

Tuckingmill Baptist Church, Camborne



August 2020

I'm not quite sure that all of you who pick up a paper copy of this magazine - or *used* to, when we could hand out things at the Chapel - realise that we also have a small *virtual* readership, too. This magazine is published on our church website. And there's a mailing list of a dozen or so who have been getting it electronically for some time.

Curiously, it's that group of remote readers who give me most of the feedback I get on what I write here. And a comment I got last month was, *What do you make of this "Black Lives Matter" campaign?*

Well, I wrote back a fairly immediate e-mail reply, but I have pondered it a bit more in the intervening few weeks. So, as Jeremy Clarkson, in the newer *Millionaire* programmes says, *Here's what I think ...*



First of all, I guess it's an entirely natural reaction to continued oppression. I have to admit that I've never been the victim of discrimination. Probably most of us haven't - though that may change if we insist that we as individuals and our church as a body speak out openly for traditional (orthodox, Biblical ... in fact, just plain *Christian*) views on marriage and sexuality.

Discrimination (in the bad sense of the word) is something the Bible speaks out against. Read James' letter, for example, railing against the mistreatment of the poor by the rich. Yes, wealth *will* buy access to certain privileges (Ecclesiastes, for all that it's shot full of nearly cynicism concerning the state of the world "under the sun" (i.e. factoring God out), is so helpfully realistic and blunt about things like that) but it doesn't mean that inhuman-

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ty, or even insensitivity, to your neighbour, is tolerable.

Build that - or let it build - into a system, and *systematic* oppression will produce *systematic* resentment. And that resentment will grow, and either eventually just overflow or violently erupt. Think about the differing kind of volcanic eruptions: steady lava flows or destructive explosions.

And I have to say, if it is a response to oppression, a reaction like that can be righteous. Setting captives free is a picture the Bible uses to describe the result of the Gospel.

But it seems almost impossible for us to continue to handle anger in a godly way. We *far too easily* claim our affront is a righteous response, “godly” anger ... but I doubt it stays that way very long. Yes, “be angry and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26) ... but not long after it reads “and given no opportunity to the devil”. “The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

So what starts out as something laudable can slowly become tainted. A cry for justice chills to a longing for what is essentially revenge.

Or people come on board with an agenda. I wonder if this is what has happened with *Black Lives Matter*. I hear several reports that the objectives of this movement now include some far-reaching Marxist or anarchist ideals.

Can we just think of this in terms of hi-jacking? It might not even have been a calculated ploy, deliberately subverting this outpouring of grief and anger into a political weapon. (Or it could have been; I am not *that* naive.)

But the overall effect has been to muddy the waters. Christians (and others) will now feel differently, based on their perceptions of the different aspects of the campaign.

Some will continue to focus on the need for police reform in the USA, or in the society of that country more generally. I don't think I'd argue with that.

But for others, with those anarchist (etc) political objectives deflecting the movement ... it's sufficiently questionable ... or sufficiently dangerous ... or clearly now so God-less ... that they feel that they must distance themselves from it, or even oppose it.

It is just another example of my thinking that there are actually very few single-issue decisions. There are judgement calls involved,



and different individuals will call those judgements differently.

How much abuse of the Foodbank system - the vouchers being sold on the streets, for example - can be tolerated on the basis that it is *mostly* supporting the people it's aimed at helping?

How far do we continue to go along with the Government's restrictions of *church* liberties ... or have they already overstepped the mark, and we are obliged to "honour God rather than men" and engage in the civil disobedience of public singing?

□

There's a fascinating series being transmitted on BBC at present, *Mrs America*, and it illustrates this *Black Lives Matter* quandary. Back in the 1970's, the Equal Rights Amendment was hotly debated in the USA. Where should Christians stand on the matter? Should women be given rights equal to those of men under US law or not?

Simplistically, it's a no-brainer. Of course a woman should be paid the same as a man for doing an identical job.

But ... the movement promoting the ERA included a lot of people wanting to press further, including "reproductive freedom", or abortion rights. Can you sign up with this group, agreeing with only

part of their agenda, but strongly opposed to another part of it?

But could you take the opposing pathway, either, and seek for the ERA to be voted down ... knowing that you would then be joining forces with the racist extremes of white supremacists?

Or do you consider both movements so ungodly that you can join with neither ... and conclude that politics is too dirty a game for Christians to be involved with ... thereby leaving it to the unbelievers to make all your country's laws?

We face a similar question every time we vote, even now. Do we insist we will only vote for a person, but not a political party - for the manifestos of *all* the parties include things that we cannot in good conscience go along with as Christians? So what happens when there's nobody standing whom you know and think a worthy beneficiary of your vote? Abstain, and let everyone else without such spiritual foibles decide for you?

Let's face it, decision-making is difficult. We need to learn to disagree without taking things so personally. We need to learn how to be thankful for other believers whose consciences are wired differently from our own - so long as those consciences (like Luther's) remain captive to the word of God.



And we need to apply this very practically, in the next few months, creeping in fits and starts back to meeting in the Chapel. People will disagree over what we can or should do, and when, and how fast we can or dare proceed. Nobody is going to feel totally happy with whatever we eventually decide to do.

