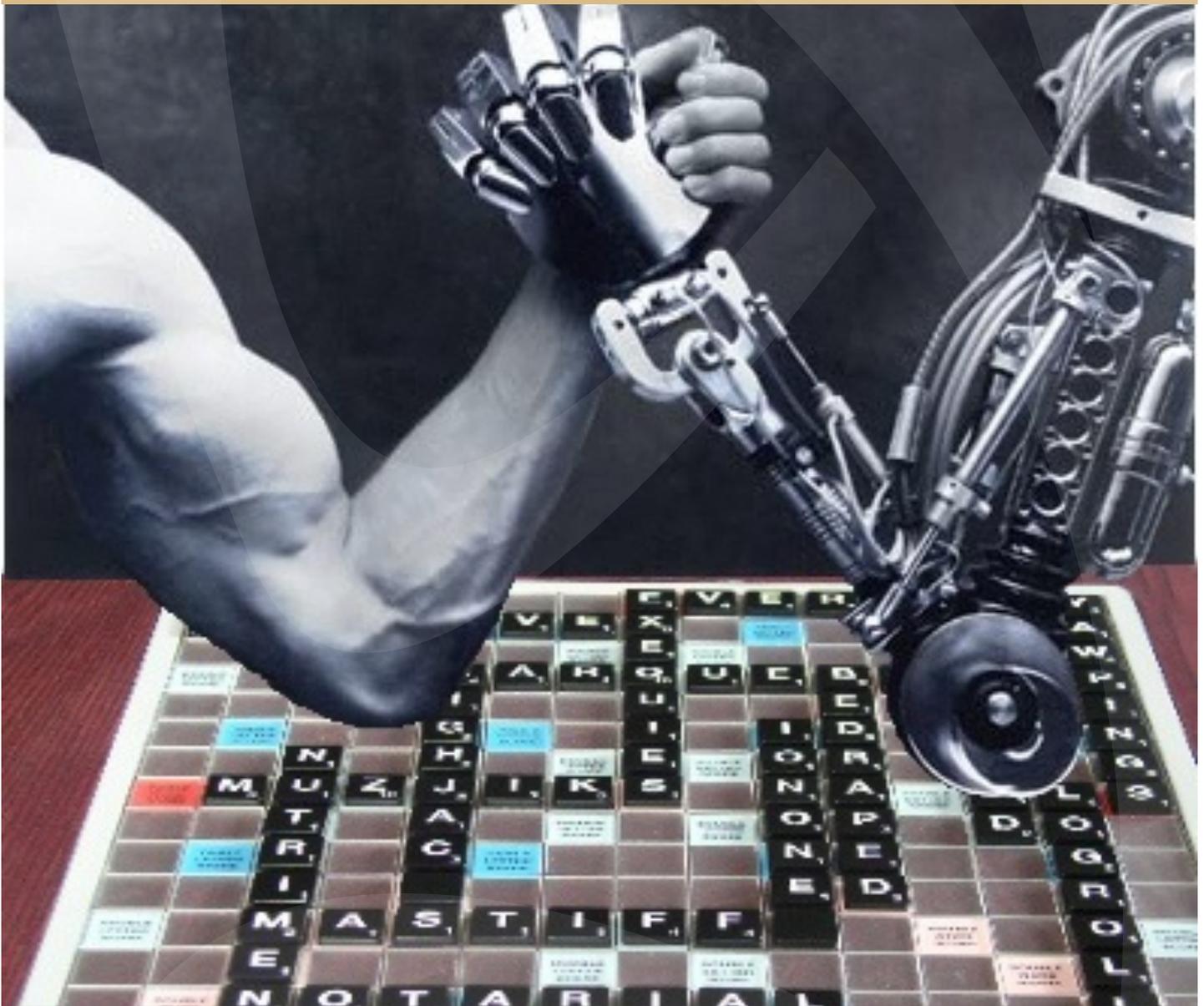


Faithful Disagreement:

*Building Durable Relationships
with God & Each Other*

A Course in Three Parts
moderated by Tom Gamble & David Ealy



FORUM 102: WEEK 2

“People Are Different Than Computers”

Introduction

Remember the Ground Rules

Be mindful of the covenant we established as a class:

- Have respect for one another**
- Care enough to listen**
- One person speaks at a time**
- Confidentiality**
- Reserve Judgement**
- Speak Up**
- Listen**
- Pray**

Our Manner of Discourse

We established an invitational method of speaking. When one person is done talking, it is their job to invite the next person to speak (not necessarily the person to either side of them). Invitations can always be respectfully declined.

Review

We will take time at the beginning of this class to review the work done in the previous forums.

Not So Obvious

This session will dig into seemingly obvious areas of awareness in order to arrive at complex insights in our interaction as human beings.

