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# Celebrating Unity Amidst Diversity

## Some Practical and Historical Perspectives





## Controversies in the Church?

**Every generation of Christians faces the need to decide just what beliefs and practices are mandated for all believers, and what beliefs and practices may be left to the individual believer's conscience.**





**Christians who submit to the full authority of God's word CAN disagree on some topics.**

**Our differences can be matters of...**

- **Belief**
- **Practice**
- **Preference**





# Disunity in the church a result of...

## Sectarianism:

narrow-minded positional  
entrenchment leading to exclusivism

## Syncretism:

undiscerning accommodation of  
other ideologies

— *Hans Kung*





**The real problem might not be our differences**

**Scripture suggests that the controversies that lead to disunity are often caused by quarreling and pride.**





**2 Timothy 2:16-17, 23 (ESV).**

**But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene...Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.**



## **James 4:1-2 (ESV).**

**What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.**





**Proverbs 20:3 (ESV).**

**It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.**





# Is there value in disagreement?

- It can help us to clarify our viewpoint
- It can help us understand the viewpoint of others
- It can help us to see ourselves in a new light





# Disagreements and the Gospel

- **Helping our witness or hindering it?**
- **The example of Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council**
  - **Some things are worth it**
  - **God can work through it**





# **Jeremiah Burroughs**

**“Difference of  
belief and unity  
of believers are  
not inconsistent.”**





## Jeremiah Burroughs on schism

**“The true nature of schism is an uncharitable, unjust, rash, violent breaking from union with the church or members of it.”**





# Denominational Theory (from Apologetical Narration)

- **Doctrinal differences are inevitable**
- **Doctrinal differences on secondary issues matter**
- **Differences can be useful**
- **No single structure can fully represent the church of Christ**
- **True unity is based on the Gospel expressed through cooperation**
- **Thus...denominational separation is not schism**





# Disputable topics in the church (areas of scriptural latitude)

## Belief

- **Creation Order (age of the earth)**
- **End Times**
- **Predestination/Free Will**
- **Participation in War**
- **Capital Punishment**





