

Oak Grove Church of Christ Newsletter - 2023.08.20

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Sermon recordings

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Speaker-AM: Robbie Moreland

Title: Different

Recording:

oakgrovecofc.org/sermons/different

Speaker-PM: Steve Helterbrand

Title: Every Act Counts

Recording:

oakgrovecofc.org/sermons/Every-Act-Counts

Be Different

- 1 Peter 1:13-1Peter 2:2
- Think Differently
- Live Differently
- Love Differently
- Talk Differently
- Be Different

Romans 6:3-5

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

Rules for Religious Discussions, 8/15/2023 by Andy Sochor

“But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” ([I Peter 3:15](#)).

It is incumbent upon all Christians to be ready to teach others. There are many potential ways to do this. The passage above describes teaching that is done in the course of a discussion – someone “asks you.” These discussions take place in different environments – friendly or hostile, public or private, in person or online, etc. How do we make the best use of our opportunities to discuss the Scriptures with others?

On one hand, we are to “contend earnestly” ([Jude 3](#)); on the other hand we must speak “the truth in love” ([Ephesians 4:15](#)). We are to “demolish arguments” ([II Corinthians 10:5, NIV](#)), but “must not be quarrelsome” ([II Timothy 2:24](#)). How do we strike the right balance? We do so by remembering some rules for religious discussions.

Be Willing to Defend the Truth

Paul, as an apostle, was “appointed for the defense of the gospel” ([Philippians 1:16](#)). All Christians must be “ready to make a defense” as well ([I Peter 3:15](#)). God does not force us to do anything. In every part of our lives, we have a choice to do what He expects us to do or not. Anytime we have an opportunity to defend the truth in a religious discussion, we have a choice to be silent, to defend the truth the wrong way, or to defend the truth the right way.

Speak the Truth in Love

Choosing to speak in defense of the truth is essential, but it must be done with the right attitude. Paul said we are to be “speaking the truth in love” ([Ephesians 4:15](#)). This means we speak with love for God since our teaching glorifies Him ([I Peter 4:11](#)), with love for the truth by teaching all of God’s word ([Acts 20:27](#)) without additions or subtractions ([Revelation 22:18-19](#)), and love for the souls of men that they might know the truth and be saved ([I Timothy 2:4](#)).

Always Appeal to the Scripture

We are to “speak as the oracles of God” ([I Peter 4:11, KJV](#)). This means we speak the very words of God. To lead people to faith, we must make our appeal to the source of faith – the word of God ([Romans 10:17](#)). If people are going to believe our message, they must recognize it as being from God. Paul was thankful that the brethren in Thessalonica “received the word of God...not as the word of men, but

for what it really is, the word of God" ([1 Thessalonians 2:13](#)). We need to cite book, chapter, and verse for our statements; not "I think," or "I feel, or "Our preacher says..." Of course, to do this, we must be familiar with the Scriptures, which necessitates study on our part ([II Timothy 2:15](#)).

Build upon Common Ground

For most of the people we will have discussions with, we will agree with them on *something*. We should take advantage of that common ground and use it as a foundation for further teaching. Paul used common ground as a foundation when he taught. In Thessalonica, he taught the Jews in the synagogue and built upon the common ground of belief in the inspiration of the Old Testament ([Acts 17:2-3](#)). In Athens, he taught the Gentiles on Mars Hill and built upon the common ground of the importance of being religious ([Acts 17:22-23](#)). He even quoted their poets ([Acts 17:28](#)) to reinforce his point that all men came from God. When we have discussions with people, we need to try to find common ground – belief in God, inspiration of the Bible, the need for authority, the simplicity of New Testament Christianity, basic principles of morality, etc. – and build upon it.

Do Not Be Quarrelsome

Paul told Timothy, "*The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged*" ([II Timothy 2:24](#)). Of course, this does not mean we cannot contend for the faith ([Jude 3](#)) or refute error ([Titus 1:9](#)). But when we fight against error, we are to fight fair. We must not resort to personal attacks ([Jude 8-9](#)). We are to tear down faulty arguments – "*destroying speculations*" – not people ([II Corinthians 10:5](#)). We do not need the last word, but should simply "*reject a factious man after a first and second warning*" ([Titus 3:10](#)); otherwise, we could get caught up in useless and unending arguments. We must use the weapon that God provided – "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" ([Ephesians 6:17](#)).

