



# Missional Journal

David G. Dunbar, President

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## You Respond

I've appreciated the thoughtful responses I've received from my e-mail letters. I'll be sharing some of them with you in this newsletter. Your comments are welcome, please e-mail us!

[president@biblical.edu](mailto:president@biblical.edu)

Dave,  
I want to encourage your progressive and helpful assessment of the meaning of "missional." The case you are building is compelling. On a personal level I am amazed at how congruent it is with my personal study and life experience. How can John 13:35 count for anything when orthodoxy is so narrowly defined that everyone else is a heretic?

## The Missional Congregation-Part 4

### Generous-Joyful Orthodoxy (continued)

In our [last discussion](#) I began by offering some definitions of the nature of orthodoxy. "It reflects a commitment," I suggested, "to the faith of the church universal, in contrast to the distinctive views of particular theological traditions or the opinions of private persons. And it is a concern for essential matters as opposed to secondary or peripheral teachings."

The problem, however, is that far too many Christians have embraced a style I call "combative orthodoxy," focusing on points of difference (real or imagined) with other Christians rather than on our unity. This produces alienation between those who should be co-laborers in ministry and, as a result, the mission of the church is sabotaged.

**The way forward is to ask again what it means to be part of the mission of God.** In a previous issue of [Missional Journal](#) I discussed Newbigin's idea of the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. What applies to local congregations applies also to the church at large: We are to incarnate the reconciling message of the cross in our relationships with the world and with one another. **Unbelievers come to understand the mission of God in light of the unity demonstrated within the community of the disciples. (John 17:20-23).** Francis Schaffer called this "the final apologetic."

If we take this seriously, we will need to repent of our combative orthodoxy. We will need to embrace a style of engagement with others that maintains a firm commitment to the orthodox center, but adopts a generous and joyful attitude toward those who differ on secondary or tertiary issues.

Perhaps it would help to elaborate these contrasting approaches. Generous-joyful orthodoxy builds friendships. It extends the gift of careful listening and deep understanding to all, and particularly to those who claim allegiance to the faith rooted in Scripture. It functions out of a

Rich McDaniel  
Former Biblical Seminary  
Board Member

Dave,  
I found it [your article] very encouraging not just in my spirit, but in causing me to want to work toward unity in the church. Thanks for the time you are taking to not only define your position as a seminary, but to minister to the pastors in our community.

J. Eugene Miller  
MDiv, 2005  
Living Hope Community Church

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hermeneutic of trust--those who confess Christ are accepted as brothers and sisters whose faith is a cause for celebration not conflict. Generous orthodoxy is that biblical love which "believes all [the best] things"(1 Cor. 13:7) about a brother/sister.

Combative orthodoxy, on the other hand, builds enmity. It functions out of a hermeneutic of suspicion that assumes one to be guilty until proven innocent. In this world, difference is dangerous, and shibboleths become the code of acceptance. Dialogue among friends gives way to debate among partisans. Combative orthodoxy is the spirit that "believes all [the worst] things" about a brother/sister and communicates this to others. It is therefore one of the seven things that the Lord hates (Prov. 6:16-19).

So how might we nurture generous-joyful orthodoxy? A few specific suggestions:

1. **We need to cultivate balance in the Christian life.** Generous-joyful orthodoxy is not a bland, lowest-common-denominator approach to Christian unity. It is a passionate commitment to knowing the truth of the living God revealed in Jesus who is the Christ. But knowing the truth of this God entails having a passionate love for his people (and for the world). We must not settle for one over the other.
2. **Consider the possibility that diversity within the church may be a good thing, even one intended by God!** We know that genetic variety is beneficial and that inbreeding is not. Why did the Spirit give us four gospels rather than one? Why James *and* Paul? If diversity is built into the New Testament itself, isn't it possible that God wants us to profit from the diversity that is part of the great tradition of Christian orthodoxy?
3. **We need to extend to others the grace of respectful understanding.** Just because others have a different opinion or practice doesn't mean they are a) stupid, b) disobedient, or c) ignorant of God's Word. Can we give up rhetoric that suggests Calvinists don't care about evangelism, that Arminians are Pelagian, that charismatics simply want feel-good religion, that mega-churches are only concerned about numbers and marketing strategies, and that emerging churches don't believe in truth?
4. **Try giving up labels entirely for a year.** Instead of calling someone a "liberal," or "fundamentalist," or "emerging," or "heretical," try using a sentence or paragraph to describe what they believe. See if it makes you more careful about how you listen and respond to others. Consider how they may be more *like* you than unlike. And, oh yes, try checking with them directly before you spread the word about what your friend told you she read on a web site that quoted (word for word!) what someone overheard this dangerous person say at the water cooler.

5. **Together let's leave behind the oppressive atmosphere of combative orthodoxy.** In an [article](#) I cited in the last *Missional Journal*, John Frame dreams of a new day for Reformed theology--and I would add, not *just* for Reformed theology--that will allow fresh ideas to be presented with humility and examined with gentleness and thoughtfulness. Along with this he suggests "that occasionally we smile and jest about our relatively minor differences, while praying, worshiping, and working together in the love of Christ." Yes! Generous-joyful orthodoxy.

6. Finally, try praying a prayer from China that has challenged me for several years:

*Help each one of us, gracious Father, to live in such magnanimity and restraint that the Head of the Church may never have to say to anyone of us, "This is my body, broken by you."*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave", located at the bottom right of the page.