

*Welding*

*and*

*Theology*

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A stately gentleman once asked me why was I so critical of the theological works of others. He stated that it was not my place to critique the works of other theologians, that I should just tend to my own efforts. After all, he said, they stand before God Almighty, they should answer to Him, not to Mr. Dykes. It is not our business to “judge” others in their efforts to reach lost souls or to promote the truth. And finally, again that I should be about my own business, to quit being an agitator.

I stood back, and measured the gentleman who just confronted me with this advice, obviously he has read some of my works! His manner gave the impression of sincerity, and his voice was modulated with a firm control. He stood, awaiting a reply. So I placed my hand on his shoulder and steered him over to a park bench. Sitting down, we both seemed to breathe easier, and I looked him in the eye and said the following:

“You may not know this about me, but years ago, in the 1980s, I attended and graduated from a welding school. It was an intensive year long course, in Grants Pass, Oregon. Since I had already been a journeyman welder, the course was very easy for me. At the completion of the course, I earned three welding certifications, all from the AWS (*American Welding Society*). I was then certified, in all positions in MIG welding. I was also certified on schedule 80 - 6 inch pipe in fixed position 6G, root pass 6011,

and filler passes with 7018. The test was via x-ray. I also certified with gas welding, and general all position 7018 Arc welding. Going back to work, I was able to earn much more because I possessed these three certifications. I worked as a pipe welder, and on marine vessels in Long Beach, California.”

“In time, I became a supervisor, I inspected the work of other welders. We were all welders, but we were all at different levels, some were better with TIG, some with Flux-Core. Now it is possible to lay down a beautiful weld, a beautiful bead. When such beautiful welds are viewed, they appear machine perfect. However, having some experience with the crew I over-saw, I knew who was a good welder and who was not, certifications mattered little to me on the job. It was the quality of the man's work. Some fellas can lay down perfect looking beads, but the welds were bad. Looked great on the outside, but when some stress was applied the weld would break away from the base metal. Either the metals were not properly fused, or fused too quickly at too high of a temperature thus crystallizing the edges of the weld. These welds break easily.”

“Now a crane can lift a large pipe which has just been joined via multiple welds, and move it over to a trench or somewhere, but if the weld is not well done it may crack, buckle, or even break. This can not only be dangerous, but is a costly waste of time, money and materials. Consequently, a man, like myself, would walk around and inspect and watch the various welders at work. Usually if we were all working together for some time on the same ship or pipeline, we became efficient. Fewer and fewer errors were made, and production moved along briskly and safely.”

“That was years ago, and being a retired person now, I can devote much time to what was a part-time venture for me,

theology. I love the good Lord and His written Word much more than I do any *Miller Matic* or a big *Lincoln AC/DC* machine. I have taught myself Greek and have spent years deep within the discipline of textual-criticism, I have studied the Bible full-time for decades, beginning in 1971, but especially in 1988. After years of study and independent research, I discovered some disconcerting facts about the world around me. Other theologians were forming churches, groups, clubs, societies, publishing houses. They were developing new curriculum for Sunday schools and seminaries. They were producing translations from Greek and Hebrew manuscripts and producing Bibles, and selling them. It was like this whole dynamic business enterprise grew up all around me, while I had my nose in the books!"

"When I peered out, I noticed that a lot of this new theological material seemed nicely designed. The finished products all looked perfect."

I paused and stopped my dialogue as I saw the gentleman with whom I was speaking look down at his watch, giving me a signal that time was a factor here. Looking down I noticed, that a part of the wrought iron bench upon which we were sitting, had several welded pieces.

I began again by drawing his attention to a visible weld, "There" I said, "you see this welded piece, it must have been properly welded, as it has lasted all these years (it was a very old bench). In this case time was the factor which indicated the quality of this particular weld. But back to theological matters. After having spent years, nay decades deep within the pages of my Greek New Testament, I had developed a good solid relationship

with the text and its meaning. There remains much still to explore, but the decades of study had given me some insight.”

