

Series: Hard Conversations	Reference: <i>1 Corinthians 13:12</i>	Title: Perfect Understanding	Date: 01.05.2019
Website Writeup: God knows all Truth, we have access to all we need as we grow into His likeness. How do we stand on the Truth we know, but in humility realize at times we can be wrong? How do we communicate with those we may disagree with in healthy ways?			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Memory Verse for this Series

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

As we said last week, this series is designed to help you as a Christian to have discerning effective conversations in love with those who think differently from you. I urge you to listen to God's voice during these sermons. I hope & pray my words & demeanor are a conduit for the message God wants to convey through His Word.

We begin today with the first of five affirmations which give guidance for how to love as Kingdom people in good communication. The basic value of learning from others, particularly those who don't think like us, is a thread running throughout these sermons. We all want to learn how to have hard conversations in love, bringing thoughtful perspective to challenging topics. We have no interest in compromising our beliefs, convictions & values as Bible-believing Christians. However, we want to speak well in communicating them.

Turn to p829 in your church Bibles where 1 Peter 3:13-17 advises us to this end...

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness & respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Wonderful words & hard to practice when you feel attacked. We'll certainly not do this perfectly & Scripture urges, in our anger we should not sin (Eph 4:26). Not to mention, as Christians we want our thoughts, words & actions to confront others with Christ, and not necessarily our opinions on hot topics. Yet, at times we get caught in the trap of making our message about an issue instead of about Jesus. If you've done this & been hurtful to others, a simple, "I'm sorry" will go a long way with those we've hurt.

As an introduction, last week we looked at John 17:20-21 where Jesus prayed for us. His prayer reveals a desire for us to have unity in fellowship with Himself, as well as God the Father & God the Spirit, as He does.

We said THOUGHT is the defining factor of UNITY with Jesus, or anyone for that matter. Think of being in a plumbers union & standing in a picket line next to all your fellow plumbers screaming at the Man as he enters his office. All there to demand increased wages & benefits. You've agreed upon a wage increase of 10%, plus dental & vision coverage, but you scream above everyone else, "I'll settle for 3%, and I don't need dental or vision! I've got great teeth & vision," your fellow plumbers aren't going to take to that well. Unity in thought & voice is paramount in community with others.

To be 'in Jesus' is to submit to Him. To conform ourselves & thinking to His. One of the central concepts of being a Christian is, we're being made into the likeness of Christ, in character & thought. In that light, unity's only possible if we have internal unity on primary issues & maturity on secondary ones.

Secondary issues are where we can have some healthy disagreement. We strive towards Christ together as we seek to understand the Scriptures which are the standard for life & direction, and the authority for all Christians. We want to take in the whole counsel of God without picking & choosing, which would only enable us to craft God into our own image, instead of who God actually communicates Himself to be.

Turn with me to p805 in your church Bible. We see here that Jesus gets to be head, of not only the Church, but all things. We're looking at Colossians 1:15-18...

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven & on earth, visible & invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him & for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church...

The head is from where thought originates from & directs all other parts of the body. As Christians we submit ourselves, and recognize the supremacy of Christ in all areas of life & in Creation itself. Amazingly we don't lose our identity in this, but are enhanced as individuals. And just because there's willful rebellion towards His headship, or indifference to it, that doesn't change the fact that He's still Head over all things.

Today we begin with our first affirmation...**God has all truth, but we don't have a perfect understanding of it.** I'm going to be cautioning us throughout this series. Notice I didn't say that we don't know Truth, or that there's no Truth, or that only God knows Truth & not us. I simply said we have an imperfect understanding of Truth - which we do. We can't grasp it fully in our finite minds & hearts. But we are called to grow in our understanding of Truth all the time, and as stated, Truth has been revealed to us in the Scriptures & in the person of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me to p785 in your church Bibles to our central text for today - 1 Corinthians 13:12 the last verse on the page, which says...*Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial & incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.*

Imperfection isn't something 100% off. Thinking of imperfection, we think of a fly in the ointment. There's a lot of good ointment, but a fly in it. Imperfection in the language of the Bible has to do with completeness. We're constantly being made whole until final completeness upon Jesus' return.

We have a lot to go on in the Christian life, but we're not fully complete. However, in relation to our righteousness, or our standing with God, we are 100% complete due to Jesus work. In terms of salvation, Christ has imputed his perfect record, or His righteousness upon us. So when God the Father looks at us, He sees Jesus' perfect record, not ours. But we're still being made into His likeness in the meantime; our understanding will be complete when the Kingdom of God is fully established.

You can have a diamond which is perfect in every way, but for one small inclusion in it - you may not even see that inclusion with the naked eye, but it's there. Imperfection can be 1-99 degrees off. We look into the mirror & our image may be a little wonky, like a carnival mirror, but as God reveals truth to us, and definitely in the end - the image comes into complete focus & proportion.

