

10 Steps to Honor God and Be Less Contentious

It is one thing to be bold. It is another thing to be argumentative.

It is one thing to be confrontational. It is another thing to be contentious.

Yet we often confuse these things, thinking that in order to present our positions boldly and without compromise, we must be contentious and argumentative. To the contrary, the Word of God says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger,” (Prov. 15:1). Scripture also teaches that, “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone,” (Prov. 25:15).

Of course, in the heat of a spirited discussion, especially on issues of great importance, it’s all too easy to become contentious and argumentative. I’ve done that far too many times over the decades, especially in private interaction.

But if we are to represent the Lord rightly, if we are to bring Him honor and not shame, and if we are to change the hearts and minds of those we’re interacting with, we must step higher. That requires patience. And it requires love.

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It requires patience because it means we will have to think before we speak (or write), to weigh our words against biblical guidelines, to understand before we answer.

In stark contrast, Proverbs states, “Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions,” (18:2).

How many times has this applied to you or me? My guess is more times than we would like to admit. Let us not act like fools!

That's why Jacob (James) wrote, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires," (James 1:19–20). He also wrote this: "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless," (James 1:26).



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That's why, to repeat, it takes patience to speak (or write) on behalf of the Lord. Who says we have to respond now to every post or comment or article or video? Who says we have to respond at all?

Communicating in a way that glorifies the Lord also requires love.

What is the purpose of our communication? To win an argument? To look (or sound) right? To vent? To make someone else look bad? To show off our knowledge or our rhetorical skills? To give place to our flesh?

None of this is based on love, not in the least. To the contrary, while love thinks of others, being contentious is self-centered. Love helps; being contentious hurts.

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As Paul so famously wrote, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight

in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres," (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

Could you imagine what the internet (or our conversations) would look like if we only communicated in love? We would probably eliminate more than 90% of our words if we determined only to speak and write and talk in love. May the Lord help us!

That's why it's so important for us to ask ourselves a series of questions before we communicate:

1. Do my words glorify Jesus?
2. Would I want someone writing or speaking about me like this?
3. Do I truly care about the well-being of the person I'm talking about (or talking to)?
4. Do I genuinely understand their position?
5. Will my comment help to enlighten them?
6. Are my words seasoned with grace? (See Colossians 4:6: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.")
7. Am I communicating out of frustration or anger or impatience?
8. If I must rebuke or correct, am I careful to build up and not just tear down, to heal and not just wound?
9. Do my words bring life or death?
10. Does my communication comport with the fruit of the Spirit or with the works of the flesh?

For those who need a refresher, here's what Paul wrote in Galatians 5:19–23: "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the

like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

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The works of the flesh speak of contentiousness and strife and division. The fruit of the Spirit speaks of goodness and grace and love and truth.

Let us then, make every effort, with God's help, to follow the way of love and to nail contentiousness to the cross.

Doing so will produce a radical revolution in our communication, and, in turn, will produce wonderful, lasting fruit in the lives of many. Let us step higher!

Dr. Michael Brown () *is the host of the nationally syndicated The Line of Fire radio show. He is the author of over 40 books, including Can You be Gay and Christian?; Our Hands are Stained with Blood; and Seizing the Moment: How to Fuel the Fires of Revival. You can connect with him on Facebook, X or YouTube.*