



Disruptive Missiology, Part 3: In Communication, Context is Everything

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When I was in grade school, one of my teachers asked me if I was a Christian. It was the end of the school year as I recall, and in my excited attempt to witness at this apparent “open door” I replied that I was a Baptist! I realized by her reply that I had answered her in a different category than she was asking. Nothing—even answers that make sense to us—is meaningful without a context.

I’ve got certain things that I believe about my faith in God, and the Scriptures. My experiences in my walk with the Lord have shaped my thinking. My study of the Word has been foundational in all this.

Of all those things we believe that could be said in discussions with non-believers we need to choose carefully. In the extreme, if we launch into modes of baptism or the timing of the return of Christ we might not get through.

When I started high school, our family began going to a new church, which consistently taught the Bible. I began to study the Bible inductively before I could drive! But then I realized that I could soak this “new affection” and deepening relationship with God and never do anything with it. I was saved and growing—but for what?

So, I got involved in ministry in various ways, which led to a heart for the world and what I’m involved in today. In the process, in church and later during seminary, I more fully understood and developed my theological framework. I hope I have continued to grow and learn. Now I’m in the process of working out how I interface my own framework with those in the body of Christ who disagree with me. I learned from a few mentors in my life that at times, it may be best to emphasize areas of agreement when sharing with those of different theological perspectives.

But recently I’ve been thinking much more about how this might apply as we share our faith with those who are not followers of Christ—especially if they are strong adherents from another major

religious group. How much of my theology should be a part of what I share? My sense right now is not much!

It is not that I think I am wrong (of course!) or that I shouldn’t be strong in what I believe. Nor is it that I should be quiet about it. It is however, because of a growing sense that I need to let my life speak and let those who hear develop their own perspective from the Scriptures itself. A missionary I know who has worked in the Middle East doesn’t answer any question a Muslim asks him. Even if he is clear on the answer, his response is always, “I don’t know, let’s see what the Bible says?” He then guides them to the passages that talk about the issue they raised, so in that sense, he is still teaching or guiding them. Actually, I’ve found that most people are looking for guidance and when they see someone who lives life in a God-honoring way, they anticipate learning something significant. It is amazing then to watch their reply when I say something in response to a question like, “Jesus said, ...”

We must let Christ and His Word speak first, rather than expressing the formulations of our thinking that we have had years to process. I’ve often noted that it took formalized Christianity hundreds of years to actually try and write down what they believed. While those early “councils” solidified certain core issues, there were on-going disagreements.

In reality, “on the street” it is the way we live out our faith that opens the door for the Scriptures to speak the loudest. Let’s be sure we point to Him and His Word with our lives and our words. 



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