

Keeping in Step with the Spirit: Spiritual Disciplines as Kingdom Living

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church | Kyle David Bennett, Ph.D.

Fall 2022

WEEK SIX

Be glad if people make the strongest objections they can against your views, for in consequence the truth will stand out all the better.

~ René Descartes (1596–1650)

All people, since they are born as infants, are born unfit for society, and a great many remain so all their life long; but, by discipline, and not by nature, they become fit for society.

~ Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

- **Summary of Last Week:** We discussed the nature and purpose of fasting and feasting. We examined the end of tummies, what habits of appetites we have, and where our urges deform. We explored three malformed ways that we use our tummies and appetites: miserly, gormandizingly, and prodigally. We learned that the remedy for this is fasting and feasting in ways that help us to eat in celebration of God and out of concern for our neighbors.
- **Where We're Going This Final Week:** We're shifting from *me* and *my* "body" (i.e., all that I encompass: mind, mouth, and marrow) and to *us* and *Christ's* body (i.e., all that we encompass: pastors, teachers, deacons, etc.) From *personal* habits in Christ to *interpersonal* habits in the Church. I would like to propose disagreement as a spiritual discipline we can and should engage in to build up the Body of Christ.
- **The Spirit of Our Interaction:**
 - Countering: We view *positions* as rivals competing against each other. This is manifested in wanting to "win" an argument, persuade the other to come to our side, or on a macro-level to get our view legislated. We are always ready to counter any point made. An antithetical posture runs through this.
 - Canceling: We view *people* as rivals to avoid or silence so that their positions aren't taken seriously. This is manifested in not giving someone a "platform," report social media accounts as violations of policies, filing lawsuits, or no longer coming home for the holidays. An attack mode animates this.
- **Is Disagreement What Divides Us?**
- **What Is Disagreement?**
 - *Etymologically:* *dia* + *logos* = through + speech
 - Something that emerges as a result of dialogue
 - You don't get disagreement talking to yourself (i.e., a monologue)
 - You don't get disagreement talking to sycophants (i.e., flattering)
 - You don't get disagreement talking to those reticent (i.e., diffidence)
 - *An understanding that we are not on the same page*
- **What It's Not:**
 - *Non-Agreement*

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- In the same way that agreement is not merely saying “yes,” disagreement is not simply saying “no.” Agreement is not unanimity and disagreement is not denial.
- There could be many reasons others do not “agree” with us (e.g. raising objections, having doubts, suspicious of our intentions, disliking us) that wouldn’t constitute disagreement.
- *It’s Close Cousins*
 - *Dissent*: has to do with conclusions. Where one begins or how one gets to the conclusion doesn’t really play any part in dissent. Dissent focuses on the end and whether or not they oppose the final view or perspective.
 - *Dispute*: has to do with starting points, interpretations, or judgments that lead into the final conclusion. Points are disputed, not conclusions. Whereas dissent focuses on the end, dispute focuses on how one gets there (but never really looks at the end.)
 - *Debate*: has to do with hearing the opinions of others, usually in a public setting, and responding to those opinions with “stronger” ones. Debate presupposes disagreement, but not all debates are in fact disagreements or even end in disagreements.
 - *Demur*: is a delay in agreement. One still has doubts and objections, and those doubts and objections may have been satisfactorily addressed, but, for whatever reason, the other person doesn’t want to admit that they have.
- *A Working Definition*: The process of uncovering where, how, and why we part ways with someone’s view or conclusion. It involves hearing, understanding, and critiquing another person’s position and why they hold that view in a way that they would approve.
- **Disciplining Our Disagreement**
 - Four components of disagreement: Listening carefully, articulating clearly, understanding critically, judging constructively
 - *Listening Carefully*: this involves (a) hearing the words the speaker is saying and what they mean; (b) identifying key words or ideas they are using and why and when they are being used; and (c) inquiring into terms or phrases that need clarification.
 - *Articulating Clearly*: involves identifying your own assumptions and biases and stating explicitly and precisely (as you can) your view and why you hold it.
 - *Understanding Critically*: involves (a) asking questions of clarification; (b) thinking about the points they are making and why they are connecting them; and (c) imagining those points from their perspective.
 - *Judging Constructively*: involves assessing where the two of you diverge and identifying where you might move ahead. Four major sources of genuine divergence are lack of information, wrong information or misinformation, inconsistent thinking, or incomplete thinking.
- **Renewing Relationships through Disagreement**
 - Loving God
 - Loving Our Neighbor
 - Loving Ourselves