

THE RIGHT TO BE RIGHT



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The Right to be Right

"What gives you the right to be right?" was the question that started this work. In answer, The **Right to Be Right** looks at arguments and disagreements in the Church, and the art of disagreement and bringing correction by looking at the issue of authority of scripture, truth, integrity, and love for our fellow man.

We will look at ideas such as

- Where do the ideas take us?
- Where does it fit in the Big Picture?
- Can we do more harm than good by trying to be correct?
- How do we face correction?

And finally, in making a stand for Him, what image do we portray of the Christ whom we claim to represent?

Sometimes the truth hurts. Sometimes we are hurtful with the truth.

There is a difference.

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Foreword.

Before I begin, let me first say that I am not pointing fingers at anyone in particular. The right to be right is a subject which has been argued before, and no doubt will be argued again by far greater minds than mine, so I do not claim to have all the answers, but am simply looking at the questions to see where this leads us.

Speaking shortly after the events mentioned below, one young lady heatedly asked a pastor from the opposing side, "*What gives you the right to be right?*" This question and the idea behind it formed the seed of an idea that stuck with me for some time. To me, and several others, the obvious answer was, "Truth is self-evident" but given the emotional arguments at the time, I knew that the statement would have to be carefully addressed. *The Right to be Right* was the result. But, as Michael Card says in the lyrics to his song, '*Present Reality*,' "Could it be the questions tell us more than answers ever do?"

The debate

A debate was held some years ago in Harare, Zimbabwe, in which it was broadly hinted that we do not have the right to correct other Christians or their theology until we know the whole picture, and since we cannot ever know God's entire plan for them, we should leave things where they are and let God do the work of correcting them, while we simply show those people the love and acceptance of God. The counter-argument was that God has given us His Word, which comprises mostly of correction to His people, and He expects us to use that Word to bring correction and reproof where necessary.

The background to this formal discussion amongst the churches in Harare was complex, but the short version is that a self-styled "General of Intercession" had made a prophecy regarding Zimbabwe from an international Christian conference in Guatemala ^[1]. At around the same time, some American evangelists had visited the country and publicly prophesied various things and urged people to do things in God's Name. Entire Ministries were launched in anticipation of the prophesied events.

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Needless to say, these prophecies were spectacularly inaccurate, and the things done in God's name were culturally insensitive and contradicted scriptural teaching on the subject. Many churches were unafraid to take a stand and call out the Americans' prophecies and teachings as false. Yet some strongly opposed those who made this stand, accusing them of "Breaking the Unity of the Spirit." Their idea was that there should never be any suggestion of disunity shown to unbelievers, further stating that disagreeing with them was inviting God's curse and judgement on the land.

Each of the sides in the debate were obviously convinced in their own minds as to the validity of the argument, and convinced that they were right. Whereas the conclusion of this particular issue has serious and deep implications within the Church, not all arguments such as this do, therefore it is my suggestion that in any good argument or debate, we look at where the argument takes us.

Paul wrote in Romans 14:5 that each person should be convinced in his own mind which days were special, which foods were permissible to eat, etc, a debate hotly contested in those days for various reasons^[2]. Later in the same passage he concluded:

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Rom 14:14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

Paul found no basis to compel anyone to eat foods previously not permissible, but appealed to each one to be convinced in their own mind, and if so convinced, let others accept that. There were, however times when he did make a stand, particularly against the Judaisers who changed the core of his Gospel message, making him particularly vehement- such as in Galatians chapter 1 vss 8&9^[3]

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

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So the question remains; when and on what basis do we make a stand? If, as Bible Believing Christians, we claim the Bible as our authority, then we *must* base our teachings and doctrines upon the Bible and be prepared to use the authority granted therein. If however, we base our arguments upon a particular confession such as Westminster etc, or teaching by a respected person, we then use their arguments as our authority, not God's Word.

Granted, we may see some minor differences on the intent or meaning of the scripture, but if taken systematically, a consensus can be reached and these differences should remain minor. If, however something is preached that is outside of scripture, the Word of God, then surely one has the right to point this out and question it?

In recent times, with the renewed interest in "Keeping the Unity in the Spirit," this has led to people doing just this being declared 'Divisive.' Jesus and Paul both made several statements about endeavouring to keep the Unity in the Spirit, so is it wrong to question non-Biblical statements and declarations? Is it possible to be both wrong *and* right? We will look at this shortly.

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Jesus' discourse to the woman at the well makes interesting reading. Let's take a look at the woman herself to begin with. As a Samaritan, she was despised by mainstream Jews, as Samaritans were considered usurpers and "half-breeds" at best. Although the Samaritans recognised and acknowledged God, they had their own ideas about how and where to worship Him, which went against what the Jews believed. As if this were not enough, the woman herself was possibly a serial adulterer. Despite this, Jesus let her know that he knew all about her without condemning her.

