

The Way Leadership Responds To Dissent

The "underbelly" of an organization is revealed by how they handle people, and how they handle people who disagree.

"We have no trouble with dissent or disagreement regarding a proposal or a decision."

That is what ministry and church leaders say. AND how could you say anything other than that! However, more often than not, "them's just words."

What ministry and church leaders actually mean is that dissent must follow a sterile, censored, and sanitized pattern.

- Dissent must not hurt anyone's sensibilities, ruffle any feathers.
- Disagreement is not allowed to tear away facades, behind which people hide to cover the decision.
- Differences of opinion are to be stated in unemotional terms; no one should feel what is being said.
- No one is to be embarrassed for defending a proposal or making a decision which is shown to be indefensible or even ludicrous.
- If what one says cuts or "wounds" -- It is deemed sinful!
- If you pull off the "bandage of hypocrisy" -- it is unkind and/or ungracious, requiring an apology.
- If you reveal the illegitimacy of an argument or the dishonesty of a defensive justification, you are being arrogant.
- Dissent is not allowed to change anyone's mind because then you are creating disunity.
- Questions that reveal how ill-considered a policy or procedure is, are forbidden. It reveals far too much about any actual openness to the thinking of others.
- Unanswerable questions are embarrassing and therefore are inconsiderate and maybe even mean-spirited.
- Uncomfortable truths are ungracious.
- Pointing out "Scripture's Twisting" used to excuse wrong-doing is strictly forbidden since misusing the Scriptures is one of the most highly convicting sins.
- All personal or group discussions must end with "Kumbaya." No one is to leave a contentious conversation upset!

Can I suggest that reasoned, fair-minded, passionate, and potent dissent will always be open to the charge or marginalized by calling it -- "unkind," "ungracious," "mean-spirited." Indeed, I might well argue that it is its potency that begets the unfair, defensive, and illegitimate criticism that deems-and-claims that it as unkind, ungracious, or arrogant.

The very nature of a potent, passionately worded, and effective argument against a policy or procedure STINGS -- and stings unpleasantly! Compelling arguments hurt! It wounds! It smarts! It is therefore easily open to the dismissive charge as "unkind," et. al.

Nevertheless, because it potently drives home the truth of wrong-doing or convicts a wrong-doer(s), that does not make it unkind, ungracious, or a transgressing of God's Word.

I might also suggest that those to whom the potent and stinging argument is made may be some of the least qualified to assess the argument's complexion. It may well take an outside party to evaluate its unholy quality.

We have all seen that reality in married life, where a husband or a wife sees a comment from two distinct vantages. That is why a third-party can be far more indifferent to this-or-that comment, than the one to whom the comment was made.

I don't make these points because there is no unkind, ungracious, arrogant, self-righteous, mean-spirited, jealous, unfair, untruthful, or ill-tempered dissent.

I make these points because

√ It is far more difficult to deem dissent as "unkind" -- "ungracious" -- "arrogant" than some would quickly bandy about.

√ "Unkind" - "ungracious" - "arrogant" -- can easily be, and too often is, a disingenuous method to dismiss legitimate, potent, and convicting dissent by those who are the wrong-doers.

√ "I don't like the way they went about it" -- is the fall-back argument of those who often seek to marginalize fair and forceful disagreement. "The way they went about it," means that they potently nailed the real issues and refused to sugar-coat it in a way that really caused it to taste like what it was not.

√ Too often, "Scripture Twisting" is used as a weapon to shoot-down a painful arrow which has hit home. A passage is used as a proof-text to defend, explain, or excuse the ungodly leadership actions.

√ Labeling a comment(s) as "unkind" - "ungracious" - "arrogant" -- is the "go-to" method used to justify the threat of using and/or the implementation of Matthew 18. Since all such charges speak to motives, heart, or spirit, it is a method that requires no proof other than the claim that it is.

√ If you have read accounts of ministry and church scandals, these words show up over and over again, along with a twisted use of Matthew 18 and other Scriptures, by the abusers/wrong-doers.