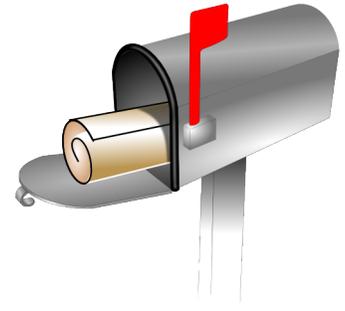


**“An Open Letter”:
Calling-Out Leadership
– Think & Re-Think --**

Whether it be the “Open Letter” of Bari Weiss, the [members of Menlo Church](#), that involving [Beth Moore](#), addressed to [the Gospel Coalition](#), or addressed to [the First Baptist Church of Orlando](#), there are *underlying dynamics operating*.



Some of the dynamics examined include

#1) Part of a ministry or local church’s obligation in dealing with disagreements, criticism, or contentious dissent is to provide a sense of fairness and equity, and hopefully, to actually deliver on that obligation. The loss of that sense of fairness and equity is what generates “An Open Letter.”

#2) There is an interesting commonality between sending anonymous letters and sending “An Open Letter.” Both types of communication recognize a broken system is in place that lacks the necessary personal and spiritual maturity to engage in contentious disagreement, dissent, criticism, or confrontation.

#3) In addressing genuine issues of church discipline, some steps can be taken to avoid bringing the congregation into the dispute and resolving it at a level where the church does not even know that such a problem even existed.

#4) When members of the church no longer feel that what they think or say matters, that they are no longer seen as co-owners, the church experiences what is seen in Acts 6:1 and requires the same resolution – a bottom-up solution! – “Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples . . . and the saying pleased the whole multitude.” There are signs of a top-down culture.

Think - Not Agree!

Over years of ministry, I have repeated this comment – As Christians, as believers, we do not have to agree on this-or-that, on what I am teaching, but we do need to THINK. We need to know what and why. If someone asks us why we do not believe in the use of alcoholic beverages as believers, we need to have thought through it and be able to make the case, or at least be able to present our reasoning, our case.

At times I have said, even at times in these posts I have said . . .

i.e. “Let me offer a suggestion which comes from those years of ministry. *Some may legitimately disagree, and they would have a fair argument to make as to these suggestions.*” – from “An Open Letter: Looking Back”

**As Christians, we do not need
to agree on this-or-that, but we
do need to THINK!**

One of the proposed suggestions was that you provide someone who has been provably involved in sexual immorality the opportunity to remove his/her membership before you take action. That is a position which can be fairly argued. In fact, I myself could make the argument against such an approach. I understand the argument against doing that and I still believe that the Scriptures allow for this approach and that on-balance there is good reason to take that approach. Would I do that if the individual were seemingly or questionably unrepentant? See what I mean?

Again, we do not need to agree, but we do need to think through issues. As was stated concerning the resignation of John Ortberg

Friendly counsel often supplies more support and even rationalization than the confrontation and rebuke that may be required. This is why I think it's always good to check in with a few detractors. They care less about your feelings and tend to shell out truth with no sugar (another reason to love your enemies—Luke 6:27).

We need more than friendly counsel. We also need a multitude. We need to involve as much of “the church” as we can, as is manageable. As is appropriate in working our way through this-or-that idea, decision, position, policy, approach, change, hiring-firing, directional change, etc.

We need help THINKING, even while disagreeing. We need to be certain that we know what to do and why we are going to do it! We need to be able to explain to any and all, who, while they may disagree, are still able to say and conclude – The leadership gave it full and fair consideration from all directions.

When only the “owners” make the decisions, and seek to announce it to the “members,” most likely they will not have gotten the “members” to “buy-in.” Result: disunity, dissatisfaction, and discord (oh – sorry that is not allowed – this is *more Scripture twisting*).

A Personal Story:

During the early days of church ministry, I remember that a young couple came to talk to me about being married. Early on into the conversation, I came to realize that neither one of them knew the Lord as their Saviour. I talked to them about their need of Jesus, personally and as potential newlyweds. They listened intently, and as the conversation progressed, they revealed a real openness to the Gospel message. “Would you like to call upon Jesus as your Saviour today? – Yes, we would.” And they did, excitedly. You could see that something had happened in their hearts.

After some other encouragement, I proceeded to ask about and map out the arrangements for their wedding day. We closed the session in prayer. Shook hands – and they walked through the office door on their way out.

He leaned back in to make a comment – “Hold it, Pastor – I did not tell you that we both have been divorced.”

He leaned back in for a comments – “Hold it Pastor – I did not tell you that we both have been divorced.”

“Oh!”

Up to that time, I had held the position that those who were divorced could not be biblically remarried.

We sat down again, and I explained my reluctance to marry them.

They walked out – I never saw them again.

Sad – Yes – !

Very SAD

I ache to this day about it.

I remember saying to myself – “Ted, you had better be right about your position because if you are wrong, you will have injured and damaged some of God's people -- using the Scriptures.

That experience caused me to think and re-think whether my position was biblical or not. [3] Were we really right and biblical in how we handled people like this young couple?

Looking back 40 years, I believe we ("I=we", but maybe "we") were the losers that day!

We don't have to agree, but we do need to think!

These posts have helped me put to “ink” my thinking as a pastor who ministered midst wonderful diversity, not only ethnic diversity, but spiritual diversity.

Any church that is growing will have to work their way through the differences of maturity, age, giftedness, spiritual growth, opinions, vantages, viewpoints, experiences, expertise, etc. As we grew from 80 to 400-500 there was more and more diversity and greater differences of vantage.

