

CCBCU—Hermeneutics

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Discussion of Unity in Body of Christ

- Can ultimate truth be arrived at?
- What are essentials of faith?
- Should body be driven to doctrinal unity?

Points

1. Fight over doctrine is essentially a fight over interpretation of scripture
 - a. Widespread disagreement exists over concepts of inspiration and inerrancy
 - i. from full verbal/plenary inspiration concept to partial/dynamic to natural, differences in understanding = different approaches to interpretation
 - b. Widespread disagreement exists over interpretive methods
 - i. From literal to allegorical to metaphorical, differences in understanding = different approaches to interpretation
2. How literally should we take Scripture?
 - a. Only as literally as author's intended
 - i. Modern, Western approach: truth and accuracy are synonymous
 - ii. Ancient, Eastern approach: truth and accuracy are different species
 1. e.g., "telescoping" of genealogies (Gen 10, Mk/Lk)—genealogies compressed to come out to significant numbers such as 7, 10, or multiples to convey meaning (completeness/eternity/long periods of time, etc.)
 2. e.g., use of hyperbole in numbers: numbers of people, armies, vanquished, etc. exaggerated to make point
 3. Ancients used numbers in specialized ways, moderns have tried to use these numbers to arrive at accurate timeframes/logistics. Doesn't compute.
 - b. Need to understand context, culture, mindset, practice of authors in order to understand and define the "plain meaning" of text
3. Can ultimate truth be arrived at?
 - a. Yes, but essential truth in Scripture is spiritual truth
 - i. Looking for truth does not always mean looking for accuracy
 - ii. Essential doctrines must be based on essential truth, not mere accuracy, e.g. young earth creationism, necessarily based on need for accurate understanding/use of language and genealogies.
 - b. Understanding truth authors intended to convey must be separated from the methods they use to convey that truth
 - i. Spiritual truth trumps accuracy
 - ii. Bible is "inerrant" but not always accurate, because authors were not trying to be accurate, but using current/cultural methods/norms to communicate truth as God inspired them
 - c. Ultimate truth is universal truth
 - i. not specific to any time/culture/worldview
 - ii. based on nature of God as modeled by Jesus
 - iii. consistent with precepts of Law, but transcendent to Law
 - iv. in essence, hits "lowest common denominator" among mankind, e.g. the Golden Rule

4. What are the essentials of our Faith?
 - a. Those essentials that are based on ultimate truth
 - b. The “Way” of Jesus as understood by his first followers—way of life: other centered, Law-consistent, God-as-present here/now, way of truth/life
 - c. All other essentials are matters of debate between Christians to varying degrees and need to be dealt with individually

5. Should Body of Christ be driven to doctrinal unity?
 - a. Within context above, yes.
In essential things, unity.
 - b. But understanding the vast differences between Christians in foundational concepts such as inspiration, inerrancy, hermeneutical processes, we must be careful where we set the line of “essential truth.” In other words, where disagreement exists, if the “essential truth” in question does not violate the “Way” of Jesus, latitude should be given for alternate beliefs.
In non-essential things, liberty.
 - c. If the Body of Christ is ever to function as one in “spirit and truth” as Jesus told us we would someday worship together (as it has not yet to this point—ever), we will need to draw the “essentials” line at the lowest common denominator and let other “essentials” that we may hold dear as less important than the division between our brothers and sisters they will cause if insisted upon.

In other words, we need to value unity above the understanding of ultimate truth that we may hold at any given moment. In light of the fact that our personal and collective understanding of ultimate truth has always been a work in progress over the centuries and over our own lifetimes, isn't that a reasonable premise?

Personally, I believe in preserving relationship over position, and I try not to let my positions ever damage my relationships. This does not mean that I don't believe in objective truth or that we can't hold our personal beliefs as important and relevant. But it does mean that the most objective and ultimate truth we possess—and all agree on—is the Law of Love that Jesus said was the basic criteria for being one of his followers. How do I want to be loved? One basic way is to be allowed to hold my beliefs as I understand them right now, and even to be wrong for awhile as I move through this journey with God. I want to be counseled, taught, debated, even teased, but not condescended to, persecuted, ostracized, or condemned. I should be practicing the same toward others.
In all things, charity.