**A call for civil disagreement – By Amber Jimerson**

**Too many members***of Churches of Christ devour rather than debate, but far too many avoid confrontation altogether. There’s a better way.*

***I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

— Ephesians 4:1-4, New King James Version

Given our history of biting and devouring one another, we in many wings of the Churches of Christ tend to avoid controversy.

We’ve seen our brothers and sisters ascribe false character traits to those who hold views we perceive as extreme — simply because of their stances; not because of who they are as people.

But as many of us have attempted to divorce ourselves from the divisive spirit of past generations, we’ve slipped off the other side of the horse. We’re fearful of voicing any solid convictions that might lead to uncomfortable discussions.

I recently returned from my first lectureship at Florida College in Temple Terrace. Although I am the wife of a preacher for a non-institutional Church of Christ, I was nonetheless skeptical of the theme: “Inquiring of Past Generations: Lessons from Church History.”

To my surprise, each presenter I heard was humble, yet educated; sometimes controversial, yet consistently reasonable; thought-provoking, yet nuanced. Hearing these speakers, shaking their hands and asking them questions all made me realize that we can be people with real convictions and a willingness to discuss them with civility. And, as missionary Bob Buchanon said, we can still go out and grab a Coke together, whether we agree or not.

During the week, I heard gratitude expressed for various aspects of Reformation thought and unflinching critiques of Restoration thought. I was impressed with the leisurely and thoughtful lesson against instrumental music in worship. My head bobbed in agreement when speakers discussed our gross exclusion of the majority of Scripture in our lessons and the way we tend to overuse topical and New Testament-based sermons at the expense of other parts of God’s Word.

I noted the warnings about the limits of apologetics and the danger of misusing poetic Scripture as basis for scientific claims. I witnessed the respect shown for our fellow travelers in church history, regardless of church affiliation, and I equally respected the critiques against Reformation theology.

I scribbled the quote “traditionalism is what gives tradition a bad name.” My mind was overloaded with the lessons of history and the importance of knowing our past.

To think that my preconceived ideas could have starved me of the joy and learning I received from these lectures!

I’m afraid, however, that it’s more than premature judgements that keep us from soul-nourishing opportunities. Laziness can also play a role. “I don’t have the energy to discuss this” is a phrase I have said regularly. Discerning Scripture, embracing conviction, speaking with integrity and lovingly disagreeing with others is all very exhausting.

But let’s say yes to the mental effort it takes to discuss our respective weirdo beliefs and have fun with it. Can we stop mocking, using sarcasm, memes on social media and strategically pulling the “I don’t have the energy for this” card when someone engages?

Breaks are needed, yes. But let’s muster the energy to discuss issues that require more than a moment of consideration. It’s far easier to categorize, demonize and never face one another than it is to hash out ideas as human beings.

And I’d really like us to all be up for that.