“This insight proved useful when I was confronted with a few of the many hundreds of religions and religious views existing just here in America. Questions concerning, baptisms, salvation, miracles, suffering, prayer, repentance, and Christian morals and a host of other controversial subjects were all presented to me, or were shared to others by others around me, that is in books, on TV and the radio, and in church services.”

“I found that I had a fairly sound foundation based upon the Scriptures, I tried to let His Word be THE light unto my path in life. So my dear friend, that light itself became my guide, and at the same time it was seen as offensive by some of those whom I encountered along my path in this life. On one hand, my basic Bible knowledge was a blessing, giving me peace and insight, giving me the ability to make proper decisions, a priceless resource. Yet, on the other hand, when other believers were somehow involved in my actions or decisions, this priceless resource became a source of disputations, even producing anger and hostility. At other times myself and others would revel in the Light which we both shared, both growing and appreciating the truth in God's Word.”

“So”....exclaimed my listener as he leaned back and folded his hands in his lap, a posture suggesting that he was not after all in a hurry; “so...how Mr. Dykes did you handle this problem? I know how I have dealt with such issues in the past, I kept my mouth shut, and left the situation in the Lord's hands. But you, it seems have decided to voice your criticism, and have thus provoked conflict. Or am I just seeing this one event of today in a wrong context? Are you always this contentious?”

I could not stop the slight grin which revealed my remaining teeth. This gentleman had just seen me raise my hand during a sermon, and ask a public question concerning the matter of having “one wife”, as the preacher giving the sermon had been married a total of three times, and had numerous children, some of whom were sitting there in the pews. Immediately after asking the question, about his relationship to the verse he mentioned, [Titus 1:6] a dead silence fell over the congregation, I felt like people were shifting their bodies as far away from me as the narrow pews allowed. No one turned their heads towards me. How dare I raise such an issue, and in front of the whole church! Well I handled it in my usual manner, I asked him to clarify the issue, but he said he would later speak to me privately if I was really concerned.

So after the service, no one shook my hand, no one greeted me—the visitor who asked the no-no question. Except this gentleman with whom I now am privileged to clarify my behavior.

“Sir”, I continued, “you are a member of long standing in this church, and do you know the details of your pastor's marriages and divorces?”

“Why no”, he replied, “it is none of my business, his private life and personal struggles are between him and God. And you dear visitor, entered our sanctuary and have just emitted a foul sense, you spoke when it was not proper, and you spoke about some private matter which is none of your concern. Actually our dear pastor has never broached the subject.”

My grin vanished as I suspected that he may have mistook it for a sign of insolence, or even sneering. So, I invited the gentleman and his wife over to my hotel room, for the primary purpose of clarifying my behavior which had been apparently totally

misunderstood by these religious folks. He declined, and as he got up to leave, he said that he would pray for me. How often I have heard that last note of Christian love, he would pray for me, he had read some of my books, and he just now met me in person, and now he leaves me in this state, as a convicted agitator. So now I sit here alone in my hotel room, and I decided to put in writing an explanation for my actions. Indeed, it seems that I often find myself in these situations, situations in which I perceive the Word of God violated. Act I must! But perhaps this may explain why I must.

In a production-type welding job, quantity is often what counts. How many parts you can weld in an eight hour shift. As time passes the products often break or fail, as improper welds were the cause. But who cares, the part outlasted the warranty, and the consumer can simply buy another if he/she so desires. I mean who cares? A \$50.00 wrought iron patio chair can last two years or 50 years, the warranty is only for one year. Why take the time to produce a good solid weld? It looks good, the weld, and all those who are not good welders will never know the difference. But I know. Perhaps that is one reason why I was not very happy as a production-type welder, they expected me to quickly mass produce welds, quality was not an issue with them as long as it appeared good.

Now, if a pastor leads a church, if he preaches, if he is a seminary graduate, receives a pastor's salary and if he is called a pastor then—he must be a pastor! True? Well I called that pastor, and on the phone he said that he was demanding an apology for my interruption of his sermon. I said that I raised my hand, and he let me speak, I was going to continue, but he hung up. He knew I

was just passing through and most likely would never again visit this part of America.