John 4:22-24 NIV

- 22) You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.
- 23) Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.
- 24) God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

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While correcting her theology, He did not make a personal attack against her. Neither did He compromise His stand, emphasising that worship must be done the right way and with the right attitude. But unlike many of us today, He was not just trying to win an argument, - He was trying to win the person.

Jesus kept the woman's best interest at heart as the primary issue here. Her spiritual welfare was kept at heart while bringing correction and mild rebuke, and in this case, mild rebuke was all that was necessary. The effect was that she ran and urged others to come and listen to Him. But how many other people have been offended to the point of turning their back on Christ because of some over-zealous people whose primary aim is confronting error, rather than presenting Christ, the reason for their Faith? In trying to be *correct*, they have wronged others by driving them away from Christ because of those who claim to represent Him.

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Returning to the debate “Can we bring correction if we ourselves do not know the entire picture?” brings to mind Jesus' statement to the Pharisees. “First remove the log from your own eye before you attempt to remove the speck from your brother's eye, for only then will you see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”^[4] Jesus does not state that because they have something in their eye, they are disqualified from pointing out the speck in other's eyes, rather He is exhorting them to do something about their own condition first, *then* having done so, point out the offending speck.

One does not have to be sinless before one can call others to repentance, or there would be no evangelists. But because we do not have *all* the answers does not disqualify us from using the answers we *do* have. The picture on a jigsaw puzzle may in most cases be deduced even if some of the pieces are missing. The details in this case are seldom as important as the whole. The Spirit of the Law was the reason behind the Letter of the Law. Following the Letter of the Law achieves little if the reason for the Law is forgotten; - even Jesus confirmed that the Law served a purpose:

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Mat 5: 20 NIV

20) For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Content vs. Intent

To my mind, this brings out the obvious question: Why do we do what we do? Although this would seem to be an obvious question, it is perhaps so obvious that it has been overlooked. Proverbs 15:1 tells us “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” There is no mention of compromise here, just a simple statement. Most people are familiar with the scripture “In your anger, do not sin” (Ps.4: 4). It is obvious, particularly in light of the money changer’s experience of Jesus in the Temple, that it is possible to be angry and not sin. Indeed, many times God himself tells the Children of Israel that they have angered Him, so anger, *per se* is not the issue. The issue is, “Do not allow your anger or emotions to get out of control.”

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Many people have experienced times when they have burned with a 'righteous anger.' It is in times such as these that the potential for damage is greatest, when things are said which are not always meant. It is as if we use our Sword as a bludgeon rather than a blade. The late Ravi Zacharias, one of the foremost Christian apologists of our time once pointed out that there is an Indian proverb, "You cannot cut off a man's nose, and expect him to appreciate the flowers you give him in compensation!" But whereas a bludgeon is meant to hurt or disable, a blade is *meant* to divide one part from another separating fact and opinion, and right from wrong. (Ref. Hebrews 4:12) **Sometimes the Truth does hurt. Sometimes we are hurtful with the truth. There is a difference.**

If we try to bring correction without being concerned for the other person, in an "I'm right, you're wrong" attitude, we fall into the danger of becoming Self- Righteous, and close to becoming like the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

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The Pharisees, of course were left in no doubt what Jesus thought about them. Truth simply for the sake of being right again raises questions about the Spirit and the Letter of the Law, when the question of “Why are we doing this?” should be at the fore. Just as Jesus did with the woman at the well, we should always have the other’s best interests at heart, whether that be regarding issues of their salvation, or their understanding of who God is. In essence, this is the heart of *Agape* love.

Communication contributes to a huge part of the world’s problems today. The words we use can be the biggest problem in getting an idea across. I suspect that this is one reason for the popularity of social media platforms that provide the ability to post pictures, memes and quotes, rather than use one’s own words.

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The content however has always been more important to the individual than the means, or to put it another way, we take care over our words in order to get the right message across. To quote Jay Adams, *“I look on clarity as a sacred obligation of a Christian minister, whether he speaks from the pulpit or writes with his pen. Obscurity is the father of heresy, and ambiguity is the mother of all error. Clarity bears a close relationship with the Truth.”* [\[5\]](#)

There is also another problem within the Christian World. Many people do not like the words being used, and therefore ignore the *intent* and *content*, and instead criticize the *method*. This “shooting the messenger” appears to be largely a result of the modern inability to distinguish between criticism and personal attack. Unfortunately, they are both a fact of life.

