

Cutting Off Conversation

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In the world of politics, there are many disagreements and controversial topics that can stir up emotions such as anger. Often it seems that when one side cannot defend their position logically, they resort to irrational behavior such as name calling, vulgarity, or even acts of violence. They refuse to have an intelligent conversation, perhaps because they know their position will not stand the test of scrutiny. They typically resort to *ad hominem* arguments that attack people personally (rather than logically addressing the positions people hold), or quite often they simply shut down all conversation.

Similar situations often arise in the realm of religious discussion. Some will discuss religion gladly, and some refuse. Still others are initially eager, but soon refuse to continue because they cannot defend their beliefs. Those who have studied thoroughly and have made the necessary changes in their lives to match up with what the Bible says have a certain confidence that many others do not. This is not arrogance, but simply the assurance that God wants all of His faithful children to possess: “*And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*” (1 Jn. 2:3; cf. Col. 2:2; Heb. 10:22). Knowing what the Bible says, and knowing that we are following it gives us a “*boldness*” that is Biblical: “*Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world*” (1 Jn. 4:17; cf. 5:3; Jn. 8:31-32; Eph. 3:4, 12; 5:17; Rom. 8:16). This boldness is not only regarding the Judgment, but in having discussions with people of different religions, as God commands us to do (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 9:22; 19:8-9; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Titus 1:11; 1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3).

Faithful members of the church of Christ generally love to talk about the Bible, God, and religion in general. We know we do not deserve salvation (Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:8), and we are not beyond the possibility of sinning (1 John 1:7-10; cf. 2:1-6); but we also know there is only “*one faith*” (Eph. 4:5), and the Bible both provides and validates the system of faith we believe and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 4:6, 17). That Biblical system of faith has been, and can still be, defended decisively (Php. 1:17). We dare not deviate from God’s perfect pattern (Col. 3:17).

Jesus demands that after we get our lives right, we **must** go to others and teach them how to “get right” with God (Mt. 7:5; 28:19-20; Jn. 7:24). Some already know God’s will, but constantly live in direct opposition to it with no true remorse (Gal. 6:1; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; James 5:19-20). Some are in complete ignorance of God’s will (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). There are also many sincere religious people who have been deceived by false teachings under the guise of true Christianity, and they need the Truth (Mt. 7:13-23; Jn. 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:22). However, in my experience, it is extremely difficult to get people to talk about the most important matters in life! (eternal matters). Some seem very eager to talk about spiritual matters initially, but when they are kindly shown exactly what the Bible says (which often contradicts their actions or beliefs), they immediately shut down the whole conversation. Why is there a sudden lack of interest in discussing spiritual matters? Where is the

willingness to change when one sees that what he has believed or practiced in the past is completely absent from (or contradictory to) the Bible? If I am the one who is wrong, do you not love me enough to teach me? (Eccl. 7:5; Psa. 141:5; Prov. 9:8,9; 19:25; 27:5,6; 28:23; Gal. 4:16).

Someone may try to defend those who refuse to discuss these matters of eternal importance, saying they may not have studied enough to defend what they practice; however, God commands them to be ready to give an answer (1 Pet. 3:15), and they should have been like the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily and refused to do anything they could not find authorized in God's Word! (Acts 17:11; cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:15-18; 1 Pet. 4:11). Those in error could still potentially be right with God in the future—all they need is a humble heart willing to study and change where necessary! I often study with preachers in all kinds of denominations (taking a loving, patient approach). These men have spent years in study, and as a general rule they all shut down conversation when they realize that they cannot defend what they teach and practice (all glory to God for His indestructible Word). They need the attitude of Apollos, but such is rare indeed (Acts 18:24-28).

The good news is that there are people out there who are honest and truly want to do God's will (Lk. 8:15). They truly love God and will change when shown the simple Truth of God's Word. Dear reader, are you one of those precious few who love Truth more than tradition, or do you shut down all conversation when you realize you are wrong and refuse to change?

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