I wanted to tell him, that had I been given the chance, that I was not judging him, certainly a person can lead a church if remarried, that was not an issue with me. But it obviously is an issue within his congregation. Their shock and silence was a clear response to an issue which they saw as practically taboo. Which shocked state confirmed my suspicion that the pastor has not addressed or explained this issue and facts about his past to the congregation. If your pastor is a seminary graduate, and has pastored successfully other congregations in the past, and if the present church is growing he must be beyond reproach. I mean why look at the log in his eye, why not view it as a speck, and never bring up the qualifications of a pastor or religious leader. Why test the weld?

It is true, I often find myself in conflict with those in authority, or rather those who hold positions of authority. In fact being called an agitator is quite fitting for me, for it seems that time after time, agitation occurs. Sometimes it is that agitation associated with excitement, with unbridled joy, laughing and dancing as did King David, or with Peter running to inform the brethren of his miraculous release from prison; but more often it is that agitation associated with opposition, with conflict. Now I know my life could be much more quiet, much more peaceful if I would just keep on welding, and not be concerned about the quality. Instead I am compelled to speak out. Instead I seem to be the one who causes the emotional disputes, the possible anger, misunderstandings, and sometimes even a resolution over time. As a welding supervisor, I

would ask, did I cause the poor weld to fail inspection? Was my inspection the cause? Was my question during a sermon the cause? Do you see my analogy?

Each of God's chosen has been engifted, that is each Christian has special gifts or talents whereby they can contribute to the church universal. I am fairly certain that one of my gifts is the courage or ability to discriminate, to inspect. As I well know such a gift is very unpopular, as it is often imitated or abused. It certainly requires some wisdom and training to properly use. Training requires time and experience. I can look back and see past experiences and how they have contributed to the development of my talent. I have made many mistakes. Some welds require an x-ray to determine their quality, some sloppy welds can actually be stronger than a perfectly formed weld with beautiful cover passes. Sometimes it helps to be acquainted with the welder, or with the pastor/speaker or brother or sister involved. There are many variables. In some instances a decision must be made, and it is made within a narrow context, it may just concern a specific spoken message, or a published article and have no external markers of intent or of an observable history, in other words it may appear a spontaneous criticism. However, as time passes, I have learned to recognize somewhat of an innate intuitiveness an inner urging. At times an issue needs immediate addressing, as the situation is highly transitory, brief. In other situations, decisions can have the added luxury of time, time to evaluate and contemplate my reactions to what appear to be mistakes or misleading informations. Recall Siskel and Ebert's popular review of movies. They finished with their thumbs up or down. These reviews were usually respected and if, for example, you were trying to decide

which movie to rent or purchase, their prior review could save you time and money. Yet, if Siskel or Ebert had just reviewed the movie, *Invasion of the Star-men*, and said that it was "dumb", and gave it a thumbs down, that would be useful information about that movie. However, had you produced that movie, you would find yourself opposing their judgments. All sides will not be pleased, a true separation should ensue, unless you are a politician.

Another example: at the beginning of my military service, I supported the United States' effort in the Vietnam conflict. But about two-thirds of the way through my second tour in Vietnam, I realized that our effort had degenerated into a horrible debacle, that sincerity and truth were not prevailing, and that the people of Vietnam would be the ones who were to suffer most. I reacted, I rebelled. Spiritually, and eventually, physically I separated myself from the military, I committed a *heresy*, that is I separated, I caused a division between me and Uncle Sam. It is part of my being, my nature, a talent which the Holy Spirit would refine in the fires of experience, time and trials.

At first, I refrained from voicing my opinions or my views. Attendance in several college classes illustrated to me clearly what it was like to disagree with the professor, or with the textbook, (i.e. in astronomy I never did answer correctly as to how old the universe was, I always stood by my belief that the universe was not millions and millions of years old. Nor did I ever, in Bio-sciences agree that I evolved from a primate). Thus, conflict was part and parcel of my brief college careers. My grades would have been higher had I kept my mouth shut, but then that was and is not who I am. I will speak out when I am relatively certain a crime or untruth is being propagated.