God Knows The Whole Truth - We currently swim in a culture of relativism where everyone's point of view is considered equally valid. A time when someone's claim to know truth better than someone else might lead to accusations of being arrogant.

Christians often emphasize the unique claims of Christ & proclaim the Lordship of Christ above all earthly powers. All right & good. However, we need to make an important distinction between God's perfect knowledge of truth & our ability to know truth perfectly.

We must remember as God says to us in Isaiah 55:9, *9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways & my thoughts than your thoughts."* A humbling thought which tends to check our pride in conversation with others.

God Reveals Truth & We Must Interpret It - God has graciously revealed Himself through Jesus, Scripture & the Holy Spirit. But humans are imperfect recipients of revelation. We bring our own weaknesses, biases & cultural blind spots to our understanding of God's revealed truth.

One doesn't have to look very far into church history to find examples of groups of Christians subscribing to ideas that were later shown to be false. Think of the examples of religious wars in Europe after the Reformation, or the justification of slavery on

biblical grounds. Enormous human suffering occurred due to some people's sincere belief in what Scripture 'clearly' taught.

We must be fair though, if we could transport ourselves back in time, we'd assuredly find many Christians didn't agree with others who perpetuated hurtful things in history. But for very understandable reasons they had little power to change things. And also as we said last week, not all who proclaim Christ are of Christ. People do things in the name of Jesus while internally holding no real connection to Him. Sometimes they're cognizant of this, sometimes not. Remember the wheat growing up with the weeds.

If you think about the story of *Schindlers List*, we realize there were people who acted in undermining ways during very difficult times without being outright with their voices to save people. How many of us would be willing to die in someone else's place by shouting our disagreement openly in such circumstances - not many. We may just shut our mouths to protect loved ones through acquiescence. And some may not say things openly, but might work behind the scenes for those under oppression. The truth is, we're very brave when it costs us little. But bravery dissipates in the face of death.

There's a great scene in the film, *Inglorious Bastards*, a satirical look at the Nazi occupation. A Frenchman & his daughters are on their farm hiding Jews in their basement. When the Nazi's show up, this man's given a choice to give up the Jews, or to have himself & his daughters killed along with them. We have to ask ourselves these philosophical questions - what would we have done? I'm not sure...

Not all Christians agreed with slavery, which is a large part of the reason we had the underground railroad. Christians hid Jews during the Nazi occupation. Christians were the ones in the early church who brought in infants who'd been thrown out in the garbage piles in the Roman Empire. It was God's direction & Israel who fought against child sacrifice of infants to Baal in the Old Testament.

The Church used to hold to the Earth-centered, Geocentric Model, based on poetic language in Joshua 10:12-13 where it describes the sun & moon as standing still. They denied Copernicus who argued the Sun-centered, Heliocentric Model in 1543. Galileo was the first to use a telescope & prove the Heliocentric Model, revealing the earth revolved around the sun, not the other way around. The church was wrong in their estimation & had to confess that we were basing some scientific reasoning on poetic language which we should not have done. Honest mistake, but with grave consequences.

Being wrong in certain contexts, or being blamed for being wrong in the past, shouldn't push us to give up convictions too quickly as the church. Neither should it make us align ourselves with certain groups in society who simply assume evil, or wrong from others without proof as well. Some things society pushes us to not only tolerate, but accept & celebrate, aren't good for anyone, given they are damaging to the soul of humankind according to the Scriptures. It may be unpopular to disagree, but it may be loving to do so & should be done well - you may have to suffer for doing good right now.

We can't be too quick to jump on the bandwagon of certain issues when they flare up. Given time, stories can flip-flop, and we might find ourselves glad we haven't succumbed to pressure. There's a strong desire in some to center ourselves on Social Justice. Justice should bleed through & be reflected in everything we say & do as Christians - a natural part of our character. That's the way it plays out in church & cross-cultural missions. Our Kingdom Opportunities & Missions Systems are our way to connect with & earn the right to serve & evangelize peoples. In those processes & life in general, if injustices arise & we have opportunity to advocate for, or stand in the gap for the marginalized & oppressed, we should. But if Social Justice becomes the churches central goal, it's lost Jesus as center - His lordship & our call to make disciples is always our primary goal. Churches are currently being divided over this issue which need not happen.

Our church is involved in justice issues, but Jesus & His lordship remains our central goal. God's glory & mission. We're very involved in these issues in Syria & Lebanon. We've cared for the underprivileged in this community & want to do more of that. However, we have a leadership gap in our Kingdom Opportunities & Missions System right now since Stef needed to take a break & Kara had a baby a while back.

