

3 Critical Choices You Must Make When You Know You've Heard From God

I'm a person of strong opinions. It's a rare occasion when I don't have an opinion on a subject.

Lately, though, I've been wondering about the art of disagreement. Without meaning to, I've come up against passions that run high and emotions that run deep. The subjects cover everything from the national debt to exercise preferences to application of Scripture. While I understand the strong feelings—I have them myself—I don't understand the hostility that targets and denigrates anyone who believes differently.

A Few Examples

Several years ago, I wrote a blog post describing my observations about yoga. Do I have strong feelings about it? Yes, I do. However, what surprised me were the comments that went far beyond thoughtful agreement or disagreement (which I welcome). Many comments attacked those in the opposite "camp." I found it necessary to delete some because of their uncontrolled vitriol. By the way, the hostility came from both sides—Christian and non.

On another note, friends, acquaintances and strangers have been posting scathing denunciations of Republicans or Democrats, depending on which side of the aisle they identify with. Hyperbole abounds in an effort to portray the opposing party as unintelligent, elitist or communist. And those are some of the more civil terms!

Finally, I had a conversation with a young lady who disagreed with something I taught from Scripture. The position I hold is

one supported by many well-respected Christian denominations. The position she holds is held by many well-respected Christian denominations. Unfortunately, rather than agree to disagree, she gave vent to vehement indignation at what she pronounced to be “false teaching” simply because she did not have the same view. I should add this was not a matter of interpretation, but simply a matter of application.

These three experiences cause me to wonder: *Have we lost the ability to disagree without attacking those who hold an opposing view?* These days, disagreements quickly deteriorate into *ad hominem* arguments, where the person is targeted instead of the position they hold.

Convictions and Preferences

I am *not* saying we should compromise our convictions. But perhaps the issue is that we don’t understand the difference between a *conviction* and a *preference*. A conviction, according to *Webster’s Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary*, is “a fixed belief.” A preference is “the choice of one thing or person over another.” A conviction is something we would die for. A preference is not. A conviction is something we would stake our reputation on. A preference is not.

Before we engage with others on everything from politics to shampoo brands, perhaps we should spend some time—and prayer—determining our convictions and our preferences ... and deciding which is which. And most importantly, listening to what the Holy Spirit has to say to us about both.

Then we have a series of choices to make.

We need to choose our **motive**. When we respond to those who disagree with us, are we doing so out of anger, self-righteousness or love for others caught in error?

We also need to choose our **venues**. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us “To everything there is a season, a time for every

purpose under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). A social media venue such as Facebook is not the place for Christians to unleash a torrent of negative comments about nonbelievers, and then expect to be a witness to our unbelieving friends! Come to think of it, Christians shouldn’t be doing that *anywhere*.

Finally, we need to choose our **words**. Some words are more emotionally charged than others, igniting fires and leaving charred remains in their path. Certainly not what we want to do if our goal is to persuade others to our views.

The art of disagreement does not require compromising our convictions. It does not even entail parking our preferences. It *does* involve respecting those who disagree with us. Who knows? Someday, they may even be won over to our way of thinking—or we may be won over to theirs!

Your turn:

How might distinguishing between preferences and convictions help you better handle disagreements? {eo}

Ava Pennington is a writer, speaker and Bible teacher. She writes for nationally circulated magazines and is published in 32 anthologies, including 25 “Chicken Soup for the Soul” books. She also authored Daily Reflections on the Names of God: A Devotional, endorsed by Kay Arthur. Learn more at .

This article originally appeared at .