

## Distorting Discussions by Pastor Marty

Just over 3 years ago, I published a newsletter titled “The Dangers of Dialogue.” In it, I explained that giving place to evil—even in relation to conversations—leads to deception or compromise. Just as Eve’s entering into dialogue with the serpent resulted in both her and Adam turning away from God’s command and embracing death, our engaging with evil puts us in an extremely dangerous position. It is vital that our theology recognize that God never makes arbitrary or capricious demands of us; every command of His is for our benefit—to protect, mature, and bless us. Today, we are increasingly falling into the same trap Eve did: we do not recognize the supernatural ability of the enemy to contextualize evil in a way that makes it look good. As I have mentioned before, Lucifer was able to deceive a large number of the heavenly host—created by God and seeing Him face-to-face for countless millennia—into believing that God was not only *wrong* in what He was doing but also *weak* in comparison to the prideful archangel. If the devil was able to convince one third of these angelic beings to follow him into destruction, we should never underestimate his ability to deceive us. He is more than capable of taking evil things and making them seem good: he has already successfully reframed suicide into deliverance, addiction into recreation, murder into choice, debasement into empowerment, betrayal into freedom, slavery into gratification, and perversion into variety. Similarly, anything holy can be defined as evil by describing it in specific contexts; for example, opposing divorce leaves women in abusive situations, and objecting to abortion risks the life of the mother. We need to only look to Hollywood to realize that there is no sin that cannot be redefined or contextualized in a way that makes it seem acceptable.

***There is no sin that cannot be redefined or contextualized so that it looks acceptable.***

The primary (first and foremost) example we have of a conversation intentionally reframed to make evil good and good evil is found in Genesis. In this passage, we find the following exchange:

SERPENT: “Did God really say you cannot eat from any of the trees in the garden?”

WOMAN: “No, we can eat from the trees in the garden, but we cannot eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, for God said if we eat it or touch it, we would die.”

SERPENT: “No, you will not die! God told you to stay away from it because He knows that when you eat that fruit, you will be smarter and will be like Him, knowing good and evil.”

Now, I have heard many theologians and pastors say the problem here was that Eve added something to what God said: He did not tell them that they could not “touch” the fruit—only that they should not eat it. I have never felt completely sure of that interpretation for a few reasons. First, Adam was right there with her during this conversation, and he did not say anything. He was the one God originally spoke to about the tree, but he does not correct her. This suggests either he knew she was mistaken and chose to say nothing or he saw nothing wrong in what she said. Second, Eve’s changing what God said was, if anything, tending toward being *more* careful to avoid the tree—not less. Third, nowhere in the Bible is it ever suggested that their error originated from incorrectly quoting what God said; their sin was disobedience. Of course, it is possible that misquoting scripture opened the door to deception, but I think there is a simpler explanation: the serpent reframed the conversation, and Eve fell into the trap. In essence, the serpent asked, “Did God say you should starve?” Eve replied, “No, we can eat any fruit except the poison one.” The serpent exclaimed, “It is not poison—it is medicine!” He reframed the conversation in order to get her to focus on the object (the fruit) instead of the verb (the eating).

***The devil attempts to reframe the conversation so the real issue is no longer obvious.***

In that first newsletter, I described the dangers of entering into dialogue with groups promoting positions that undermine Christian theology. The Church has begun to believe there is a benefit from having extended conversations over morality. Now, when the discussion involves honesty and truth, there certainly is a benefit, but when the purpose of the conversation is only to “move the line” further in one direction, there is no good result. Jesus rarely entered into the argument with the Pharisees and Sadducees *in the way they wanted*; instead, He directed the conversation back to basics. One perfect example of this is found in Matthew 19. Here, the Pharisees want Jesus to enter into a “conversation” over what reasons are valid for divorce. By this time period, there had been centuries worth of debate on the subject. The line had moved so much that the question was not “What is true?” Instead, it had become, “What side are you on?” They expected Him to defend a certain position just as many others had done. What is vital to recognize here is not *what* Jesus said as much as *how* He said it. Others had tried referencing Genesis to argue against permissive divorce; however, the debate continued because it was only a *position*. Jesus sidestepped all those prior debates by undoing all of the reframing of the issue. He negated situational ethics by categorizing the question itself as a result of human sinfulness; after He had done that, He declared that there could be only one right answer, forcing them to discuss the issue in the context of a specific framework/premise: there is absolute truth, and we can know it.

