

something). Our perspective and predilection are fundamentally shaped by our moral state and personal experiences.

- We don't know all things and trust all things; and, we are self-asserting and self-preserving. (What all operates behind our disagreements? How do we vary in how we engage disagreements?)

How is God unlike us?

- He has absolute **truth**.
- He has absolute **knowledge**.
- He has absolute **righteousness**.
- He has absolute **wisdom**.

Why are we talking about disagreement?

God's desire...

ESV **Psalm 133:1** Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

ESV **1 Peter 3:8** Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Our experience...

We don't handle our disagreements with others well, or we don't know how to do so, or we don't care about doing so.

"We seem to live in a world of increasing polarization in which the members of warring tribes address each other with remarkable vitriol in the online environment, and our disagreements show no sign of narrowing." (Tim Cooper, p. 1)

(He writes about the relationship between John Owen and Richard Baxter: "It is really quite remarkable that mature believers who are, in so many respects, magnificent examples of what it means to follow Jesus with faithfulness and sincerity can also be Christians with pronounced blind spots who demonstrate brittleness, selfishness, and ego in their relationships with others and who damage those around them." [p. 6])

"Uncovering genuine and deep disagreement can be so sharp as to paralyze us. When it breeds conflict, families, churches, communities, and even companies can be destroyed. People with whom we disagree may appear to threaten not merely beliefs but our sense of the common, overarching good." (Richard Lints, p. 4)

- The truth (and knowledge, righteousness, and wisdom) matter(s).
- We are held accountable for our conduct.
- We can routinely be wrong.
- God's objectives matter (and are consequential).

Should we care about it?

Should we do something about it?

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Danny Capon, *Pastor*

A Theology of Disagreement

No. 1 | Introduction

Selected Scriptures

Introduction

A Theology...

...of Disagreement

What is disagreement?

Is "disagreement" in the Bible?

If we're only looking for use of the English word (family), "disagreement"...

For example, in the *English Standard Version* (ESV), the following related words (forms) are found: "**disagreeing**" (1x, Acts 28:25, *asumphonos*), "**disagreement**" (1x, Acts 15:39, *paroxusmos*).

If we expand our search for its opposite, we find the following: "agree" (15x, Gen 34:15, 22, 23, *uth*; Job 22:21, *saken*; Mat 18:19; 20:13, *sumphoneo*; Mar 14:56, 59, *isos*; Acts 15:15, *sumphoneo*; Rom 7:16, *sumphemi*; 1 Cor 1:10, *lego autos*; 2 Cor 13:11, *phroneo autos*; Phi 4:2, *phroneo autos*; 1 Tim 6:3, *proserchomai*; 1 John 5:8, *hen*), "agreed" (11x, Ex 8:12; 2 King 12:8; 1 Chr 13:4; 2 Chr 30:23; Dan 2:9; 6:7; Amos 3:3; Luke 22:5; John 9:22, *suntithemi*; Acts 5:9, *sumphoneo*; 23:20), "agreeing" (1x, Mat 20:2, *sumphoneo*), and "agreement" (9x, Is 28:15, 18; Dan 6:6, 11, 15; 11:6, 17; 1 Cor 7:5, *sumphonos*; 2 Cor 6:16, *sugkathesis*).

But, there are many other (English) words that may relate...

"(not) consent," "(dis)unity," "divide/division," "separation," "conflict/strife," "fellowship," "one(ness, one-voice, one-man)," "right in (one's) eyes," etc.

Our English word, "disagreement"...

(Oxford) lack of consensus or approval; (want of agreement or harmony)

(Cambridge) a situation in which people do not have the same opinion

"A clear definition of 'disagreement' is essential, not least because a distinction between *disagreement* and two other commonly used terms in this area, *conflict* and *dispute*, will prove significant." The primary definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is that a disagreement constitutes 'want of agreement or harmony; difference; discordancy, diversity, discrepancy.' We should note that this definition does not imply that disagreement is necessarily damaging." (Christopher Landau, p. xv)

"(Although) there is some overlap between 'disagreement' and 'conflict' or 'dispute,' there is also a clear distinction to be made. A disagreement is not inherently hostile when compared with a conflict or a dispute. It does demonstrate a lack of harmony, but a conflict or dispute indicates a greater degree of separation between two parties. A disagreement can, very quickly, make a downward descent into *becoming* a dispute or a conflict, but...(there may be in) the initial space, sometimes experienced only

fleetingly, where a disagreement has emerged but has yet to become toxic." (Landau, p. xvi)

What do we disagree about?

We all disagree...

"To disagree is human." (Olli-Pekka Vainio, p. 46)

We disagree about everything...

- "This is (not) what is." – We can disagree about **reality**.
- "This is (not) what what is means." – We can disagree about **interpretation**.
- "This is (not) what must be." – We can disagree about **righteousness**.
- "This is (not) what should be." – We can disagree about **wisdom**.
- "This is (not) what I care about." – We can disagree about **values**.
- "This is (not) what I want." – We can disagree about **desires**.
- "This is (not) what I am okay with." – We can disagree about **submission**.

We (further) disagree about:

- a matter
- how to approach the matter
- the degree to which the matter matters
- how to approach each other in (dis)agreeing about the matter

Think about the following matters:

The Iowa Hawkeyes	Voting Republican
The Pre-Trib Rapture	Jesus Christ as Fully God and Man
Subscribing to Disney+	How we educate our children
Our kids' involvement in sports	How we prepare our kids for marriage

What is the right conviction (**belief**) and the right action (**practice**) about any of these matters? What is the right way to relate to others regarding any of these matters?

Additionally, how we engage in (dis)agreement affects us both internally and externally...

Why do disagreements happen?

Would there be any disagreements in a perfect world?

What do we see in Genesis 1-2? **Differences** abound in God's "very good" creation; and yet, as a "very good" creation, there is functional **harmony** (unity).

What do we see now, Genesis 3 forward? **Differences** still abound in God's creation; but, now creation has been given over to "decay" (Rom 8:19-22) and humans are morally "dead" (Eph 2:1-3)—in a word, "**corruption**."

^{ESV} **Genesis 6:12** And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

How does the Bible describe our morally corrupt state?

- We have deceitful hearts.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

- We are born foolish.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 22:15** Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

- We default to suppressing the truth.

^{ESV} **Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

- We are driven by our selfish desires.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires

^{ESV} **Psalms 14:1** The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. ² The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{ESV} **Romans 3:9** What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

We are now a people full of **unbelief** (leading to skepticism) and **pride** (leading to dogmatism).

How does this affect our relationship with others?

- When we interact with others, our interaction is fundamentally shaped by our perspective (what we see and how we see) and our predilection (what we [dis]like and how we are predisposed toward [or against])