

That's Your Opinion

Has this ever happened to you? You share with someone you know information that you believe to be important, relating documented evidence that you possess, even giving the documentation to the person you're speaking to. After listening politely and reviewing the evidence, the person responds, "That's your opinion."

I do have opinions, and I am not shy about voicing them if the situation appears right to do so, but that's not what we're talking about. I know the difference between statements based on evidence or facts and opinions. For a long time it seemed to me as if many people were unclear of the distinction and this assumption informed my response. I would point out that an opinion is a personal bias which may or may not rest upon any evidence¹ whereas what I had just done was to convey information and evidence without injecting personal bias into the equation. This normally got me a blank look from the person I was speaking with, and the blank look was often followed by the assertion that it was all (apparently both my original information and my definition of the word "opinion") just my opinion. Even if the person acknowledged my point about the difference between evidence and opinions, that same person would often reiterate the charge later in the conversation. "That's your opinion," the person would say, and wonder why my jaw dropped in response.

I must have been quite dense for a very long time.

The problem wasn't a lack of understanding on the part of the listener. It was a lack of understanding, on my part, of what the listener was telling me. The listener was saying, in effect, "I don't care what the evidence says, I have my own opinion, and I'm not going to change it regardless of whatever proof or evidence you provide." The person was trying to shut me out and shut me up, and I was the one who didn't get it. The funny thing is, I don't think they really got it either.

By labeling my presentation as opinion, they sought to minimize or trivialize the impact of the evidence, either on the grounds that opinions are generally worthless or, conversely, going the cognitive relativism route and holding that all opinions are equally valid². Responding to these people as if they were sincere - they merely needed to be shown that the information I imparted was of a higher standard than opinion - changed the issue

¹ o·pin·ion - [uh-pin-yuh n]
-noun

1. a belief or judgment that rests on grounds insufficient to produce complete certainty.
2. a personal view, attitude, or appraisal.
3. the formal expression of a professional judgment: to ask for a second medical opinion.
4. Law. the formal statement by a judge or court of the reasoning and the principles of law used in reaching a decision of a case.
5. a judgment or estimate of a person or thing with respect to character, merit, etc.: to forfeit someone's good opinion.
6. a favorable estimate; esteem: I haven't much of an opinion of him.

[Origin: 1250–1300; ME < OF < L *opiniōn-* (s. of *opiniō*), deriv. of *opinārī* to [OPINE](#)]

—Synonyms **1**. persuasion, notion, idea, impression. Opinion, sentiment, view are terms for one's conclusion about something. An opinion is a belief or judgment that falls short of absolute conviction, certainty, or positive knowledge; it is a conclusion that certain facts, ideas, etc., are probably true or likely to prove so: political opinions; an opinion about art; In my opinion this is true. Sentiment (usually *pl.*) refers to a rather fixed conviction, usually based on feeling or emotion rather than reasoning: These are my sentiments. View is an estimate of something, an intellectual judgment, a critical survey based on a mental examination, particularly of a public matter: views on governmental planning.

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² For the nitpickers who think that I should have written "epistemological relativism", which asserts that knowledge is relative, I submit that epistemological relativism is merely a subgenre of cognitive relativism, the relativity of truth. In any case, relativism is philosophical garbage and a way of denying the absolute truth of the existence, plan and will of God.

from consideration of the evidence to a question of what constituted evidence. Their perhaps tacit goal of not having to deal with the evidence was accomplished.

As I began to catch on I tested various strategies to deal with the objection (That's your opinion!) quickly so we could get on with our discussion of the main point. I still assumed that the person was sincere. It was, however, beginning to dawn on me that it might be the conclusions that the evidence was forcing them to consider that was the problem, and not the evidence itself. In order to avoid messy conclusions you must either do away with the evidence or the messenger. If you can shoot the messenger BEFORE the messages is delivered, you will never be forced to hear bad news, but unfortunately killing the messenger is usually not an option. So you must make the evidence go away before it upsets you too greatly. Here's an example. Let's say my contention was that a certain person (let's call him Adolph) was a Nazi, and after my presentation "Him" says:

Him: That's your opinion!
Me: Ok, but could you tell me which portion of what I just presented to you was opinion?
Him: All of it!
Me: Really? The quotes I showed you wherein he said that he was a Nazi were my opinion?
Him: People are misquoted all the time!
Me: The picture I showed you of Adolph in an SS uniform... Was that my opinion?
Him: Photoshop!
Me: What about his book "Why I Am a Nazi" subtitled "I, Adolf, Really Am a Nazi"? Was that my opinion?
Him: It's a novel. Haven't you ever heard of fiction?
Me: But it says on page one, "This book about me, Adolph, being a Nazi is fact, not fiction at all, not even a little bit. I'm a Nazi! I'm a Nazi! I'm a Nazi!" Now, that's not my opinion, is it?
Him: (Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr!)
Me: So, we can conclude that there is no doubt that Adolph is a Nazi, right?
Him: That's your opinion!

