



TENSION 1

Not a Problem to Resolve but a Tension to Manage



Some theological pairs are supposed to be HELD IN TENSION.

- * It's not an ISSUE to be RESOLVED, as though there were a DEFINITIVE ANSWER, but it is a TENSION to be MANAGED.
- * Almost like TWO SIDES of the same COIN.
- * Like MERCY and JUDGMENT or GRACE and TRUTH.
- * There's a DITCH on EITHER SIDE of the ROAD and it's perfectly possible to fall into either.
- * It's neither ONE nor the OTHER ... certainly not EITHER/OR ... usually BOTH/AND.

→ Often it is easier to think of things in terms of black and white, rather than getting lost in the grey. Having said that, sometimes there is more mystery (grey) than we would like. Discuss.

→ Do you face any tensions in your life? Any difficult balances? Any that you've got wrong in the past?

EXAMPLES

- a) Is it the SOVEREIGNTY of God or human FREEWILL?
 - b) Paul said that *"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up"* (1 Cor 8:1) ... but surely you need KNOWLEDGE, but not at the expense of LOVE ... What if it's all LOVE and no KNOWLEDGE?
 - c) Should we always be AT PEACE or should there be an internal HOLY DISSATISFACTION?
 - d) Is it God-ALMIGHTY or God-ALL-MATEY? Is Jesus our FRIEND or LORD? Or might He be BOTH held in TENSION?
 - e) We're encouraged to be SEPARATE from the WORLD, but if we become TOO SEPARATE, how can we INFLUENCE?
 - f) Do we SIT BACK and KEEP LOW or JUMP UP and PRESS IN? (Matt 5:5, 23:12 v Matt 11:12)
 - g) Is New Testament Christianity about being SAFE or DANGEROUS?
- As you work your way down this list, which way does your pendulum swing? Do you tend towards one rather than the other? Do you prefer one over the other? Are there any areas where you feel you need your pendulum to swing?
- Can you think of any other theological tensions?

New, richer, deeper Christian UNITY will come when you realise your friend from another church / different denomination or tradition is currently looking at the OTHER SIDE of SAME COIN.

→ Does this statement make a helpful contribution to the discussion on Christian unity? What sort of scenarios, style options, practical theological emphases does it cover?

→ How does this thought make you feel about other churches or denominations you know? Are they in tension? Has the pendulum swung too far one way? Are they in extreme or just plain in error?

2 Tim 2:15 → Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

- * Learning how to CORRECTLY HANDLE the Word is a LIFELONG JOURNEY.
- * Sometimes the 'PENDULUM' swings a little too far one way as an OVERCORRECTION ... It usually SWINGS BACK again.

→ What factors should we bear in mind as we attempt to correctly handle the word in reference to unresolved theological tensions? What roles do Word and Spirit have in that?

What happens if we don't manage the tension?

'12 TEACHINGS THAT HARM THE CHURCH' (Joseph Mattera)

1. HYPER-GRACE
2. HYPER-HOLINESS
3. HYPER-CALVINIST
4. HYPER-ARMINIANISM
5. HYPER-LOVE
6. HYPER-FAITH
7. HYPER-PROSPERITY
8. HYPER-HIGH CHURCH
9. HYPER-CHARISMATIC
10. HYPER-RATIONAL

→ Which of these do you feel are the most harmful? Do you know people in any of those camps? Are you attracted to any, and if so, why?

→ It's impossible to have too much grace. Discuss.

→ It's impossible to be too holy. Discuss.

→ It's impossible to have too much Holy Spirit. Discuss.

→ If love isn't all you need, what else do you need?

→ How do you get out of the ditch once you've fallen in it?

→ What ditches were the Pharisees and Sadducees stuck in? How come they didn't even know they were in a ditch? How did that affect the way Jesus related to them?

MORAL: Whenever we focus on ONE TRUTH to the EXCLUSION of other related aspects, we end up in ERROR.