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Everyone who has ever written an exam, a paper or dissertation understands that on submission to the examining authorities, it will undergo a critique. Most people do not take this personally because it is part of the process of learning and being corrected. Why is it then, that when this happens outside an academic institution the same people are upset when this happens? Should we not submit our ideas to the authority of Scripture for examination? The very purpose of Scripture is to teach, rebuke, correct and train!^[6]

By the same token, many people criticize with the *intention* of finding 'loopholes' or faults, not with the intention of looking at the intent or bringing correction. These are the people Jesus advised to take the log out of their own eye first. To criticize within reason and at the right time is fine, but if taken to extremes, misses the point. If one is constantly 'hyper-critical,' one is in danger of becoming a hypocrite!

Open minds: Closed to the Truth?

Several years ago, a well-known American academic wrote a book entitled, “*The closing of the American mind* [\[7\]](#).” In it, he put forward the proposal that in America, people have been conditioned for so long to accept everything with an open mind that they have closed their minds to the fact that there does remain a moral right and wrong. I see this principle at work in Christendom as well. And it is a lot more insidious.

Very often we do not like what the Bible says because of the emotional response it invokes in us. Let's look at a few examples:

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A common argument, particularly with 'traditional' denominations is, how do we reconcile for example the judicious hanging of criminals with a loving God who gave us the Ten Commandments', "Thou shalt not kill?" As always, a text out of context is a pretext. God is a Just God. Exodus 20:13 is more accurately translated "You shall not *murder*" in most modern translations. (רצח *Ratsach* - H7523 Strong's) Very soon after the giving of the 10 commandments on Mount Sinai, God himself commanded Israel to go into the Land of Canaan and *completely wipe out the inhabitants*^[8].

In the Book of Judges, the Benjaminites and half-tribe of Manasseh are singled out because they did *not wipe out the inhabitants*. *Why was this?*

In Genesis, God told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves, then return home to bring God's judgement on the Amorites, but not for four hundred years, because the Amorite's sin was 'not complete' yet. God is Just and Merciful, but is still Omniscient, knowing the outcome of all.

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In time, the Israelites themselves would be God's punishment upon the Amorites. This is an example of how people fail to look at the whole picture, and instead look only at the details they can see. It is also an example of how people tend to erroneously interpret the Word through their own culture, society and understanding.

In Leviticus 10, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu decided to cut corners and offer incense to the Lord using "unauthorised" fire- fire not taken from the altar of the Lord, but somewhere else. Fire came out from before the Lord and killed them.

Lev 10:3 ESV

3) Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' "And Aaron held his peace.

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When God says something is wrong, it is wrong, no matter how we see it. God's specific instructions had been ignored. Again, as God's representatives, the real question is how God is seen by our actions. God would not allow their disobedience or laziness to go unpunished or others would believe that God did not care that His reputation as a Holy and Just God had been dishonoured.

In 2 Chronicles 18:17, the king of Israel asked the prophet Micaiah to prophesy regarding the upcoming battle. The prophet told him that Israel would be scattered like sheep on the hills. The king turned to the king of Judah and said, "See? Didn't I tell you he only prophesies bad things about me?" The king had missed the point that Micaiah was only prophesying what God was telling him, and that if he would change his ways, God might change what He said about him. But, having been told the God's word on the subject, the King of Israel then proceeded to march off into battle (and his death) regardless, having made his own mind up in spite of what Micaiah the prophet had said.

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This to me is another issue- many of us just do not want to face facts when presented to us. A natural response in some ways, this ‘Ostrich Mentality’ is present in many unbelievers. It is evidenced in the supposition that as long as I can’t see danger approaching, it won’t hurt me. It is also demonstrated in the [misguided] hope that as long as I don’t know I am wrong, I must be right. Sincerity has never been a benchmark for truth.

The problem with being shown that you are wrong is that then you have to do something about it. For many, this is a problem as they are forced to rethink their lives in view of this, which should be evidenced by repentance, leading to salvation. There are two alternatives available, however. The first is to ignore the evidence, and the second is to discredit the messenger. Like Ezekiel’s Watchman on the Wall, all we can do is to warn people of approaching danger. If we do not, we are held guilty for their destruction. If we do warn them and they ignore the warnings, they have no one to blame but themselves as we have done our job.

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The same also applies to those of us who are already Christians. Like Apollos, in Acts 18: 24-26, although we may have great learning, sometimes we may need to be instructed 'more adequately' regarding what we have learned, as well as possibly gaining more learning. Unfortunately, as a rule, people do not like to be shown that they are wrong. Having said that, I liken it to a runner on a marathon; I too would be angry to be told that I am on the wrong track when I am nearly at the finish, but I would be far angrier if I completed the race and discovered that *no one* had warned me that I was on the wrong track.

What and Who?

When Paul wrote to Timothy, in his second letter, chapter 3, verse 16, he told him that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Almost everyone is aware that the New Testament was written to give instruction and to avoid or to correct error.