In fact, there seem to be "stall-plateaus" which a ministry reaches as it grows. I can almost recall those various numbers (the first one was around 135-150). It is then that changes needed to be made and therefore differences arose over and over again as to what and how we minister as a church.

Churches that do not experience people coming to know the Lord, are not challenged by an ever-changing diversity. Dead churches are settled and satisfied with each other. "The church" has become fairly uniform and everyone is on the same page – “We're Good!” Dead churches are "happy" with how things are running, even if they are not growing. We are all comfortable with each other, how things work, the preaching, and/or services & ministries (and/or the demands and parameters thereof).

The Danger: Some churches dishearten and marginalize (and worse) people who come with

different, diverse, saved or lost, older or newer, current or established perspectives because different and diverse vantages are inherently critical of the status quo.

We Don't Have To Agree,

But We Do Need To

Think

&

Re-Think!

Dead churches typically don't have the “diversity challenges” which travel with growth. Dead churches then "scratch their head" as to why they are not growing or seeing people come to the Lord!

These various posts have pushed me to think and re-think what the Scriptures say about disagreements, dissent, conflict, contentious conversations, sowing discord, and church discipline.

These posts have caused me to “think through” some of the ugly church practices and power plays which far too often mark ministries and local churches (well outside of the mega-ministries and churches of Falwell, Ortberg, MacDonald, White, et al).

These posts are a replay for me – a sad replay – as to how I see people, no less God’s people, run over roughs-shod by those in position and power.

We had better be right in our understanding of Scripture, and be slow to brandish it as our weapon of choice to intimidate-quiet-silence-dismiss-retaliate. I am convinced that Matthew 18 was never designed to address criticism (legitimate or illegitimate), dissent, or contentious disagreement, or to fabricate issues which would accomplish any of the above-stated results. Rather, Matthew 18 is the N.T. counterpart of Exodus 18 -- the resolving of serious and meaningful civil matters.

The same danger, which I related above and which marked my earliest years of ministry, is ever-present when it comes to handling people's

conversations - objection - criticism - disagreement - dissent - contentions

. within ministries and local churches.

These posts are about thinking and re-thinking through the biblical process of confrontation and correction of wrong-doing, wrong-doers, in the “pew” and in the “pulpit.” Are “we” really righteous and biblical in *how we handled people*.

I believe “we,” as “the church,” are the losers when we mishandle and manhandle people, when leadership misuses its position and power, and when there is then, or also, an abuse and twisting of the Scriptures to justify or excuse what is done. [2]

These posts have forced me to *think, re-think, and clarify in my mind*

- the importance of providing a sense of fairness and equity in ministry with handling people
- the need for “boards” to hold leadership accountable, which is their responsibility
- the use and abuse of Matthew 18
- the difference is between confronting the wrong-doing of leadership and what is called-or-deemed – “sowing discord”
- the possible provoking of “An Open Letter”
- the top-down attitudes which mark those who see themselves as “owners.”
- the two top reasons to leave a ministry (outside of doctrinal change)
- the danger of anything close absolute power, unchecked by its appointed or elected leaders and members
- the twisting of Scripture which is used to justify and excuse unconscionable decisions and actions

Maybe some other leaders, board members, pastors, elders, deacons, or members in the pews will “think and rethink” these issues as they read these various posts on handling controversy in the church.

(to be cont’d)

1. I spent weeks reading the different positions and arguments about marriage, remarriage, and divorce. I came to the position that the Scriptures do not forbid re-marriage, specifically on the two grounds of adultery or desertion. We also changed the church by-laws to allow for the marriage of those who were divorced.

2. What I believe to be an uncontested example of this misuse and abuse of Scripture and or God's people is described in the pdf post on "Weaponing Matthew 18."

To deal with sexual immorality, drug abuse, or drunkenness as a Matthew 18 issue is not only unnecessary, but unbiblical. Those sins are different than a civil dispute between two believers – (i.e. property, salary-employ, fraud, dishonest business practices). When it comes to these sinful vices, which have a pull and draw on lives, the ability to determine "repentance" is time-determined.

A ministry or church does not need to go to Matthew 18 to deal with those vices. There is good reason and biblical support to address membership without forcing it into a Matthew 18 mold. While you do need to ascertain the veracity of a believer's behavior, merely because that typically requires speaking to him (alone or with another), that commonality does not mean that you are involved in a Matthew 18 issue.

Example: A person has been arrested for the use and possession of heroin or meth. After visiting him in jail and realizing that he is indeed guilty (We will keep it to – his "penitent-to-priest confession – although there could be other clear evidence that would lead me to believe such as verified as well. Right? – i.e. his wife or grown child's awareness of the problem), I would seek his dismissal from the church rolls.

This is not an issue that falls under Matthew 18. But it still involves the same question as to whether he has forfeited his right to be an employee or volunteer of a ministry and/or a member of "Forgiveness Baptist Church."

When it comes to the sins of drug addiction, sexual immorality, pornography, alcoholism, or gambling, you are dealing with vices. Only "time" will reveal whether an individual is biblically and practically repentant. If you fail to address it properly from the beginning, it may well reappear in that person's life again (and again, and again, and again – seen it!).

This is not a Matthew 18 issue! If you want to pound it into that mold, you can make it work, but you will be deterred from removing such an individual off of the church rolls because they will be found "repentant" when it is revealed. Who isn't? But you may find yourself having to deal with the same sin over and over because only time can reflect what genuine, biblical, and practical repentance looks like – not tears, shame, words of regret, confession, or promises of change.

Remove him from membership, work through *the process* to "sure" and genuine repentance.

This position is born of "thinking and rethinking." You do not need to agree, but you do need to THINK.