Rehearsal with Real Issues

In addition to the Scriptures with which we will practice our communication skills, we will begin diving into “real” issues as well: political, theological, and interpersonal.

Facilitators

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SESSION OUTLINE

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Semantic Warnings

DEFINITIONS

Computer |kəm'pyōōtər|

noun

an electronic device for storing and processing data, typically in binary form, according to instructions given to it in a variable program.

- a person who makes calculations, esp. with a calculating machine.

Human |' (h)yōōmən|

adjective

1. of, relating to, or characteristic of people or human beings: *the human body.*
2. of or characteristic of people as opposed to God or animals or machines, esp. in being susceptible to weaknesses: *they are only human, and therefore mistakes do occur | the risk of human error.*
3. of or characteristic of people's better qualities, such as kindness or sensitivity: *the human side of politics is getting stronger.*
4. • Zoology of or belonging to the genus Homo.

noun

a human being, esp. a person as distinguished from an animal or (in science fiction) an alien.

Expectation |ekspek'tāSHən|

noun

1. a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future: *reality had not lived up to expectations | an expectation that the government will provide the resources | he drilled his men in expectation of a Prussian advance.*
2. a belief that someone will or should achieve something: *students had high expectations for their future.*
3. (expectations) *archaic* one's prospects of inheritance.

PHRASES

manage expectations (also *manage someone's expectations*) seek to prevent disappointment by establishing in advance what can realistically be achieved or delivered by a project, undertaking, course of action, etc.: *as the White House tries to paint a rosy economic picture, they are also trying to manage expectations | the company needs to be very sure it has a hit or it should start managing its customers' expectations.*



Unity |'yōōnətē|

noun (pl. *unities*)

- 1 the state of being united or joined as a whole: *European unity | their leaders called for unity between opposing factions.*
- the state of forming a complete and pleasing whole, esp. in an artistic context: *the repeated phrase gives the piece unity and cohesion.*
- a thing forming a complex whole: *they speak of the three parts as a unity.*
- in Aristotle's Poetics, each of the three dramatic principles requiring limitation of the supposed time of a drama to that occupied in acting it or to a single day (unity of time), use of one scene throughout (unity of place), and concentration on the development of a single plot (unity of action). makes calculations, esp. with a calculating machine.

Semantic Warnings

READ:

The definitions on page 3, paying particular attention to how what you believe about what's defined is similar or different than the definition.

WRITE:

In the spaces below, take time to reflect on each question and to write down examples. Be prepared to share at least one.

Can people function like computers?

What does it mean to be human?

When you argue or discuss something with someone, what are your expectations?

When you craft your argument, what are you hoping for?

Review the questions in the brown boxes.

How can two people see the same information and come away with completely different interpretations?



Why can't we feel the same intensity about opportunity as we feel about fighting something or someone?

“Forebearance”

READ: The excerpts from *Faithful Disagreement* by Frances Taylor Gench.

The apostle Paul's closing exhortation to the church at Rome includes a fascinating discussion about living with disagreements, addressed to Christians whose argumentative discourse is threatening the unity and stability of the church. What are they arguing about?

It seems that there are, within the house churches of Rome, different understandings of what proper response to the gospel of Jesus Christ looks like. The main point Paul tries to convey to these congregations, writes N. T. Wright, is that "there are some things that appear to divide Christians very deeply in terms of their practice but are, in fact (in the language of later theology), 'things indifferent' that should not be allowed to divide them." Such matters are clearly very important to the disputing parties, but from Paul's perspective are not essential for faith or salvation. Indeed, says Paul Achtemeier, Paul maintains that "there is room within the Christian community for differing ways of responding to the gospel with respect to one's everyday life." The problem he perceives is when one group tries to impose its understanding of Christian faith and lifestyle on others.

Paul is not suggesting that "anything goes." There are limits to Christian behavior, as we know from his discussion elsewhere. In 1 Corinthians, for example, he is fit to be tied about sexual immorality (a man living with his father's wife; 1 Cor. 5) and divisive worship practices (1 Cor. 11). But what Paul is saying in Romans 14-15 is that within the structures of grace (and limits of acceptable behavior) there is a measure of freedom. Therefore, Christians must exercise forbearance as they live together with differences and disagreements over what proper response to the gospel looks like.

...Two antagonistic groups are identified by label in [Romans 14:1-15:13]: the "weak" on the one hand, and the "strong" on the other. We can be fairly certain that the "weak" did not identify themselves as such! (Can you imagine: "We're the weak!" "Let's hear it for the weak!") This is probably the terminology of the "strong" and reflects their stereotypical grasp of the situation—a viewpoint, even caricature, that would hardly have been welcomed by the “weak.” Paul adopts this language of "weak" and "strong" and clearly identifies with the "strong" in 15: 1. But to be fair, let us keep in mind that the "weak" might have described things differently. (It would be interesting to know what labels they were using to describe both themselves and members of the other camp.)

