Postcards is the Users Guide for personal discipleship. While The Compass provides content for one-on-one discipleship, Postcards tackles the practice, philosophy, and difficult challenges that are a part of discipleship.

Here, for example, is a partial list of the topics covered: Habitual Sin, Authority Issues, Christian Counseling, Fasting, Theological Conflicts, Coaching Through Trials, Challenging to Conferences, Confronting Sin, Ministering Cross-Culturally, The Role of Faith, Difficulties in Sharing the Ministry of the Spirit, Selection, Conflict Resolution, Why Does Leadership Matter, Conducting Basic Follow-up... Postcards contains 47 articles on all critical issues of discipleship.

ORDER ONLINE AT CRUPRESS.COM
Chapter Twenty Three

Thirty Year’s War
On theological debates

A cursory reading of the New Testament alerts us to the theological debates and differences that are a part of ministry, and a part of discipleship. I have presided over my fair share of ministry divisions and unfortunately ministry splits, and am convinced that how we deal with these differences and conflicts is every bit as important as the outcome. While wrestling with theological issues is unavoidable, wrestling with people over them can often be averted by maintaining three simple values: be knowledgeable, be honest, and be charitable.

KNOWLEDGEABLE

In dealing with theological differences, as a non-denominational ministry we have a greater challenge (because we don’t defend one position) as well as greater freedom (because we don’t have to defend one position). What we need to strive for is a greater understanding of the different positions on issues most likely to surface divisively. For example, let’s take the issue of free will and predestination. Wherever there’s a crack in the sidewalk, you’ll often find this weed growing out of it. Being knowledgeable means that I can lay out the two opposing viewpoints and give at least one verse that strongly supports their position. I want to express to my disciple that neither side is crazy. I want them to honestly understand why a person would hold this perspective. More important than the issue itself, I am helping my disciples respect these people by showing them that their belief is biblically justifiable.

After laying out the adjacent views, in this case a Calvinist and Arminian perspective, I now explain that there are those who hold a mediating position between the two. Here it would be some form of compatibilism. Whatever the issue, there are always two opposite convictions, with alternative positions held along a spectrum. One of the points of this exercise is to move my disciple away from polarities to the broader, but grayer road on which most people traffic.
Having accomplished this, it is important to state that within every major theological dispute there are viewpoints which go outside of acceptable parameters. For example, there are those who hold the view of an “openness of God” perspective in the free will/predestination debate. This teaches that God may not fully know the future. There are some in the charismatic camp that believe people cannot be certain they have the Holy Spirit if they do not speak in tongues. You will need to drive in certain tent pegs and explain where the debate crosses over a line and leaves the camp of orthodoxy. There are acceptable evangelical positions along a spectrum, and you need to define that spectrum. In a non-denominational movement you are a good steward if you can accurately map out the major geography of the debate, but also define where the map ends and where dragons and sea serpents dwell. To do this you must be knowledgeable.

HONEST

Now, even though I may have a viewpoint on the issue, the next thing I try to do is to be as honest with the biblical data as possible. For example, on the issue of eternal security, I might say that if Hebrews was the only book in the New Testament, I could be persuaded to believe that losing my salvation was a viable option. (It’s best to acknowledge the difficulty of certain passages.) I would then state, “when combined with the entire council of scripture I don’t think these verses could be teaching this, and what makes more sense would be…” (In essence I’m teaching the need for a systematic theology not just a biblical one). Or on the issue of charismatic gifts, I might say that to whatever view one holds, it would be difficult to justify from Scripture a cessation of the gifts. I may deem them to have ceased but it would be based on observation and other factors more than a biblical argument. You may disagree, but this is my honest appraisal of the biblical data and that is what I share with my disciple.

Again, as important as the theological issue, I am teaching character: that truth and being truthful is more important than someone thinking I’m right. This will shape their biblical scholarship making honesty in interpretation the highest value, instead of looking for verses to justify a position.

CHARITABLE

Many theological convictions contain an underpinning of values. Let’s go back to the issue of Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinists concerned for God’s glory see the limits of human freedom, defined by Arminians as detracting from the sovereignty of God. Those who hold to some position of free will are often concerned that in removing free will, God could seem responsible for evil and His governance could appear dictatorial and not benevolent. The point being, both are concerned with God’s glory and see the
other perspective as limiting that glory. There is a common value of God's glory—He is amazing—and with that comes a desire to defend against theological positions that impinge upon that glory.

I'm not saying that theological positions are relative. Some are true and others are false. Some are more accurate than others, and we should choose a perspective that has the most and best biblical support. But there are relative components to why we align with certain perspectives based on our experience of God and what we value about Him. When analyzed, Spirit-filled Christians often share a value of God's glory, which they think their position best defends. I have found it helpful to bring out this shared value in creating a foundation for unity in the body, and keeping my own mind from casting the judgment, “Idiots.”

**HERE’S WHAT I THINK**

Last, I think your disciple has a right to know what you think on the issue. And having created the context, you should explain your perspective. They will actually be more inclined to embrace your perspective having gone through the process because they see you as knowledgeable, gracious, and concerned for what is true. You have educated them on the issue, given them guidance, demonstrated character, and avoided sowing seeds of discord. Congratulations.