

Question: I find it confusing and distressing to hear Christian people arguing about what the Bible says. Is it not possible to discuss the Bible without arguing over it?

The reasons people argue about matters taught in the Bible are as varied as the individuals involved, their attitudes toward others and their ways of interpreting scripture. However, we do need to learn to discuss the Bible openly and honestly in a manner that respects one another without engaging in heated arguments. Even though we may not agree with all of our friends, we should be able to learn from nearly anyone. Arguing often betrays arrogance, a lack of respect for others and/or an unwillingness to consider what another may say. The Bible does warn us to not have anything to do with “foolish and stupid arguments” that “produce quarrels” (2 Timothy 2:23). But honest discussion of different views presented in the spirit of a genuine truth-seeker can be a valuable part of growing “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:18). The wise man said, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17 NIV).

Often arguments about what the Bible teaches spring from uninformed opinions not based on careful study. We cannot assume that every person who expresses an opinion knows what he is talking about. Someone needs to suggest that those who disagree go to the Bible itself and see what it actually says. We may continue to disagree on an interpretation of scripture, but we can at least have a foundation for reasonable discussion. We should follow the example of the Berean Christians who “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

At other times, arguments are not about what the Bible actually *says*, but what it *does not say*. For example, the Bible is very clear in telling us that Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night (John 3:2). Many different views have been suggested as to *why* he came at night, but the Bible does not tell us why. Accepting the freedom to think differently on matters where God has not spoken, we may avoid some arguments.

Some arguments are more about how to apply biblical teachings than about what the Bible says or does not say. Good biblical interpretation is a two-step process: (a) What did the words mean to the original readers in their historical time and cultural situation? (b) In view of step one, how would these words apply to us today

in our culture? The second step is open to more differences in understanding. Thus, once again an attitude that respects the sincerity of others and leaves any judging of actions or motives to God is important (Romans 14).

In addition to the above considerations, don't let Satan deceive you into believing that the Bible can't be understood just because people argue about some things it may say. God has not hidden his message in an unknowable form. Jesus said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17 NIV). Education and long study of the Bible can enhance one's ability to understand God's word, but you do not have to be a scholar. Anyone who loves and desires truth can understand the things important to a life with Christ and an eternal relationship with God. Begin where you are. Act upon what you do understand. As you do this, God's Spirit will open up a greater understanding of His word (1 Corinthians 2:11-14).

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: universitychurchmurray.com] 2016/07/15