Frances Taylor Gench. *Faithful Disagreement: Wrestling with Scripture in the Midst of Church Conflict* (Kindle Locations 467-487). Kindle Edition.

DISCUSS:

- What stands out to you from this excerpt?
- The last sentence in the second paragraph is telling. What's the difference between trying to convince someone of your viewpoint and imposing your viewpoint on others?
- What is “forbearance” (from the third paragraph)? How do you practice this (if you do)?
- Is it possible to avoid having a stereotypical grasp of a person or situation?

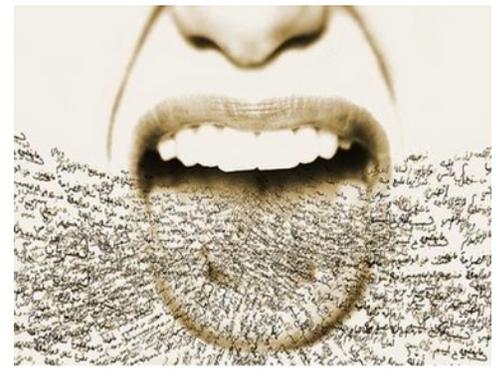
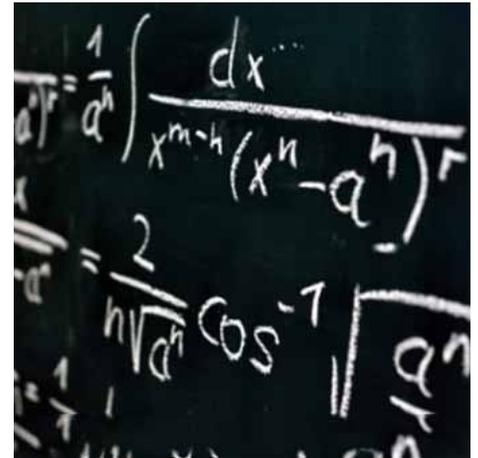
WYSIWYG

DISCUSS:

WYSIWYG "is an acronym for "What You See Is What You Get". In computing, a WYSIWYG editor is a system in which content (text and graphics) displayed onscreen during editing appears in a form closely corresponding to its appearance when printed or displayed as a finished product, which might be a printed document, web page, or slide presentation" (from Wikipedia). When it comes to people, what do you think contributes to the following? (they are all statements intended to provoke; feel free to agree or disagree with their premises)

- WYSIWYG is not the reality for most people.
- People cannot be reprogrammed.
- It's possible for someone to be totally, and in all respects, honest.
- At best, all viewpoints are subjective. It is impossible to arrive at an objective view of a subject.
- Math is the only language for which there is no dispute.
- Language is limited by those using it.
- Like a computer, garbage in, garbage out, when it comes to how the mind functions.
- How does education affect your filters?

- How does experience change your filters?
- How does exposure to other cultures or people change your filters?



“One day we will learn that the heart can never be totally right when the head is totally wrong”

— Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*

Perspectives from Scripture

READ: As you read this passage from James, prepare to defend your interpretation of it.

WRITE:

- What is the central tenet of this passage (if there is only one)?
- What kind of people do you think the letter of James was written to address?
- What is the most important piece of advice from this Scripture?
- What of this passage speaks most to you? What of this passage really applies to other people you know?
- What makes it hard to put the advice in this passage to work?

James 4:1-17; 5:12

Conflict with people and God

4:1 What is the source of conflict among you? What is the source of your disputes? Don't they come from your cravings that are at war in your own lives? 2 You long for something you don't have, so you commit murder. You are jealous for something you can't get, so you struggle and fight. You don't have because you don't ask. 3 You ask and don't have because you ask with evil intentions, to waste it on your own cravings.

4 You unfaithful people! Don't you know that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? 5 Or do you suppose that scripture is meaningless? Doesn't God long for our faithfulness in^[a] the life he has given to us?^[b] 6 But he gives us more grace. This is why it says, God stands against the proud, but favors the humble.^[c] 7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will run away from you. 8 Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Cry out in sorrow, mourn, and weep! Let your laughter become mourning and your joy become sadness. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

11 Brothers and sisters, don't say evil things about each other. Whoever insults or criticizes a brother or sister insults and criticizes the Law. If you find fault with the Law, you are not a doer of the Law but a judge over it. 12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, and he is able to save and to destroy. But you who judge your neighbor, who are you?

Warning the proud and wealthy

13 Pay attention, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such-and-such a town. We will stay there a year, buying and selling, and making a profit." 14 You don't really know about tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for only a short while before it vanishes. 15 Here's what you ought to say: "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast and brag, and all such boasting is evil. 17 It is a sin when someone knows the right thing to do and doesn't do it.

