
Words of Truth

Should We Give Place To Erring "Arguments"?

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The word debate, in the English language, means this: “a formal discussion on a particular topic in a public meeting or legislative assembly, in which opposing arguments are put forward” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Synonyms include: “...parley, argument, counterargument, dispute, wrangle, war of words, argumentation, disputation, dissension, disagreement, contention, conflict...” (Oxford American Writer’s Thesaurus). What stands out to you in all of that? As we move forward, think on what the word “debate” means. Think about the synonyms. If you know anything about the word of God, you should already see much of what we will learn.

When I was younger I was a member of a congregation (one that was apostate) that recommended learning to debate and learning from debates. The premise of what I had been taught was that you should hear two sides and choose which one is right. This way of thinking was appealing to me because I am good at debating and I like competition. I wanted to “champion the cause” (so to speak). What I had to learn was, there is a difference in contending for the faith (Jude 1:3-4) and being a person of strife, debate, and contention. Contending for the faith is of necessity at times (Philippians 1:17 and Galatians 2:11-17). Strife and contentiousness are works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). I had to repent of being a contentious person. Part of that process was learning what we are going to study now.

As I studied the Scriptures and matured in the faith instead of church of Christ traditions (Colossians 2:20-23), the following Scriptures struck me very hard regarding arguing and debating: *“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them... Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults”* (Romans 1:28-32 and II Corinthians 12:19-20).

Looking Into The Idea Of Debate

I did some studying about the words translated “debate” in Romans 1:29 and “debates” in II Corinthians 12:20. In Romans 1:29 and II Corinthians 12:20 it is the same Greek word. The word translated “debate(s)” means: “of uncertain affinity; a quarrel, i.e. (by implication) wrangling: — contention, debate, strife, variance” (Strong’s # 2054). Now, consider how that word is used in other Scriptures. It is translated “strife” in Romans 13:13, I Corinthians 3:3, Philippians 1:15, and I Timothy 6:4. Then we find that Greek word translated as “contentions” in I Corinthians 1:11, “variance” in Galatians 5:20, and “contentions” in Titus 3:9. Look at those Scriptures and read the contexts. Those Scriptures, in their contexts, show us that “debate” is sinful. It is carnal and is to be avoided. As you think about it, other Scriptures make this even clearer.

When false brethren came in among the saints they did not let them speak and then answer them to give brethren a choice. Notice: *“Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”* (Galatians 2:1-5).

There were and always will be false brethren (Matthew 7:15-20, Matthew 26:14-16, John 12:1-6, Acts 20:28-31, Galatians 5:7-9, I Timothy 1:19-20, II Timothy 2:14-18, II Timothy 4:10-17, and II Peter 2:1-3). False brethren are sneaky (Ephesians 4:14 and II Timothy 3:1-7). The Lord does NOT permit His people to listen to any and all argumentation. The Lord does not permit us to listen to opposing arguments (Proverbs 14:7, Proverbs 19:27, Matthew 16:5-12, Mark 4:24, Colossians 2:4-8, II John 1:9-11, and Revelation 2:14-16). The fact is, those that present things contrary to the truth are to be marked and avoided so that they do not deceive the simple (Romans 16:17-18). Think on that. How could the people of God claim to be faithful if we permitted that which God explicitly commands us to avoid?

Conclusion

This subject matter is clear. Debating is wrong on two accounts. The first, there is no Scriptural authority for us to engage in debate. We need authority for all that we say and do (Ephesians 5:10, Colossians 3:17, and II Timothy 3:16-17). Secondly, it is sinful because it is a direct transgression of all that was written above (I John 3:4). More could be said. However, for the honest student of the Scriptures, the abundance of evidence in our study should suffice. Let’s never allow debates to exist among us (I Corinthians 1:10 and Philippians 2:2).