

COVER STORY: How to Disagree and Still Keep it Holy

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Disagreements are inevitable. Whether we're at a social gathering, discussing politics, or debating hot-button topics like climate change or vaccines, differing opinions will arise. In today's "speak your mind" culture, it's easy to become embroiled in heated arguments. But as Christians, we're called to a higher standard in our interactions with others.

The Bible provides guidance on how we can navigate disagreements in a way that honors God and maintains our witness. Here are four principles that are both biblically sound and conveniently applicable to everyday living, for disagreeing but being able to keep it holy.

1. Hear First, Then Speak.

One of the most overlooked aspects of healthy disagreement is the importance of listening. We often enter conversations with the goal of making our point, but the Bible encourages us to listen to hear first, then speak second. James 1:19 instructs, "My beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger," (MEV). It is important to hear others before we respond, especially in moments of tension and conflict.

Listening well means giving the other person our full attention, being fully present in the moment and genuinely trying to understand their perspective. Too often, we listen with the intent of formulating a rebuttal before the other

person is even finished speaking, rather than truly engaging with what the other person is saying. Proverbs 18:13 warns, "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him," (MEV). When we fail to listen, we risk responding in ways that are unhelpful or even hurtful because we haven't fully grasped the other person's point of view.

Active listening not only helps us understand the other person's perspective but also diffuses tension. When people feel heard, they are less likely to become defensive or combative. Listening shows respect and demonstrates that we value the other person, especially when we disagree with them. Proverbs 1:5 reminds us, "A wise man will hear and will increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel," (MEV). We can always learn something from others, even—sometimes especially—when we don't see eye to eye.

In addition to listening more, we should also be careful with our words. Proverbs 10:19 tells us, "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise." Sometimes, saying less can be more effective than filling the conversation with arguments and rebuttals. We must choose our words carefully, ensuring that they are thoughtful, respectful and in line with God's Word. What better way to begin hearing first, than by speaking less?

In practice, listening well means asking questions for clarification, summarizing the other person's points to show understanding and pausing before responding. This approach creates an environment where both parties feel heard and valued, making it easier to navigate disagreements without hostility.

Ultimately, the key to listening more and speaking less is humility. We must be willing to set aside our desire to win the argument and focus instead on building understanding and maintaining peace.

2. Discretion and Wise Judgment

In a world where opinions are freely shared, we often feel compelled to jump into every debate. Whether it's a heated Facebook discussion or a casual chat with a friend, we sometimes believe it's our duty to correct those we disagree with. However, the Bible encourages discernment when choosing which battles to engage in. Not every disagreement is worth our energy.

Proverbs 26:4-5 gives us a valuable lesson in wisdom: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit," (MEV). This passage may seem contradictory at first, but it emphasizes the importance of discerning when and how to engage in a disagreement. If addressing the issue will only result in pointless quarreling, it's often best to let it go. On the other hand, if a serious matter is at stake, responding thoughtfully can bring clarity and prevent harm.

Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2:23-25 also encourage us to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes that generate strife. "But avoid foolish and unlearned debates, knowing that they create strife. The servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but must be gentle toward all people, able to teach, patient, in gentleness instructing those in opposition. Perhaps God will grant them repentance to know the truth," (MEV). This passage reminds us that as believers, our goal should not be to win arguments but to foster understanding and teach in kindness. It's vital to assess whether the matter is truly significant before engaging in debate.

Choosing which disagreements to engage in also involves recognizing when others are not open to changing their minds. Proverbs 9:7-8 warns us, "He who reproves a scorner gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man gets hurt. Do not reprove a scorner, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he

will love you,” (MEV). If someone is entrenched in their views and unwilling to listen, it’s often better to walk away in peace than to push further and invite animosity.

We should approach disagreements with discernment, asking ourselves whether engaging in the debate will lead to a fruitful exchange or whether it will only breed contention. Not every issue needs to be addressed, and we must act on God’s wisdom to determine which battles are worth fighting.

3. Grace, Because He First Gave Us Grace

Even when we believe we’re right, how we present our views is just as important as the content of our argument. The Bible is clear that we are to be gracious and kind in our interactions, even when we’re in the midst of a disagreement. Ephesians 4:1-2 urges us to “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called. With all humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another in love,” (MEV). When we argue with others in a way that is combative or condescending, we step outside of the love and humility that God calls us to exhibit.

Even if we have the best arguments and are factually correct, we lose credibility if we fail to demonstrate Christ’s love through our words and actions. Responding with gentleness can diffuse a situation and help the other person feel heard and respected.

Being gracious also means avoiding insults, name-calling or ridiculing the other person’s viewpoint. Even if their opinion seems outrageous to us, our goal should never be to tear them down but to engage with respect and kindness. Colossians 4:6 encourages us, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you should answer everyone,” (MEV). Our words should be thoughtful, considerate and intended to build bridges, not walls.

It's also essential to maintain a calm and composed demeanor when the other person is not. Disagreements can't escalate if at least one person remains calm and courteous. As we exhibit Christ-like character in our interactions, we may inspire others to do the same. Even if we don't change their mind, we can leave a lasting impression through our conduct.

In essence, being gracious in disagreement involves controlling our emotions, using kind and respectful language, and treating others with dignity, even when they disagree with us. Our goal should always be to reflect Christ in every conversation, allowing His love to guide our words and actions.

4. Humility and Common Ground

Humility is the vital ingredient of Christian character, essential when navigating disagreements. Philippians 2:3 encourages us, "Let nothing be done out of strife or conceit, but in humility let each esteem the other better than himself," (MEV). When we approach disagreements with a spirit of humility, we acknowledge that we don't have all the answers and that others may have valuable insights to offer.

Pride can quickly turn a healthy discussion into a heated argument. Proverbs 13:10 states, "Only by pride comes contention, but with the well-advised is wisdom," (MEV). When our goal is to prove we're right, we create division and conflict. But when we approach the conversation with humility, we open the door for meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding.

Humility also involves recognizing that we may not be as informed as we think we are. Even if we've studied a topic extensively, there's always more to learn. Others may bring different perspectives and experiences that can deepen our understanding. By staying open to learning, we allow God to teach us through others, even in the midst of disagreement.

In addition to humility, seeking common ground can help de-escalate conflict and build connection. Often, disagreements become more heated when both parties focus solely on their differences. However, finding areas of agreement, no matter how small, can create a sense of camaraderie and reduce tension.

The disciples didn't always agree on how to carry out God's work, yet they still referred to each other as brothers and co-laborers in Christ (Gal. 2:11-16; Acts 15:30-41). This shared identity in Christ helped them maintain unity, even when they disagreed on specific issues.

Remembering we share common hopes, values and dreams smooths the path forward to treating others with love and respect, even in disagreement. Whether it's acknowledging shared goals or simply affirming the other person's good intentions, finding common ground can soften the conversation and foster a spirit of collaboration rather than competition.

Be Agreeable, Choose to Be Christlike

Disagreements are part of life. It is as simple as that. We all have them, we will run into them on any given day. But as followers of Christ, we are called to handle them with grace, humility and love. By choosing our battles wisely, being gracious in our approach, listening more than we speak, and staying humble, we can navigate disagreements in a way that honors God and preserves relationships. Romans 12:18 reminds us, "If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men," (MEV). While we may not always agree with others, we can strive to disagree in a way that reflects the character of Christ and promotes peace.

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