This gap affords us a chance to listen more closely to God's leading & be prayerful on where to go next. Pray to that end, please. One very practical way Kim & I have approached this desire to serve the poor & refugee is to take in foster kids who've recently come over our borders - no political statement, just caring for kids. We've worked with Kara's organization to give clothing to refugees. I believe things like Financial Peace can be better utilized to this end in the future. There are other avenues we're considering too, which is premature to speak of right now. But suffice it to say, we're not quick to jump headlong into issues when they arise, aligning ourselves in ways which may be compromising to our missional call as a church, or put us in a position of marginalizing certain other groups of people. For example...

About 7 years ago there was a local incident which prompted a community meeting. Everyone was convinced one group had acted out of line. I went & listened. A lot of good conversation happened. The end result was the community listened, realizing there were good reasons why people acted in the way they did & that the story had been embellished on social media. Everyone was calmed. A lesson to listen long & not react too quickly. Sadly, others who never attended the meeting still held to their negative views. Those who showed up, listened & communicated openly advanced. Situations are complicated & not always as they seem. We must exercise caution.

Activism can be driven by emotionality, not facts, and sometimes by damaging human desire. It sometimes vilifies others without acknowledging there's sin on both sides of every issue, or at the very least miscommunication. I believe God's Kingdom is a just kingdom. We should be careful in our current cultural context, given activism can be a humanistic endeavor which doesn't address the root problem of sin in the hearts of everyone involved.

Instead, we should pray for our 'enemies', for wisdom, love & discernment, given we don't want to find out we've perpetuated someone else's wrong agenda out of ignorance. Our conviction from Scripture is - God created all peoples, loves all peoples & values none higher than another - God's the author & originator of justice, but only He can do it perfectly given He has all truth. That doesn't mean we don't act at times, but we must be cautious & wise in doing so.

Do I live justly, is my personal challenge. We all live in the tension of our current political situation. I recently saw a meme which made me laugh. A little boy's holding a fork in front of an electrical outlet. Referencing the last election, he's wondering, "Top outlet, Trump. Bottom outlet, Clinton. Which do I choose?" The obvious joke is, both are going to shock & hurt. It drives us to think about where we put our ultimate trust, in political leaders, or in Christ?

Immigration in America is a touchy subject. I'm comfortable sitting at the table with someone who argues, as Christians we should advocate for open borders. I'm equally comfortable with another who says we should uphold our current immigration laws & screen people coming in. Neither's racist, or an uncaring attitude - just different approaches to a dilemma. I understand both arguments, it's more of a grey issue than people want to admit. There are true racists out there, but for the majority, I think we're just stuck between a rock & a hard place & need not vilify others.

We Must Approach Truth With Humility - Being aware of historical problems shouldn't lead us to not pursue Truth because we're afraid we might be getting it wrong. Instead, it ought to humble us & make us more gracious with our brothers & sisters when we disagree. It doesn't mean we'll simply acquiesce to another's point of view, but it might bring gentleness to our responses. As Proverbs 15:1 states, *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* Great advice in our current situation.

So how do we talk about political & cultural issues without yelling at each other?

First, we realize the goal isn't necessarily to convince the other person that we're right & they're wrong, but rather to lead them closer to understanding Jesus. It's very possible we're both partly right & both partly wrong. Or perhaps the other person is wrong about this issue from a theological standpoint. But that doesn't make them a bad person, and it doesn't mean that they don't have any connection to Christ. This is the difficulty of the Christian life. How do we stand on Scriptural Truth, without injecting our own faulty emotion & opinions into the conversation? Which is a life-long upwards learning curve.

Second, we sincerely try to imagine a world in which the other person might be right. This might take considerable willpower, but if we're humble enough to realize, we "*see through a glass darkly*" as 1 Corinthians 13:12 says in another version, just as they do, perhaps we can manage. That may bring a calming atmosphere to our conversation, understanding people may actually have good intention, but a faulty reasoning process.

Third, we choose not to believe someone's opinion about politics is the entire story about who they are as a person. Perhaps we can't arrive at any other conclusion than - the other person is tragically misguided. This might be true. But it doesn't mean there needs to be irreparable damage to our love for each other in Christ.

I'm praying we'll be able to think well, bringing Jesus to the forefront in life & conversation with others. Sometimes we literally have to look at someone & realize they may be very different in 10 years than they are today. If people are following Jesus & growing up as they grow old, their outlook will eventually conform to His outlook. Sometimes patience in process is what we need.

Pray for others, love well, do your best to communicate in ways which reveal the love & direction of Jesus. Faith is trusting God knows best even when it doesn't seem to make sense to us. Calling Jesus Lord means obeying Him even when we don't have a perfect understanding.

Even Carl Sagan wrote: *"The truth may be puzzling. It may contradict deeply held prejudices. It may not be...what we desperately want to be true. But our preferences do not determine what is true."* Good words from an unlikely source.