The question is, will we thank God for those people more adventurous or more timid than ourselves, those who want to hang back and those who want to press ahead? Will we secretly host snarly

thoughts about someone making a different judgement call ... or will we remember the Scripture saying,



Who are you to pass judgement on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls... Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

(Romans 14:4-5)

Peter Ham

You can contact Peter Ham, TRBC's pastor, by phone on (01209) 212442 or (07818) 078135. You can also e-mail peter.ham@live.co.uk,

Church website:

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Zoom meetings - "online church":

Still seeking to improve on this, but we've now settled on weekly meetings as follows:

Sundays: 10.30 and 6.30

Thursdays 7.00

| | 10.30 a.m. | 6.30 p.m. (cafe church) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 9 th August | Proverbs 10:2 | Following on from a.m. |
| 16 th August | Proverbs 10:11 | Following on from a.m. |
| 23 rd August | Proverbs 10:12 | Following on from a.m. |
| 30 th August | Proverbs 10:28 | Following on from a.m. |
| 6 th September | Matthew 16:21-28 | Following on from a.m. |

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How to disagree well

Guy M Richard
from the *Tabletalk* magazine last year



One of the greatest problems that we face in the church today is disagreement. Anyone who has served in a position of leadership in the church will know exactly what I am talking about. The real problem that we face, however, is not so much the presence of disagreement as the way that disagreement is usually carried out and what typically happens as a result.

Disagreement, in and of itself, can be a good thing. It can provide important clarification and refinement when we are developing a plan of action. It can also provide protection for the church as a whole, so that no one is able to kidnap the church and take it in an unbiblical or unwise direction.

Disagreement forces us to think. It opens our eyes to different perspectives and challenges us to see issues from different points of

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view. At its best, disagreement strengthens and protects the church and its individual members.

The problem that I see is not that we disagree with one another. The problem is the way that we disagree and how we respond to the disagreement of others. Most of us have a hard time disagreeing without also being disagreeable. We tend to adopt an “us vs. them” mentality. We go on the offensive, and we fight to win. No doubt pride is a big part of why this is so. We are proud people — all of us. And pride, as C.S. Lewis has so helpfully pointed out in *Mere Christianity*, is always competitive.



It seeks to win. It doesn't simply want to be good; it wants to be better than someone else. It doesn't simply want to be strong, fast, or wise; it wants to be stronger, faster, or wiser. Pride makes our disagreement competitive in an unhealthy way because it always seeks to exalt the “us” over the “them.”

But disagreement doesn't have to be an unhealthy competition. It can be a healthy one. The key is in realizing the lie of the “us vs. them” dichotomy. Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). He wants to keep us as far away from the truth as possible. He doesn't want us to see that the “us vs. them” dichotomy never leads to victory but only to loss. He doesn't want us to see that when we engage in unhealthy disagreement, we are ultimately attacking ourselves.

This idea first occurred to me many years ago in regard to my marriage. I was studying Paul's teaching on the unity of the husband-wife relationship in Ephesians 5 when it dawned on me that if husbands and wives really are “one flesh” — as Paul (and Moses) says that they are — then that means that every time I have a disagreement with my wife, I am actually fighting with myself. I realized

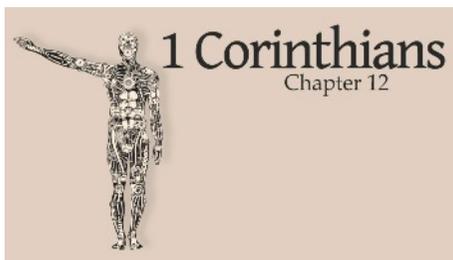


that up to that point I had been fighting as though we were two separate people, each seeking to win over the other.

As I began to appreciate the fact that we were not two separate people but one flesh, it began to change the way that I saw our disagreements. I understood that for me to fight to win was really a losing proposition. It was like one half of me fighting against the other half of me. In this scenario, it wouldn't really matter which half wins, because the whole of me would lose either way. As I began to see this for the first time, I came to see that "fighting to win" really meant fighting so that the whole of "me" — i.e., my wife and I together as one flesh — could win, not just one half of "me."

The same thing is true in the church. We know this because, in Ephesians 5:29–32, Paul likens the union between Christ and the church to the union of the husband-wife relationship, which means that the church is not only one flesh with Christ, so to speak, but one flesh with one another as well.

When the Holy Spirit unites each believer to Christ, He also unites him to everyone else who is united to Christ. Each of us becomes part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). Just as eyes, ears, arms, and legs are all united to our bodies, so they are also united to each other. The same blood is flowing through them all. The same head oversees and orchestrates their movement. Each member has a vested interest in the others. When one member suffers or is hurt, the body as a whole is affected.



And so it is within the body of Christ as well. The same lifeblood flows through every member of the body. The same Head oversees and orchestrates the movement of each part. When one member suffers or is hurt, the whole body is affected.

The doctrine of union with Christ means that when we disagree with our fellow Christians, we are really fighting with ourselves. Satan's lie has been to convince us that there actually is an

“us vs. them.” But the truth is that there isn’t. We are one body. The “us vs. them” dichotomy pits arms against legs and eyes against ears. The body not only suffers in this case, but each member suffers along with the body.

The trouble is that we don’t feel this as acutely as when we experience it physically in our bodies. Every part of the human body is affected when someone breaks a leg, for instance, because every other part has to compensate for this affliction. We feel that acutely. But we don’t feel it so acutely when a brother or a sister in Christ suffers or is hurt. We ought to, but we don’t. The degree to which we don’t feel that is the degree to which we don’t really understand our union with Christ.

The truth is, there is no “us vs. them” among Christians. There is only “us vs. us.” If Christians can only embrace this reality, it will revolutionize the way that we disagree with one another. We still need to fight to win in our disagreements, to be sure. But the “win” will look different. Our disagreements won’t be about “us” winning and “them” losing. Instead, they will be about “us” winning together as one body.

If the church can appreciate the fact that we are “one flesh” and learn how to disagree well among ourselves, we just may attract the attention of the world at large and that may in turn lead them to ask for the reason for the hope that is in us. We can certainly pray together to that end.



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