

**Learning How to Talk About
Significant Theological Differences**
The Proper Context for Constructive
Conversation

Wheelersburg Baptist Church
1 June 2025
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1

**Learning
How to Talk
About
Significant
Theological
Differences**



2



1 Peter 3:14b-16, ESV

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,
but in your hearts honor Christ the
Lord as holy, always being prepared to
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.

3

Why Does This Matter ?

- ✓ The differences between Dispensational and Covenant Theology are really a form of family squabble.
- ✓ Especially in families, sometimes people in such situations do not play fair.
- ✓ If we are going to bring glory to God in the midst of our differences, we must play fair.
- ✓ There are rules (instructions) about how to fight for God's truth in a way that honors God laid out for us in the Scriptures.
- ✓ When we don't follow the rules God's name is what is soiled.

4

Learning How to Talk About Significant Theological Differences

- June 1 **The Proper Context for Constructive Conversation.**
- June 15 **The Importance of Knowing the Past.**
- June 22 **The Importance of Listening Well to What is Said.**
- June 29 **Evaluating and Responding Properly to What We Learn**

5

My Big Picture Outline of the Proper Procedure

- I. Establish the Proper Contexts.
- II. Assemble the Evidence.
- III. Evaluate the Significance of the Evidence.
- IV. Develop Proper Conclusions.
- V. Enact Proper Ministry Practice.

6

Three Realms of Context



Attitudinal
Context

Theological
Context

Methodological
Context

7

Three Realms of Context



What attitudes should
be evident in this
discussion?

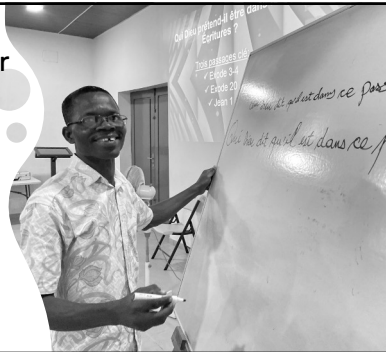
About what points of
theology are we in
agreement?

What principle of
interpretation does the
Bible give for us to use?


8

Key Attitudes for
Doing Biblical
Interpretation

- Humility
- Gentleness
- Respect
- Honesty
- Love




9



Humility

Not only must we develop a spirit of humility toward the Bible in regard to our *conduct*, we must also develop such a spirit in regard to our *doctrines*. **We evangelicals are not noted for our humility about our doctrines – our beliefs about what the Bible teaches in various areas of theology.** Whatever position we take in a specific area of theology, we tend to feel that our position is airtight and that anyone

10




Humility

holding a different view is altogether wrong. **We tend to be quite impatient with anyone who differs from us.** Ironically, the more our views come from the teachings of someone else instead of from the Bible itself, the more rigidly we tend to hold those views.

-- Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, NavPress, p.71.

11




Humility

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,"

-- Philippians 2:2-5, ESV.


12



Humility

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."
 -- Colossian 3:12-13, ESV.


13



Gentleness & Respect

"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 them repentance heading 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."
 -- II Timothy 2:24-26, ESV.


14



Gentleness & Respect

"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to 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."
 -- I Peter 3:15-16, ESV.

15




Honesty

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grown so that it builds itself up in love. . . Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor for we are members one of another. "

-- Ephesians 4:15-16, 25, ESV.

16




Honesty

"But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.'"

-- Acts 4:19-20, ESV.

Those words spoken in the face of personal threats displayed respect, gentleness and an honest evaluation of who was ultimately in control and who they ultimately needed to please.


17



Love

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

18



Love

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. . . So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; the greatest of these is love."

-- I Corinthians 13:1-6, 13, ESV.

19

The Principle of Interpretation the Biblical Writers Use

The Core Question:

Is there a hermeneutic embedded in the Scriptures that we must use in interpreting what the Scriptures mean?

20

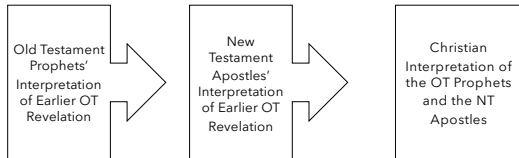
One Theologians Opinion

"The way the prophets and apostles read is the way they wrote and the way we ought to read. They have embedded in the Scripture the way Scripture should be interpreted. The Bible comes with "hermeneutic included." We may not always get everything right but that does not mean a standard does not exist. Rather, the biblical writers have set that standard. For a Christian, our hermeneutic then must be one of surrender and obedience, one that bows before how the Author has demanded his children read and seek what he has confluenty intended through the human author."

-- Abner Chou. The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers, p. 232.

21

The Christian Hermeneutic



22

The Parts of the Hermeneutic of the Biblical Writers

Interpretation is a complex activity but it breaks down into four basic instructions to follow in making sense of the text of Scripture.

1. Investigate the meanings of words. (literal).
2. Investigate the grammar and literary form in which the words are set (grammatical).
3. Investigate the historical and cultural contexts of the text (historical).
4. Based on the information of steps 1-3 answer the question, "So What?"

23

Things to Remember Before Entering into Theological Discussions

- ✓ There is always the possibility that I could be wrong in my understanding of what God's Word is saying. It is even possible - maybe highly probable - that neither party in a theological disagreement is entirely correct.
- ✓ I need to honestly ask and answer questions like, "How can I conduct myself in this conversation in such a way that the best interests of even those who disagree with me are served by what I say and do?"

24

Things to Remember Before Entering into Theological Discussions

- ✓ The basis for our respect for other people is who they are as image-bearers of God who were created by God and are loved by God in the same way that He loves us. Respect must never be made contingent on the other person agreeing with me.
- ✓ Since biblical love is pursuing that which is good and right for the other person, I must ask myself, "Am I speaking what I speak to pursue what is right and good for the people to whom I am speaking or do I have other reasons for saying what I say?"

25

Things to Remember Before Entering into Theological Discussions

- ✓ There is truth and we should be concerned about speaking it accurately and persuasively while living it out gently and honesty through the attitudes we display toward others. In practical terms this means that certain modes of speech that tend to be harsh and easily misunderstood such as sarcasm should be used sparingly or not at all.

26