Now I know nothing of flying a helicopter. If a pilot makes a mistake, perhaps too much pressure on one or another pedal, I would not and do not perceive that, I would not recognize it. Thus, I cannot evaluate the piloting ability of a helicopter pilot, at least not as one at the controls. But if someone tells me that turning the other cheek is always right, I would debate! Or if someone told me that the 1,000 year kingdom of the Messiah's rule is happening right now, again I would object. I would try to do so in a proper and gentlemanly way. At least initially, sometimes a firmer method is required, sometimes one must punch so as to actually knock-out the adverse opinion, not just a mere tap on its "his/her" chin. Of course such punches are not delivered first, first come the gentle taps, and if no response then the tap becomes harder and persistent. I speak from experience, for God Himself, has often tapped me, to get my attention. If I do not respond, and as a loving Father, He may resort to more serious methods to get my attention. This has been the cause of much suffering and affliction in my life. I often wished that I had heeded the initial gentle taps, I would have saved myself much agony. But then, my growth and experience would have been muted, in the end God knows what He is doing. I know personally what it is like to be corrected, I appreciate correction, I get upset when I repeatedly make (-) mistakes, though like a child I may not like the correction, in the end I know it was/is for my good, or for a better end.

The Greek ἀιρεσις—often translated as "heresy"—can have a negative meaning or a positive meaning. Itself it is neutral, colorless. Its context gives it a body, a semantic value. Sometimes a person who commits a heresy is called a heretic, one who divides, and again the division may be proper or improper. Typically

“heresy” is a buzz word in the language of religious America, it is usually loaded with negative connotations. Even just the simple statement, “that I committed a heresy”, sounds evil or foul or bad. An euphemism might be “division” or even “unrest”, or perhaps “agitation”. Agitating milk and eggs in a blender is not bad.

The Apostle Paul was very clear in stating that some heresies are indeed **necessary**, and I Corinthians chapter 11, is not to be ignored. Agitating people to swim who are drowning is not bad. Agitating a speaker to clarify or correct him/herself can be seen as rude (even during a question and answer session). Linus Pauling did not like it when someone in his audience did not agree that massive dosages of vitamin C would prevent cancer, and then voiced their opinion during appropriate dialogues. (Recall that Linus and his wife both died of cancer). Yet, when a preacher violates God's Word in a sermon, listeners who may notice the error are expected to let it pass, and maybe to discuss it privately later. If the preacher keeps repeating the error, and even magnifies it, a listener such as myself may then perform that necessary, but unpopular duty of calling him or her to account publicly. Certainly some issues can and should be privately resolved, but when many naïve persons are involved or misled, then a public forum is necessary.

Paul withstood Peter before a church in Antioch as Peter was misleading the church. It was not a private issue. When theologians and public speakers (even preachers) mislead, naively or intentionally, they ought to be corrected. Gently of course, and perhaps privately at first. But if the error is intentionally repeated, and if forced upon naïve listeners, (i.e. like upon those who know nothing of welding) then it is the duty of those who see the error to

expose it. An unpopular task or gift! I mean some folks hate an x-ray machine because it revealed a cancer in their lung. Okay! then level a 12 gauge at that machine and blast it so that others will not learn of a possible cancer, or be offended by such revelations. Or, if your weld fails inspection, then shoot the inspector!

Consequently, I continue, I upset the protocol, I am behind or outside the herd, I swim against the current. I work very hard at using my gift properly, I have made and will make mistakes; hopefully I will improve. I certainly can be more discriminating, and more careful in my language. I have learned to duck, so feel free to swing away, and perhaps I can steer you to a park bench.

I pray for wisdom and patience, and I hope this helps you to better understand why at times I will raise my hand or write an article, why I appear hypercritical or why I may object. Some Vietnamese may also know why I am as I am.