

Policy on Disputed Matters
Westside Church
January 2012

It has long been the practice at Westside Church to extend the teaching responsibility to a plurality of men in the congregation as the Lord leads. This practice, if not unique, is at least not common among churches today but we consider it a real strength. That said, we have an enemy who opposes our freedom in Christ and all other avenues of ministry that flow from this church to the uttermost parts of the earth. One method he has used since the early days of Christianity is to attack the unity of believers by sowing seeds of discord and division in the body. What we are sharing today is intended to preempt these attempts by exercising the authority we have been given over all the power of the enemy.

It will serve us well to make sure we cultivate an atmosphere in which anyone sharing what they believe to be the truth from God's word feels comfortable doing so. To extend love and respect to one another in this way will ensure that the path to spiritual growth and maturity remains open to all. It will also encourage people who do not necessarily see things the way the majority of us do, to give voice to their thoughts. This is a strength because the consideration of other points of view will add vigor to our own conviction even when we ultimately do not agree.

This does not mean that virtually anything goes from the pulpit at Westside Church and there may be times when the eldership would deem it necessary to correct or clarify a position taken. A copy of our statement of faith is attached to this document. In defining the common ground upon which our fellowship is based, the statement of faith also defines those things which are not considered disputable matters. Having said that, our regard for one another is not based on our maturity in Christ. Most of us can see how our

own spiritual path has resulted in changing positions on disputable matters talked about in the scriptures. We, the elders, are confident in the Lord's ability to guide us all, both individually and corporately, into all truth through the study of His word and the teaching power of His Holy Spirit.

So how does one handle a situation where someone shares something from the front that does not line up with what you believe to be the truth? In a body like ours, where access to the front is open and considered part of growth and development of new leadership, this is bound to happen. If you simply want to be sure of exactly what that person said, or what they meant by what they said, it would be best to go directly to them. If you want clarification on a point of scripture, you could go to one or more of the elders or some other person in the body whose spiritual maturity and judgment you trust. It would be disrespectful and contrary to a loving atmosphere to show outward signs of disapproval or anger over what is shared. We are reminded that love, "is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong." To disagree is anyone's prerogative, to show disapproval and annoyance or react in a way that shows a lack of respect for that person's opinion, discourages the free exchange of ideas and ultimately hinders everyone's progress toward maturity in Christ.

Obviously, if someone sins against us personally, then Christ has laid out a specific remedy for us in Matt. 18:15-17, not forgetting His final word on the matter in verse 21 that, "if our brother sins against us," we are to forgive him seventy times seven times. But one does not sin against us by simply differing with us in interpretation of scripture. While, as mentioned earlier, there are certain aspects of scripture on which we would need to agree in

order to have true fellowship, the larger share of scripture is open to various interpretations. Certainly if one's differing interpretation in these areas is brought forward in an insulting or combative manner, it might well reach the level of being an offense or sin against a brother. But if there is a sincere presentation of an interpretation differing from our own, we need not be offended; indeed, love would require that we not be offended. Instead, our response should be like the Bereans who first gladly or readily listened to what was presented and then searched the scriptures daily to see if the things they were hearing were true. We would first turn to the Word to confirm whether or not we have a true and broad scriptural basis for our own view of the truth. If so, we would hold to it and be ready to give an account of why we believe when the Lord gives us opportunity to share it with others in the Body that they might similarly judge what we bring. Indeed, it would seem that Paul did not commend the Bereans for agreeing with him but for "gladly listening" and then "examining the scriptures" to find the truth for themselves.

Instructing the Romans regarding the sticky subject of meat offered to idols, Paul says in Rom. 14:1, "Give a warm welcome to any brother who wants to join you, even though his faith is weak. Don't criticize him for having different ideas from yours about what is right or wrong." Then after his instruction he goes on to say in Rom. 15:5-6, "May God who gives patience, steadiness, and encouragement help you to live in complete harmony with each other - each with the attitude of Christ toward the other."

Whenever this subject is discussed, special concern is always expressed about our young people hearing differences of opinion regarding certain aspects of scripture shared from the front. Again, we are confident in the Spirit's ability to help us discern the truth through the preponderance of sound teaching over time. That said, as a parent, you should be alert for situations where this might have

taken place and be ready to explain how your beliefs differ from what was said and why you believe the way you do. You are your children's primary teacher of spiritual truth and we are confident in your ability, with God's help, to keep them on the path to sound doctrine. We are always willing to assist you with this in any way we can.

It is worth repeating that our regard for one another is not based on our maturity in Christ. We do not have to agree on everything in order to be in fellowship. We do have to treat each other with love and respect if we are to nurture a church environment where differences of opinion, on disputable matters, can be openly discussed to the mutual benefit of us all. In Paul's letter to the Philippians he expresses the type of attitude that should be maintained by those who have achieved a certain maturity in the faith. We believe these words are particularly appropriate to this current discussion:

Phil 3:10-16

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.