

Maintaining Commitment While Sustaining Conversation

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This issue of the **JBIB** takes a significant step forward in the development of the journal. We have increased in size; but, more importantly, we have increased in dialogue. A special section focusing on Dr. Richard Chewning's provocative plenary paper presentation at the Fall 1997 CBFA Conference offers the chance to include Chewning's paper, three direct responses, and two articles that addressed similar hermeneutical concerns about the "proper" understanding of Scripture's relationship to the study of business and economics. Also, we have included a response and re-response to Dr. Mark Ward's article *Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Work Ethic* published in the Fall 1996 issue of the **JBIB**. And Dr. Brian Porter, a member of our Review Board, has written a response to Dr. Beversluis' article *Justice and Christian Management*.

I am thrilled that with this issue the **JBIB** is moving more forcefully to become a "town hall" for Christian educators

wrestling together with the challenge of applying biblical principles to business and economic issues. And, yet, I also am wrestling with a more fundamental issue articulated briefly in this article's title.

I became a Christian at the age of 33. This incredible spiritual rebirth left me struck by how blind I had been to the one thing that really mattered—my relationship to Jesus Christ—and left me wondering how blind I might have been to many other issues of faith and truth. So, as I plunged into personal and group Bible studies, I was thrilled to be learning "real" truth—truth with a capital "T". It was not very long, however, before I discovered that there would be those who, though equally committed to the work of Christ in their life, reached different conclusions than I about the Bible's "position" on matters in business and economics.

One "watershed" event in my growing awareness of the differences between positions of equally committed Christians was the opportunity to observe one of

the four week-long Baylor University sessions—sessions by the authors whose work would go into the four volume *Christians in the Marketplace Series* edited by Dr. Richard Chewning and published by NAVPRESS. I had the opportunity to observe Kenneth Kantzer and J. Philip Wogaman offer differing perspectives about God’s “creation mandate” and Christ’s “Great Commission.” I had the opportunity to observe the spirited interaction between William S. Barker and John Jefferson Davis regarding the implications of differing views of eschatology and their impact on business ethics. I was privileged to watch Richard Gaffin and Norman Geisler debate the relative merits of natural law as an underpinning for business ethics.

As I observed these learned Christians discussing contrasting views, I noted how people of faith could maintain a strong commitment to the truth as they

understood it while sustaining conversation with those who had reached different (sometimes very different) understandings.

Perhaps the essential point was that they had determined (actually, Dr. Chewning had determined the ground rules for the discussion) to engage in *dialogue* rather than *debate*. A debate is an effort to *convince* another that their position is weaker than yours and to *convert* them to your perspective. The key tool in debate is *argumentation*. A *dialogue*, in contrast, is an effort to *comprehend* another’s position and to *communicate* to them your perspective. The key tool in dialogue is *articulation*. The ultimate difference is that in a debate there is a view that one party wins and one party loses because the ultimate aim is self-centered victory; in a dialogue, both parties are winners because the aim is interpersonal vision. The following table contrasts the two very different processes:

Debate	Dialogue
convince and convert	comprehend and communicate
argumentation	articulation
win-lose	win-win
self-centered victory	shared vision

In I Peter 3:15 we read, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” To make a defense does not mean to behave defensively. That is, my purpose is not to seek to keep another from beating down my beliefs. Rather, my goal should be to arrive at my beliefs logically and to articulate those beliefs clearly. What we may be prone to do is to ignore the latter part of the verse. The New American Standard Bible translates the phrase as “with gentleness and reverence.” The New International Version of the Bible translates the phrase as “with gentleness and respect.”

As a Christian academic, I am committed to the Truth. I do not believe that everything is simply a matter of opinion. I believe that God clearly communicates His Truth in His Word and does so without either error or ambiguity. And, yet, I know that while God’s Word is inerrant, my understanding of God’s Word may be in error. God is omniscient, but I am not; therefore, my understanding of God’s Word is partial and subject to all the frailties of my own weak and sinful nature. So, while

I seek always to offer an adequate articulation of what I believe and why, I need to listen to the voices of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as we all seek to more clearly integrate the TRUTH of Scripture with the issues of business and economics.

It is the Holy Spirit, and not ultimately human reason, that will lead us into TRUTH (John 15:26, John 16:13, I John 5:7). It has been my experience that the Holy Spirit leads us each through an often unique learning process that is characterized by both truth AND love. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul encourages believers to “speak the truth in love.” In his discussion of the word *agapeo*, W.E. Vine says this:

Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom. 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to ‘all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith,’ Gal. 6:10.

I am left, then, living with what I believe is a God-intentioned tension. There is TRUTH; yet my perspective about what this TRUTH means and (especially so) how this TRUTH applies to business and economics issues at any given time in my faith journey may differ from my friends on their journeys. We all “see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (NIV, I Cor. 13:12-13). **It is within the tension that faith grows**—faith that as we each struggle to present our own views and also wrestle with the differing views of our other brothers and sisters in Christ, that we are all being led by “He, the Spirit of truth, [and] He will guide you [us] into all the truth” (NAS, John 16:13). The **JBIB** is dedicated to encouraging communication with the certain belief that we in Christ are partners rather than protagonists and that our differences should be occasion for active dialogue rather than acrimonious debate.

This issue of the **JBIB** is, as always, a work of collaboration of which my own personal contribution as editor is relatively small. Those who should receive praise are:

- the authors who had the courage to present their work before their colleagues and the commitment to revise (often substantially) their work in light of comments from the Review Board
- the members of the Review Board who took the time to “speak the truth in love” and to offer a variety of ideas which helped to greatly strengthen the work articles in the **JBIB**
- the expert team at Cedarville College’s Public Relations Office (especially our new technical and layout editor, Kara Steinman) who took original manuscripts in various formats and created the quality publication you are now reading.

And, finally, all praise ultimately should go to the Holy Spirit, whose superintending of all the labor and laborers involved in this effort is the real force that transformed mere human effort into a publication that might, in some way, bring glory to Jesus Christ. I pray that you will enjoy the fruit of the work of your friends in both the CBFA and beyond in this fourth issue of the **JBIB**.

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