Notice how calm and reasonable I was. Ok, maybe the example isn't completely accurate, but subjectively this is exactly how it often felt. The reality is that even if they agreed, point by point, that nothing I said was my own opinion, and agreed that every point was supported by strong evidence or fact, more often than not they fell back on some form³ of "that's your opinion". Like:

- That's how you see it.
- You have a right to think what you want, but so do I.
- We can't all see things like you do.
- You have your view, I have mine, and the bartender has his, OK?
- Old dog? New Tricks? Sorry. (Or: "Guess I'm just set in my ways.")
- People shouldn't talk about religion (politics, etc.).

These sorts of responses got me to begin doubting the sincerity of the responders. It couldn't be that they're just trying to brush me off, could it? Reasonable, thinking people cannot attach themselves to a position, and cling to it in spite of mountains of evidence and plain common sense, can they? Intelligent people are surely

³ Most people, once you've knocked the "opinion" evasion down are smart enough not to use the word "opinion" again, even if they are effectively saying the same thing.

open to facts, logic and reason, right? I'm not punchy; I'm just slow. The fault must lie within me, I thought. Somehow, in spite of approaching each argument from several different perspectives and in several different ways, and backed by numerous unimpeachable reference citations, I was failing to communicate my argument effectively. If my rhetoric⁴ were more polished... If the logic of my assertions were more direct and easily followed... If people actually liked me...

The problem didn't lie with me, although if people did like me it wouldn't have hurt. I've had more than one discussion with different institutional church "leaders" that followed this pattern. The leader in question (let's call him Nick O'Laitan, shall we?) was involved in X, say, and I would spend an hour enumerating Scriptural reasons why the practice of X was a bad thing. The verses at times followed the pattern of: "The Lord saith X shalt not be done by His people," 2YYYYYY 7:12. "The Lord hates X," ZZZZ 2:19. "If your brother is found to be doing X, admonish him in private. If he stops doing X you have saved a brother. If he continues in X tell it to the church, and if he won't listen to the church tell the former brother to hit the road." YZYZ 4:18. I'm not kidding, not really. I've presented plain speaking passages, in context and in harmony with the rest of Scripture, gone over the passages one-by-one and presented documented, witnessed behavior which was consistently and habitually practiced, that was a direct and flagrant abrogation of the Word. I've made such presentations to nice people who were sincerely concerned for the spiritual and even physical wellbeing of those who were under their "pastoral care", and who staunchly believed that they stood squarely for the Word of God. You know what I heard as a reply? "That's your opinion." "I interpret this differently." "Tradition supports my view." Perhaps the only honest man who actually understood what I'd just done replied, "What can I say? Your Pastor has feet of clay." Not good enough, because he didn't actually change his behavior.

And that's really what we're talking about, and why I thought to write about opinions. I actually started writing this paper over a year ago, under the tongue-in-cheek title "Opinions Are Wonderful Things," but I bogged down after two pages. If only my rhetoric were more polished, my logic simpler and more direct... yeah right. What prompted me then to want to write was the reaction I'd continually gotten from good, honest, sincere and well-meaning Christians whenever they learned about what I believed concerning the institutional Church, the Nicolaitan clergy and the Nicolaitan laity that keeps them in power, and Churchianity in general⁵. No matter how you slice it, Scripture alone does not support the way Church is done today, at least in America, which is really all I can personally attest to. In fact, much of what we call Church today is diametrically opposed to the Church in the Bible unless you color your Scriptural understanding with the writings of Church Fathers, Church Councils, synods, tradition, the writings of the Reformers and Puritan and other so-called

⁴ I feel the foregoing is necessary today, unfortunately:

rhet·o·ric (rĕt'ə-rĭk) *n.*

1.
 - a. The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively.
 - b. A treatise or book discussing this art.
2. Skill in using language effectively and persuasively.
3.
 - a. A style of speaking or writing, especially the language of a particular subject: *fiery political rhetoric*.
 - b. Language that is elaborate, pretentious, insincere, or intellectually vacuous: *His offers of compromise were mere rhetoric*.
4. Verbal communication; discourse.

[Middle English *rethorik*, from Old French *rethorique*, from Latin *rhētoricē*, *rhētorica*, from Greek *rhētorikḗ* (*tekhnḗ*), *rhetorical* (*art*), feminine of *rhētorikos*, *rhetorical*, from *rhētor*, *rhetor*. See **rhetor**.]

