuke of fellow believers.

SOMETIMES IT'S APPROPRIATE TO DISAGREE (EVEN VIGOROUSLY).

Divine use does not require, or necessarily imply, divine approval.

- God even uses Pergamosian, Thyatiran, and Sardisian churches (Revelation 2-3).
- Christ holds their pastors in His hand and identifies them as His churches, but may still sometimes have severe rebuke for them.

6.

SOMETIMES INDIGNATION IS JUST THE WRATH OF MAN.

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I. Howard Marshall: *The reason for the contention between Paul and Barnabas has seemed so trivial that some deeper cause has been suspected.*

SOMETIMES INDIGNATION IS JUST THE WRATH OF MAN.

Matthew Henry: *... we shall never be all of a mind till we come to heaven. ... even those whom we justly condemn we should condemn **moderately**, and with a great deal of **temper[ance]**, because we know not but afterwards we may see cause to think better of them ... and we should so **regulate** our [words] that if it should prove so **we should not afterwards be ashamed** of them . . . [and] should cheerfully receive, forgive and forget, and put confidence in, and as there is occasion, give a good word to [them].*

..let every man be **swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath**; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.... If any man among you seemeth to be religious and bridleth not his tongue ... this man's religion *is* vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this ... to keep himself unspotted from the world (*James 1:19-27*).

**YOUR REACTION CAN BE JUST AS UNSCRIPTURAL,
YOUR ATTITUDE JUST AS WORLDLY.**

7. EVERY BELIEVER IS INDIVIDUALLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MASTER

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Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand (*Rom 14:4*).

EVERY BELIEVER IS INDIVIDUALLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MASTER.

- Not based on what other people thought of you and your choices.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment (1 Cor. 4:3).

EVERY BELIEVER IS INDIVIDUALLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MASTER.

- Not based on your own conscience.
Yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing [against] myself, yet am I not hereby justified (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

EVERY BELIEVER IS INDIVIDUALLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MASTER.

- Based on your faithfulness to the word of God.
Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful. . . . But he that judgeth me is the Lord (1 Cor 4:2, 4).

8.
**THE PROBLEM IS NOT OUR DIFFERENCES,
 BUT THE MISMANAGEMENT OF OUR
 DIFFERENCES.**

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 MISMANAGEMENT OF OUR DIFFERENCES.**

*"The importance of this sort of study cannot be overestimated if we are to move toward unanimity on those matters of interpretation that still divide us.... it is very distressing to contemplate how many differences there are among us as to what Scripture actually says.... [T]here is a disturbing array of mutually incompatible theological opinions" (D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 18).*

**THE PROBLEM IS NOT OUR DIFFERENCES BUT THE
 MISMANAGEMENT OF OUR DIFFERENCES.**

Unity is possible without unanimity.

Lack of unanimity is one of the best tests of unity.

Our differences ought to result in our studying Scripture more closely than we would if we all agreed on everything.

**THE PROBLEM IS NOT OUR DIFFERENCES BUT THE
 MISMANAGEMENT OF OUR DIFFERENCES.**

Philip Henry

"it is not so much our differences of opinion that doth us the mischief

(for we may as soon expect all the clocks in the town to strike together, as to see all good people of a mind in every thing on this side of heaven)

but the mismanagement of that difference."

**THE PROBLEM IS NOT OUR DIFFERENCES BUT THE
 MISMANAGEMENT OF OUR DIFFERENCES.**

It is not **disagreement** (lack of unanimity) that tarnishes God's glory in the Church, but **ill will** (lack of unity).

9.
**UNITY IS NOT A GOAL, IT'S A FACT.
 ACT LIKE IT.**

UNITY IS NOT A GOAL, IT'S A FACT. ACT LIKE IT.

- **John 17** is not a plea to us to be unified; it is a prayer to the Father to make us a unified entity.
- **Ephesians 4** teaches that this unity is not an ambition to aspire to; it is a reality to be guarded.

10.

HE'S NOT THE ENEMY; HE'S A BROTHER.

HE'S NOT THE ENEMY; HE'S A BROTHER.

¹⁴ And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

¹⁵ Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother. (2Th 3:14-15)

11.

CELEBRATE PERSPICUITY!

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... perspicuity is one of the foundations for religious liberty in the West. Implicit in the affirmation of Scripture's clarity is the recognition that individuals have the responsibility and the ability to interpret Scripture for themselves.... Of course, this ... doctrine has opened a door to all sorts of problems—factions, eccentric interpretations, rampant individualism, and the like. But despite these dangers, the freedom that perspicuity protects is worth the cost....

CELEBRATE PERSPICUITY!

... The biblical doctrine of perspicuity can be abused. But a raft of bad interpretations and the sometimes free-for-all of Protestantism is still worth the price of reading the Bible for ourselves according to our God-given (and imperfect) consciences. Freedom of religious inquiry and expression would not be possible without confidence in the clarity of Scripture.

~Kevin DeYoung, Taking God at His Word, 67-68