- * Any truth taken to an EXTREME is UNBALANCED and can be HARMFUL.
- * We're going to need the WISDOM of the HOLY SPIRIT to balance the tensions.

12 TEACHING THAT HARM THE CHURCH (Joseph Mattera)

1. HYPER-GRACE → Since Scripture teaches us that we are saved by grace + not by works, those in the hyper-grace camp believe + teach that once a person is saved, they can live any way they want + still achieve the benefits of salvation. They need a full dose of the book of James to counter-balance their hyper-grace!

2. HYPER-HOLINESS → An overemphasis on outward holiness to the point in which they believe a person has to dress a certain way in order to have right-standing with God. (e.g. women should not cut their hair, wear trousers, makeup or jewelry) ... Their emphasis on outward conformity to strict standards makes them more like Pharisees than Christians ... They need to meditate on Matt 23 to understand God's view that inward holiness is a greater priority than outward holiness.

3. HYPER-CALVINIST → Emphasises God's sovereignty to point that it bypasses what Scripture teaches regarding human responsibility ... For the hyper-calvinist, it is wrong for preachers to induce sinners to repent, make decisions for Christ, and/or do anything that aided in the process of salvation ... because the Elect will be the elect.

4. HYPER-ARMINIANISM → Overemphasizes human responsibility to the point that they nullify God's sovereignty ... Extreme Arminianism such as 'open theism' even goes as far as teaching that God doesn't know everything in the future + that God makes His decisions after He sees how humans respond to Him. They have reduced predestination to 'post-destination' and have created a god that responds to time + space rather than the One who controls it.

5. HYPER-LOVE → Emphasises the love of God to the exclusion of the holiness + righteousness of God ... Whenever we focus on one attribute of God to the exclusion of the other attributes of God, we become unbalanced + present a wrong view of God's character + nature. Those in this camp say that God is love (1 John 4:7) + ignore the Scriptures that deal with God's wrath, along with the laws of sowing + reaping due to sin (Eph. 5:1-6; Gal. 6:7-8) ... Tends towards a universalism that says everyone will be saved in the end because of God's love (see 'Love Wins,' Rob Bell).

6. HYPER-FAITH → Primarily preaches on faith for healing + deliverance, + sets believers up to think there will always be victory with very little suffering or pain if they exert faith in God ... As with all these it is based on element of truth but tends to ignore what the Bible says about suffering.

7. HYPER-PROSPERITY → Primarily emphasizes Scriptures that deal with personal blessing + financial prosperity ... Again, although there is some truth in their teachings, this overemphasis produces believers who seek the blessing more than the Blesser ... + sadly ministers have perverted + corrupted this teaching for financial gain (not as many people as we're often led to believe) ... [The problem is not so much with the teaching principles, but with the considerable and distracting overemphasis].

8. HYPER-HIGH CHURCH → Emphasize institutional church traditions + protocols that produce a professional class of clergy who have to walk around all day in clerical garb ... They insist that the church be set up as a hierarchical organization replete with titles, + even a throne for the head bishop ... JM: Somehow I cannot picture Jesus, the original apostles and/or Paul wearing clerical robes + collars every Sunday + focusing on hierarchical titles + titular elevations.

11. HYPER-CHARISMATIC → Focus more on the gifts of the Spirit than on the Word of God, character development + inward holiness. They elevate their spiritual experiences above the truth of Scripture ... [Again, the pendulum swings + but from my experience 'charismaniacs' tend to put people off + make them back away from things of the Spirit ... Let's have the Holy Spirit, lots of Him, but let's make sure it's the real thing + that it's not hyped, man-made imitation].

12. HYPER-RATIONAL → These are afraid of any spiritual experiences and/or manifestations. They depend upon their mind to the neglect of their spirit. They believe God only speaks through His written Word. They rationalize their faith + have little or no real prayer life or substantive fellowship with God. They split hairs over biblical doctrines + in some ways worship the Bible more than the God of the Bible.