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⁵ If YOU don't already know see "[Forsake Assembly?](#)" ([Assembly.PDF](#)), "[It's the System](#)" ([System.PDF](#)), "[Strange Fire](#)" ([StrangeFire.PDF](#)), "[Show ME](#)" ([ShowMe.PDF](#)), "[Christian Worship](#)" ([Worship.PDF](#)) and "[Tradition!](#)" ([Tradition.PDF](#)) in the [Studies and Essays](#) section of [2Cor105.com](#). Afterwards you can shoot me a nasty e-mail, if you'd like.

Divines, the scribblings of theologians of various ilk, and the proclamations of various and sundry Christian Superstars, authors, speakers, television and radio personalities of today. I hope you have the giant 64-color pack with the crayon sharpener, because that's a lot of coloring.

The point of all this is simple. After years of hearing, "Well, your opinion is way out there," or "D. James Kennedy has a different opinion," or whoever believes this or that ad-nauseam, I've finally become wise to what's going on: they DON'T WANT to accept any evidence that I present because they DON'T WANT to change the way they're doing things now, and I don't entirely blame them. It's comfortable and familiar like a broken-in pair of Oxfords, like that easy chair that you just can't throw out in spite of the duck-taped tears in the fabric. There's that nice flow of the seasons: Advent with candles and holly, special Choir arrangements and if you have enough creative types, a dramatic presentation or a living manger, complete with live animals; Ascension, with more choir music, palm fronds, and maybe a passion play with more live animals; all the new moms stand and receive a gift, now old moms, now grandmoms; it's your turn new dads, old dads and gramps; VBS time, write scripts, rehearse songs, make T-shirts, Jesus loves the little children, for the children we simplify - so the colors represent the Gospel - the gospel that we should be sharing with the children's parents in the course of our daily lives; Independence day, flags and bunting, potluck cookout, sack race, sparklers, and aren't we blessed to be able to worship as we do without jack-booted atheists banging on our doors; Harvest time, lets dress up as Noah and the animals, oranges and browns and reds; Thanksgiving, yes, thank the Lord for all the year's blessings in case we forgot to thank Him when they were received, and thanks to the lay people here who've helped so much. How comforting are the weekly rhythms: the rituals; the building with the steeple; Children and adults in Sunday School; the big old organ; the altar; the pulpit; all rise; hymn number 198; deacons pass the plates; Children's Church; the sermon - tell them what you're going to say - give them an anecdote - make your points rhyme or do an acrostic - tell them what you just told them; the benediction; handshake - good sermon Pastor. It's all so nice and the people - sure you only see most of them on Sundays, but they like you and you like them, and if the car breaks down, or there's water in the basement, there's someone you can call for help. Yeah, I get it. Yeah, I understand. But...

I don't want to hear John MacArthur's opinion or RC Sproul's, nothing against them⁶. That's their opinion, and it may even be an informed opinion, but what is it informed by? The Word ALONE, or years of indoctrination in tradition and other men's opinions? Don't read to me from Calvin or Luther. You want an opinion? They didn't stray too far from mother Rome after all, and now their descendents are drifting back into the orbit of the mother (Marian?) church. Don't quote Irenaeus or Polycarp or Clement of Rome or Zero of Mostel (that's a joke, ok?). Please, please don't talk to me of Nicaea or Chalcedon or Constantinople, and mention the word "tradition" at your peril. What I want is what I give: show me facts, show me evidence from the only reliable source of Truth - The Word of God. Let's look at it together, along with the context, and compare what we find with the rest that Scripture has to say on the topic.

Then listen to me, and if I present the case for church being a house-to-house gathering of the family of believers, in an orderly but not rigidly ordered time of praise, fellowship and especially building up the saints, and if I do it with Scripture alone, rightly divided, don't tell me it's just my opinion. If you have an answer that fits the criteria laid out here, I will certainly listen, and we can talk.

I've made this offer before, many times, so I don't hold out much hope. Look, I've said from the beginning that I don't want people to believe ME. Lord forbid it! And I'm the last person anyone should be following: I've never had a God-breathed utterance or written a line of Scripture in my life. The only thing Scripture tells me to persuade people about is the faith⁷. So really, I can show you what I am convinced is proved beyond doubt by the evidence of Scripture, and you can decide for yourself, but you know what? I'm not going to press the point or argue. I'm not leading anything but the life God has given me, so whether you believe what I have to say or not is your choice and between you and God. And you know what else? That's my opinion.

⁶ OK, I DO have some things against them, but their Reformed teachings are not the issue here.

⁷ Acts 18:14, Acts 26:28, Acts 28:23 and 2 Cor. 5:11 - all are examples of Paul persuading men concerning the Gospel, and Paul is our example (2 Thess 3:9).