

Phil Johnson:

In Which I Make Some Concessions to Thabiti Anyabwile:

The redoubtable Mr. Anyabwile wrote:

Dr. White charges me with not “being overly careful in representing Wilson’s words, nor in evaluating, fairly and properly, Johnson’s citing of the article.” I understand the charge if all you have is that tweet and you’re jumping into an A + B conversation instead of C’ing your way out. **I’d been tagged in a number of misrepresenting and further inflammatory statements from Mr. Johnson. So I replied in an admittedly snarky way, knowing full well that Mr. Johnson speaks snark fluently. The tweet is hyperbole. I have shared a conference platform with Mr. Johnson in Ocean City, New Jersey, about a decade ago. I know perfectly well that he’s capable of articulating the gospel of our Lord.** I’m going to assume Dr. White’s press here results from jumping in mid-stream and perhaps not carefully observing the tone of things up to that point.

1. He’s right that I’m fluent in snark. I haven’t been able to keep that a secret.
2. He’s right therefore that I didn’t take offense or assume he literally meant what he said. I got the hyperbole.
3. We *did* both speak at a Conference in Ocean City, New Jersey a few years ago. I’d almost forgotten that, but Thabiti’s message there was really good. We also met and participated on a panel together a few years before that, during one of the early T4G Conferences.

However...

1. I don't recall tagging Thabiti in *any* snarky posts prior to his hyperbolic remark. In more than a year's time, by my records, I had referenced him by name or tagged him in only three posts, all within two days prior to his remark—and while I did express disagreement, none of my Tweets would really qualify as “snarky.” Here are some links to those three Tweets:
 - a. **One** in which I disagreed with what he wrote and recalled that I had expressed a very similar disagreement in some detail two years ago.
 - b. **Another** in which I simply referred to (and briefly replied to) his statement about the “complicity” of white people’s grandparents in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King—in order to correct someone else’s misunderstanding.
 - c. And **a third** in which I pointed out the difference between what he was saying that day & what he had said the day before.
 - d. I *had*, that very day, answered a series of Tweets asking for clarification on why I disagreed with Thabiti’s position. That thread culminated in this Tweet, in which Thabiti is not directly referenced, but this is the comment that links to Doug Wilson’s article, and it’s the one that seemed to raise Thabiti’s thermostat.

One other point I'd like to make: If you read Thabiti's article too quickly, you might not notice that paragraph I quoted from him (above) doesn't actually deal with the point James White was making. James's point was not that Thabiti unfairly savaged me. James himself might agree at times that I am richly deserving of any snark that might come my way. (Hey, my own kids would affirm *that.*)

But James was merely pointing out that Thabiti was wrong to suggest that in the article I linked to, Doug Wilson had stated that the gospel begins with forgiveness rather than repentance. What Doug said was, “If you want racial reconciliation, you have to start with forgiveness. Forgiveness is not the pinnacle we [are] appointed to

climb. Forgiveness has to be the foundation we build from. If you want men and women to reconcile their long grievances with each other, you have to *begin* with forgiveness, you have to start with pardon.”

Thabiti *did* understand this, because he says in his very next sentence (after the quotation I’ve cited in the text box above), “But for the sake of argument, let’s let Dr. White’s concern stand. So Mr. Wilson says *racial reconciliation* must start with forgiveness. I referred in error to “the gospel.” That’s my bad. I own that.”

Here’s the thing: that’s not merely a point to be conceded “for the sake of argument.” That *is* the key point Dr. White was making in his first Tweet on the issue.

Now, *for the sake of argument*, let’s acknowledge the truth of this one thing Thabiti said: “The first command of the gospel is ‘repent.’” That’s absolutely true, and that point has been at the heart of many things that I have edited for main author I work with, written on my own, and preached over the past thirty-five years.

But ***the gospel calls me to repent for my own sins—not the sins of others.*** Not even my great grandad’s sins (and he was quite the scoundrel). This emphasis on repentance by proxy is what many of us object to most about Thabiti’s views on what’s required for “social justice” in the new order of “evangelical” conviction. It’s not evangelical at all. It has a flavor reminiscent of Roman Catholicism’s ideas about indulgences and the “treasury of Merit,” or the Mormons’ doctrine of baptism for the dead.

Besides, my ancestors were not *all* guilty of racism. I realize that many of today’s stylish social justice warriors are convinced that any ***white*** person’s denial of racism is simply proof of guilt. But my view of racism is rather old fashioned. I believe people—***individuals***—should be judged by the content of their character, and not the color of their skin.



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