***Jesus always framed the issues appropriately before engaging in the conversation.***

Over and over again, we see a pattern when Jesus would answer a question asked by one of His opponents: He would first ask another question or make a qualifying statement; after that, He would provide an answer according to the correct context of the issue. It was this practice that enabled Him to avoid their otherwise-unavoidable traps. In many cases, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were normally mortal enemies of each other, actually joined together to try to trick Him—unsuccessfully. He was so skilled at avoiding their traps that they finally resorted to convening false testimony, breaking their own laws, and distorting scripture in order to condemn Him. However, it is important to point out the few times when He refused to answer their questions. When they asked Him to identify the source of His authority, He required them to first state their position about John’s baptism; when they refused to do so, He refused to provide them with an answer. This is important! When they would not agree to address the conversation in the appropriate context, He did not continue with the conversation. There are many Christians who engage in discussions because they associate that with defending their faith. The two are not the same. If there are times that even Jesus did not answer His opponents, it is foolish to think we always should. When He was brought before Herod, it says that He refused to answer even a single question. This was the corrupt leader who beheaded John the Baptist, a prophet of God. Jesus remained silent to reflect judgment for his sins, and Luke tells us he was later eaten by worms. At another time, they brought a woman caught in adultery. Instead of answering their question, He bent down and drew in the dirt and only responded when they persisted in asking while the woman was undergoing humiliation. In this instance, it is less clear what was taking place because we do not know exactly what Jesus wrote in the dirt; however, there is no mistaking the fact that He delayed replying—and when He did reply, He reframed the issue. There were times Jesus did not engage in conversation.

***There were clearly times when Jesus simply refused to engage in the conversation.***

Although I normally relate newsletter topics to theological issues, I want to make an adjustment in this one. The principle here is that we can sometimes invite serious danger when we enter into some conversations with those who—intentionally or unintentionally—do not actually desire truth. Instead, they want to engage in a conversation primarily so they can advance an agenda. This issue has become

significantly obvious in our current political climate. Even a few years ago when I wrote the newsletter on the *Dangers of Dialogue*, it was nowhere near as bad as it is now. We are in a climate where simply having a differing opinion instantly results in demonic words and actions, and standing up for truth can lead to physical harm and legal repercussions. There is no longer any place or situation that is entirely safe. Simply having a different perspective than certain groups causes instantaneous eruptions of hate and rage, and disagreement with the demanded norm completely negates any right or expectation for others to act or speak with civility. In a wholly literal and factual sense, the same fascist practices that have led to holocausts, genocides, and terrorism in other countries are in widespread use today by political and legal groups, Hollywood, and the media in the largely successful attempt to silence truth.

***We have entered a time when terrorism & fascism are openly practiced in our country.***

It is in a situation like this that unity within the Church is desperately needed, for it is only by standing up to evil as a family that the darkness can be driven back. However, the Body of Christ is not in the best condition because the lines have been moved, and the truth has been compromised. It is simply no longer enough for Christians to defend the Christian faith; we must also become serious in our defense of the reality that there is absolute truth and indisputable facts beyond personal beliefs. As a community, there may not be a single truth that some denomination or group has not given away. In some cases, heresy has infected the Church through theological attacks, such as through Gnosticism, Jungian Psychology, and Liberal Theology; however, more widespread damage might have been done by those who have foolishly engaged in conversations with darkness without recognizing any need to frame the issues appropriately. The result has been that in some denominations, every moral line has been moved further and further until there is almost no recognizable distinction between the Christian of today and the pagan of yesterday. When the Church stands together for good, the gates of Hell are not able to withstand her; however, we can't do that until we have reclaimed righteousness and truth.

***The Church cannot stand together until we have reclaimed righteousness and truth.***

I am writing this message in a much stronger way than usual because the need has reached epic proportions. As a whole, the Church must take responsibility for those members who have forsaken the truth in exchange for friendship and approval by the world. Repentance is needed because some in the Body of Christ have been martyred by their own brothers and sisters. We are facing not only the destruction of our homes and families but also the safety and identity of our children. It is far too easy for us to resign ourselves to Armageddon and claim that things have to get worse before Jesus returns. That may well be true, but we risk being responsible for not doing what we can to prevent destruction and save those who do not have to be lost. However, there is good news: if Jesus could change the course of the nation of Israel in three years, and if thousands of Christians could significantly impact the entire Roman Empire in a matter of decades, then even just fifty million Christians can drastically change the course of this nation in just a few years. The process of change will require us to again stand firm in our claims of absolute truth and practical holiness. In order to do this, we are going to have to take back much of the ground we have given to the world, including taking our place in courts, schools, government, and even the media. Additionally, we must take our place as a prophetic people who call out sin, corruption, and dishonesty around us. We don't need a singular prophet to the nation as much as we need to all be individual prophetic voices preventing darkness from hiding in our midst. We are entering a time right now when the Lord is pouring out His Spirit on His Church to bring forth a faceless generation to take back our families, our cities, our states, and our nation; if we ask Him to use us as Isaiah did long ago, He will not refuse us. Just as He did then, He is asking, "Who will go for Me?"