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### THE STAND DIALOGUE OR ARGUMENTS

We love to disagree, we Americans do. We will argue mightily and aggressively to defend what we think is right. If we think it is right, whatever it is, then for us it is categorically right and no one or no thing can change our minds. I once heard one extremely dogmatic man say that his mind had been made up and that no one should even try to confuse him with the facts!

Most of us would rather talk than listen. We would rather persuade rather than be persuaded. We believe so strongly in our own thinking, logic and ability to discern right and wrong that it seems to be our duty to convince-persuade others less sensible than ourselves. Conversation turns to dialogue which in turn turns to argumentation. People and points of view are polarized and there can be no further dialogue or discussion with someone now readily viewed as enemy.

Take the abortion debate, or rather argument. One is either for the right to abort or against. There is no middle ground. It is easy to disagree. But why not find some points, any issues no matter how minor upon which there can be agreement. There are Christians, moralists who are willing to discuss the possibility of abortion in the event of conception as a result of rape, or incest, or most importantly, when the life of the mother is at stake. That is especially so when the victim is a daughter or family member. It is interesting how, at times, that which seems so clear in theory becomes compromised in reality. When it is your daughter, what is right for her can really become what is right. The personal takes precedence over the theoretical.

For pro-choice people, perhaps they would be willing to discuss abortion on demand, at any time for any or no reason. Perhaps there should be limits especially for young women-girls. Perhaps they would be willing to discuss the concept of adoption rather than abortion for babies brought to term even if the woman does not wish to be a mother. Perhaps pro-choice people would be willing to discuss partial-birth abortion so that at some time in the pregnancy, at some point in the development of the young baby's life in utero no abortion can take place. The issues are indeed inflammatory but there ought to be some way to discuss these critical matters without anger and mistrust.

The point of dialogue is to come to some commonality, some agreement rather than merely agreeing to disagree. It is far easier to disagree. So, when disagreement in dialogue arises early on, dialogue can only be resumed if there is some point of agreement. It ought to be a rule for communication and discourse that FOR EVERY POINT OF DISAGREEMENT THERE MUST BE ONE POINT OF AGREEMENT! Hardly anything political, social or cultural is black and white. There are invariably things circumstantial, exceptions, things unforeseen and change in the way things are or the way they are perceived. We need to work at finding points of agreement. Sometimes, that takes long, hard work to accomplish. We can find such areas for agreement without fundamental compromise. We as Christians especially need to dialogue with and make friends of mammon (all mankind) especially those who are not Christians. Healthy, constructive dialogue is a way to do that.

It is also critical to separate the person from the point of view. Critical issues can and should be debated, often passionately so. But at the end, instead of anger which makes an enemy of the other, every effort should be made to find personal, common ground. I once debated-argued with someone pro-choice and at the end, we agreed to disagree. But we moved to the personal to find common ground. I found out this person, not enemy, thoroughly enjoyed sports, fine dining, good wine and classical music. We found out that we had much in common as people, human beings and we left our discussions of abortion as friends, remembering those things we had in common even more so than our areas of disagreement. Make friends, says our Bible, not enemies. Make friends without compromise and that can be done. The world would be such a better place if Trent Lott could dialogue with Ted Kennedy, if George Bush could truly dialogue with Al Gore, if Billy Graham could truly dialogue with Jesse Jackson, if Charlton Heston could dialogue with George Clooney, if any so-called liberal could truly dialogue with any so-called conservative. It would be a far, far better world. And, we could find in such communication, a real compatibility and some exciting areas of commonality. Try it for yourself. The next time you hotly disagree with another, don't leave that human encounter without finding something for agreement. Something important for agreement. Issues will be clearer, you and the other will be better for it, and the world itself will be just a little bit better.