# Disputable topics in the church

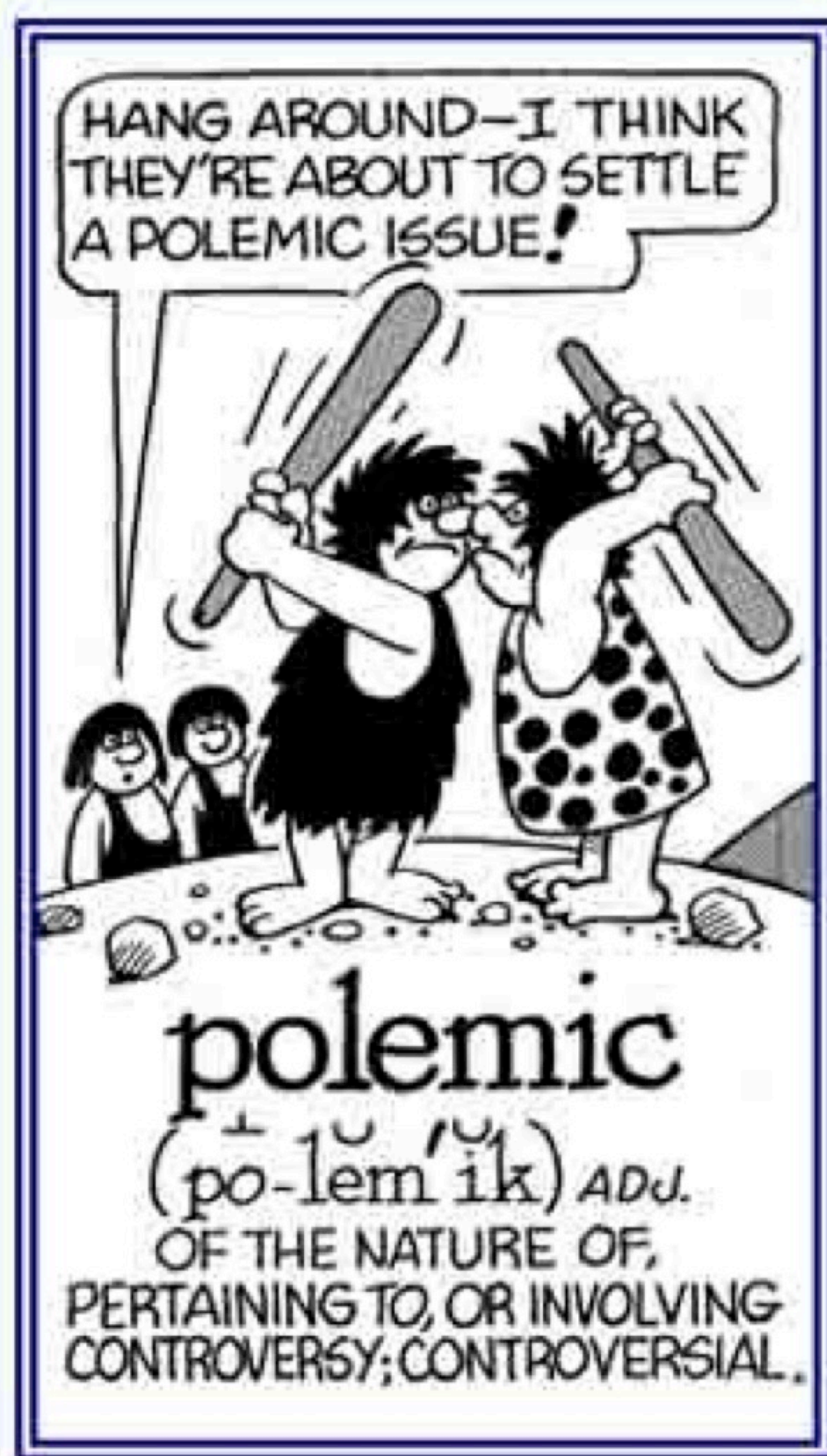
## Practice

- **Modes of Baptism**
- **Uses of Spiritual Gifts**
- **Forms of Church Government**
- **Styles of Worship**
- **Celebration of the Lord's Supper**
- **Divorce and Remarriage**
- **Gender and Church Office**
- **Politics in the Pulpit**
- **Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages**



# A Biblical Posture for Polemics

Learning to disagree  
with a tone and strategy  
that is seasoned with  
the Gospel





## A Posture of Prayer

- **Matthew 5:44 “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**
- **Prayer sets the stage for a “Gospel seasoned” conversation.**
- **Prayer helps us check our own motives.**
- **Prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be present, and reminds us of our role in the dialogue.**



# A Posture of Humility

- **James 4:6 “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**
- **As Christians we need to constantly affirm our imperfection, God’s revelation, and our need for each other in growing our understanding of Jesus and His Word.**
- **Remember the Gospel and stick to criticizing the theology...not the individual.**
- **Express appreciation and gratitude**



# A Posture of Listening

- **James 1:19-20 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”**
- **Don’t begin your rebuttal before you have even heard your opponents argument in its entirety.**
- **Ask questions that seek to gain clarity, not questions that are looking for “holes.”**
- **Take your opponents’ view in their entirety, not selectively.**





# A Posture of Gentleness

- **Ephesians 4:31-32 “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.”**
- **Words and emotions can run quickly in a disagreement. Stay away from insults, blanket statements, sarcasm, and arrogance.**
- **Do not assume your opponents position on matters that you have not yet addressed together**
- **Seek to persuade, not antagonize...watch your motives**



# A Posture of Esteem

- **Philippians 2:3 “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves.”**
- **Never attribute an opinion to your opponent that they themselves do not own.**
- **Represent your opponents’ position in its strongest form, not in a weak “straw man” form.**





# **A Posture of Edification**

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”**
- **Disagreements can be opportunities to strengthen one another and our community**
- **The Word of God is central in the building up of individuals and the community around Truth.**



# Case Study: The Nature of Spiritual Gifts

**The question...are the “sign” gifts  
still given today?**





# Use of Spiritual “Sign” Gifts

## Cessationism

- **The belief that some of the so-called charismatic gifts are no longer given and that they aren't a regular feature of life in the church**
- **Particularly the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, tongues, healing, and miracles**



# The Cessationist Argument

- **Fits best with scripture and experience**
- **Sign gifts coincided with and ceased at the end of the apostolic age**
- **These gifts as they are practiced today do not fit with their biblical descriptions**



# Use of Spiritual “Sign” Gifts

## Continuationism

- **The belief that all the spiritual gifts, including healings, tongues, and miracles, are still in operation today, just as they were in the days of the early church**





# The Continuationist Argument

- **The church still has access to all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible**
- **No scripture states that these gifts are no longer given**
- **Problems with gifts (Corinth) were problems of use and not problems with the gifts themselves**
- **Paul is correcting prideful distortion of the gifts, not the gifts themselves, in his corrective comments**



# Peninsula Community Chapel's Study "on Spiritual Gifts"

## What We Agree Upon

- **Gifts are given as Jesus deems necessary for the building up and outreach ministry of the Church (1 Cor 2:7, Eph 3:12)**
- **Gifts are to be used for the edification of the Church (1 Tim 3:5, 1 Cor 14, 1 Thes 5:21-23, 1 Pet 4:10)**
- **No gift should be used in such a way as to relegate Scripture to a secondary authority in the life of the Church (1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thes 5:21-22, Acts 20:32)**



# Therefore...

- **Christians can disagree on matters of belief and practice**
- **Christians discuss areas of disagreement with the Bible open**
- **Practice should flow from belief (theology)**
- **Scripture (not our interpretation of it) is the final authority**
- **Discussing our differences can lead to greater gospel clarity and fellowship**



# Panel Discussion

**Travis Simone — Elder, Lead Pastor**

**Rich Sylvester — Associate Pastor**

**Hunter Ruch — Associate Pastor**

**Claude Marshall — Associate Pastor**

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**Questions & Feedback**

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