...5:12 Most important, my brothers and sisters, never make a solemn pledge—neither by heaven nor earth, nor by anything else. Instead, speak with a simple "Yes" or "No," or else you may fall under judgment.

A “Real Life” Example

READ:

“My Take: Jesus was a free marketer, not an Occupier”

Tony Perkins is president of the *Family Research Council* in Washington.

One of the last instructions Jesus gave his disciples was "Occupy till I come."

As Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem for the last time, just before his crucifixion, he was keenly aware that his disciples greatly desired and even anticipated that the kingdom of God was going to be established immediately on the earth.

Groups bring Occupy to Congress

As a way to break the news that it wasn't going to happen in the manner and with the timing they expected, Jesus pulled them aside and gave them instructions by way of a parable.

The primary purpose of the parable, which appears in the Gospel of Luke, was to make clear to his disciples that the kingdom of God would not be physically established on the earth for some time and that, until then, they were being entrusted with certain responsibilities.

Jesus, depicted as a ruler in the story, would have to leave for a while as he traveled to a faraway place to receive authority to reign over the kingdom. In his absence, the disciples – depicted as servants – were to "occupy" until he returned.

Here's the direct quote from Luke: "He called his ten servants, and gave

to them ten minas, one mina each (a mina today would be worth around \$225), and he then told them to 'Occupy till I come.' " (Luke 19:13, King James Version)

But just what does Jesus' order to occupy mean? Does it mean take over and trash public property, as the Occupy movement has? Does it mean engage in antisocial behavior while denouncing a political and economic system that grants one the right and luxury to choose to be unproductive?

Opinion: Occupy Wall Street looks like church to me

No, the Greek term behind the old English translation literally means "be occupied with business." As with all parables, Jesus uses a common activity such as fishing or farming to provide a word picture with a deeper spiritual meaning.

From a spiritual perspective, the mina in this parable represents the opportunity of life; each of us is given the same opportunity to build our lives, and each of us shares the same responsibility to invest our lives for the purpose of bringing a return and leaving a legacy. Jesus gave equal responsibility and opportunity to each of his 10 servants.

The fact that Jesus chose the free market system as the basis for this



parable should not be overlooked. When the nobleman returns, after being established as king – a stand-in for Jesus – he calls all his servants together to see what they had accomplished in his absence.

The first servant reports a nice profit: 10 minas. While the story lacks specifics on whether he invested the money in a herd of sheep or a hedge fund, we do know that he made his gain by engaging in business transactions of some sort. He used a free market system to bring a tenfold return on investment. No doubt such a return took a lot of diligent, dedicated effort.

The newly established king praises the servant and gives him a reward that's an even greater return on his efforts, "because you have been faithful in very little I will give you authority over ten cities."

Likewise the second servant in the story, who had turned his one mina into five, is praised and rewarded with
(continued on page 9)

A “Real Life” Example

(continued from page 8)

greater responsibilities: He is given five cities.

Occupy Wall Street movement tackles housing crisis

The third servant in the story had apparently either slept through his economics course or was just indifferent to the work delegated to him.

He had essentially kept the capital entrusted to him under his mattress for safekeeping.

When called to give an account of what he had accomplished, the man immediately attempts to shift the focus off his failure with excuses of how unfair the boss was because he was always trying to get more than he deserved for his money.

The employee review is immediate and intense: "Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant." The king's disappointment and frustration are nearly palpable. "Why didn't you at least put the money in the bank and draw interest?" the king inquires.

While such language might prompt an HR complaint today, its meaning was quite clear to the disciples. There are no excuses for doing nothing.

Parables generally have a twist near the end, a final jolt to drive the point home. This one is no exception. The ruler orders that the capital, or opportunity, given to the lazy servant

be taken from him and given to the most productive servant. "To everyone who has, more shall be given," the Bible reads, "but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away."

Jesus rejected collectivism and the mentality that has occupied America for the last few decades: that everyone gets a trophy – equal outcomes for inequitable performance. There are winners and yes, there are losers. And wins and losses are determined by the diligence and determination of the individual.

Some would argue that such an approach encourages abuses, the likes of which we have seen on Wall Street. While some egregious abuses have taken place, they are not inevitable or intrinsic to free enterprise.

The parable of the king and the servants endorses the principles of business and the free market when properly employed.



Notes

"Not ordinarily do men achieve this balance of opposites. The idealists are not usually realistic, and the realists are not usually idealistic. The militant are not generally known to be passive, nor the passive to be militant. Seldom are the humble self-assertive, or the self assertive humble....truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis that reconciles the two."

— Martin Luther King Jr., Strength to Love



Notes



Notes