Do Not Take Personal Offense

When we try to teach people, they may not listen. Some will argue. There will be those who reject or oppose what we say. When this happens, it is easy to take it personally; yet we must guard against this. Jesus said, "*The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me*" ([Luke 10:16](#)). Instead of taking personal offense when people reject Christ, we simply need to shake the dust off of our feet and move on ([Luke 10:10-11](#)).

Conclusion

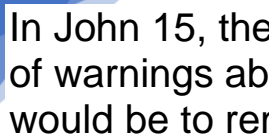
The only way people can be saved is through the gospel – "*the power of God for salvation*" ([Romans 1:16](#)). So we should take advantage of opportunities to engage people in religious discussions. As we do so, let's be careful to do it the right way.

Bearing Fruit, 8/18/2023 by Doy Moyer

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" ([John 15:1-8, ESV](#)).

We often think of fruit-bearing as bringing others to Jesus. While bearing fruit includes testifying of Jesus, there is more to consider. To get a better perspective on this figure of the vine and branches, let's think about some Old Testament connections.

1. Psalm 80 describes Israel asking for restoration: *"Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!"* The psalmist describes Israel as a vine that was brought out of Egypt, planted in the land, and prospering ([Psalms 80:8-11](#)). Yet walls were broken down, its fruit plucked, and the vine ravaged by beasts because of their sins. Now Asaph asks for God to have regard for the vine. Though others have burned it with fire and cut it down, *"let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!"* ([Psalms 80:17](#)). We can see connections here to John 15 as this request is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Indeed, the Son of Man is the true vine and those who do not abide in Him cannot bear fruit but will be cut down and burned with fire. Life is found in Jesus, who restores and saves His people. What the psalmist desired for restoration can be found in Jesus Christ, the true vine.
2. Isaiah 5 uses the figure of a love song about the Lord's vineyard (God's people) that was planted on a fertile hill. But when the vinedresser (God) looked for good grapes, He found only wild grapes unfit for consumption. This is a picture of Israel's faithlessness. God did everything for the vineyard: *"What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?"* ([Isaiah 5:4](#)) God then says He would remove the hedge and it would be devoured ([Isaiah 5:5-7](#)). Just so, those who do not abide in Christ are cut down and thrown in the fire. Other passages show the same concept (cf. [Isaiah 27:4](#)). Life is found by abiding in the Lord.



In John 15, the disciples would likely hear what Jesus said against that backdrop of warnings about turning from God. The only hope they had of bearing good fruit would be to remain in Jesus. What, though, is the good fruit in John 15? In the greater context of John 14-16, the disciples are tasked with the mission of spreading the message of Jesus and proclaiming the truth. Making disciples of all nations would surely be included here. Paul referred to the gospel “*bearing fruit and increasing*” ([Colossians 1:6, 10](#)). Surely the seed planted will grow and bear fruit.

There is something else in the text that is necessary for fruit-bearing. Jesus reminds the disciples of His love for them, then tells them to keep His commandments and abide in His love ([John 15:9-11](#)). This is followed by a command to “*love one another as I have loved you*” ([John 15:12](#)). We can connect this to [John 13:34-35](#) where Jesus said, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Bearing fruit as we abide in the Vine means loving Him and one another. This shouldn’t surprise us, for when we read of the “*fruit of the Spirit*,” love is first on the list ([Galatians 5:22](#)). Without love, there is no fruit bearing. Let us also recall the two greatest commands: love God and love others as self ([Matthew 22:36-40](#)). Love is fruit and love is necessary to bear more fruit. Everything hinges on this.

Abiding in Jesus means loving Him, His disciples, and a world of people lost in sin. If we do, we will tell the story of the cross wherein Jesus showed the truth in this statement: “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you*” ([John 15:13-14](#)).

May we seek to bear fruit by loving our Lord, loving others, and spreading the good news of salvation!