

Overcoming “Cognitive Dissonance”

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Any person interested in religion will inevitably be exposed to new ideas he has never considered. This is a natural part of the growth process. Some ideas that seem new may actually be ancient, being rooted in sound Biblical teaching (Jeremiah 6:16). Other ideas or teachings are new because they did not come from God, but man (cf. Matthew 15:9). What should one do when he is exposed to religious information that is new to him? Should he always reject any information that contradicts what he has always believed, or should he “prove [test] all things, hold fast that which is good”? (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Obviously, he should test all things by God’s Word, but when a person is exposed to an idea or teaching that contradicts what he believes, there is a tendency to reject that new information. Some may call this stubbornness, pride, or various other terms, but the psychological term is “cognitive dissonance.” Cognitive dissonance is defined by Encyclopedia Britannica as:

the mental conflict that occurs when beliefs or assumptions are contradicted by new information. The unease or tension that the conflict arouses in people is relieved by one of several defensive maneuvers: they reject, explain away, or avoid the new information; persuade themselves that no conflict really exists; reconcile the differences; or resort to any other defensive means of preserving stability or order in their conceptions of the world and of themselves. -- britannica.com

Cognitive dissonance is most dangerous when it prevents someone from acknowledging critical Truth from God’s Word. Some may assume that nothing can be done about it, but there is one thing that is so powerful, it can always overcome this problem—love! If a person loves God more than himself, more than family, more than his preacher, more than traditions, or anything else, his love for God will cause him to let go of any practices or beliefs that conflict with God’s will as revealed in His Word, even if the idea of doing so is initially uncomfortable or difficult (Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 8:15; John 6:60, 67-69; Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 1 Peter 4:11). Love for God should motivate one to objectively examine all things to determine whether or not they are within God’s will. If his love for God is supreme, he will reject anything contrary to God’s will, regardless of how long he had believed it or how many people still believe it. Therefore, loving God with all of our hearts is always the key to overcoming this problem! Jesus said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37).

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