Paul had no compunction about naming people who opposed him, and warned his readers to avoid those people. A closer look however, will show that Paul did name people who opposed him *preaching the Gospel*, but did not allow the situation to degenerate into a personal feud. But in the next few verses, he gave Timothy strict instructions: *“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.”*

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Paul was also deeply concerned about the doctrine he had preached being faithfully handed down. He starts off his first letter to Timothy by saying, “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.” His requirements for deacons, and those holding office was that they should keep the deep truths of the Faith with a clear conscience^[9]- “*What you heard from me,*” He wrote in his second letter to Timothy, “*Keep as the pattern of sound teaching.*”^[10]

The Bible is our Final Authority, and contains all the answers regarding Salvation and the Christian life we need. There can be no compromise on the Word of God, and for this reason it forms the standard for whatever correction, rebuke or encouragement is required. Because of this, even Jesus when arguing with the devil in the wilderness stood upon the scriptures, countering Satan’s arguments with “*It is written...*”

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The Scriptures give several direct commands and instructions on which there can be no compromise. There are also several references to cultural issues, which may not apply to us anymore, but do not stop us from learning from them^[11]. These are “Grey Areas,” and must be looked at in their context, as they still provide part of the “Big Picture.” Many people have quoted scripture out of context to back up their own unbiblical propositions and ideas. In cases such as this, correction should be brought immediately so that others are not deceived by this manipulation of Scripture.

This is not the sole concern of the ‘Priesthood’ or ‘religious academia,’ but should be the responsibility of all. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul writes that it is *imperative* that the Corinthian church, and by extension, we today, are to show discernment and integrity concerning the holiness of His Church.

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1Co 5:11-13 ESV

11) But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler^[12], drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one.

12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

13) God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

One focus in the Church is God's reputation and Holiness. As Christians, we bear His name and reputation. This judgement is therefore to be shown by those within the Church to those also within the Church, not those outside, as 1 Peter 4:14-19 says.

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Some have taught that it is not for the ordinary person to bring an accusation against their leaders or those “specially chosen,” misquoting the scripture, “Touch Not the Lord’s Anointed!” This was said by David when he had the opportunity to kill the divinely chosen King Saul in a cave. Instead, he cut off the tasselled hem from his robe, which signified his Royal authority.^[13] The next day, David challenged Saul publicly from across the valley in full hearing of all Saul’s men. Saul admitted that David was more righteous than he, and left him alone for a while. The fact that David did not harm Saul, but challenged him openly and in public is usually ignored.

Speaking of things brought by “deceiving spirits and “Doctrines of Demons,” Paul told Timothy, “If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the Faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” It is important therefore that we challenge ourselves – “Test ourselves to see if we are in the Faith.^[14]”

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The Apostle Peter warned in 2 Peter 2 that false teachers and prophets will be responsible for drawing many people away from Truth and pure worship, and bring God's Name (and reputation) into disrepute. This is why God commands us to separate from those who bring false teachings contrary to those already established, so that their teaching will not gain a foothold. "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." Paul warns Titus^[15]. But it is inevitable that this will bring divisions in the church. This is why Paul warned the Corinthian Church,

1Co 11:18-19

18) For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part,

19) for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

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This was something to be taken seriously. Deuteronomy 13 makes it clear that if a prophet announces a sign and wonder that actually takes place, but he uses this to lead you away from God, it is a test to see if you are listening and following God Himself... or that prophet. In Deuteronomy 18, the prophet who speaks in God's Name something God had not commanded him to say is to be put to death. As James says, "...You know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1) All of these things point to a God who cares deeply about His own reputation, His Holiness, and that of those who are called by His Name. The issue is ultimately about Him, not us and our ideas, therefore we cannot allow our own pride to get in the way. Where then do we draw a line and make a stand against those who disagree with us?

As said before, when it comes to Biblical issues, the arguments must be scripturally based. It is always best to argue from the scripture itself, rather than another's opinion of the scripture. If one chooses to stand upon the scripture, he can have no better foundation, for the other will find himself arguing against the Word of God.

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Arguing another's viewpoints often shows a disposition to listen to others rather than study for one's self, however we do recognise that many of our doctrines and teachings, although they come from Scripture, were first argued and clarified and put into words by the Early Church Fathers such as Augustine, and the Reformers such as Calvin and Luther etc, to whom we owe a great debt. In essence then, we can agree with another to the extent that they agree with the Bible and what it teaches. This of course means that we ourselves must first be grounded in Scripture in order to stand on God's Word.

Conclusion

In concluding, let me restate one of the key issues involved in the original argument: “Where does this lead us?” Do we ignore the issues, or come along side in Godly concern and bring correction? Many issues are in fact ‘Non issues,’ i.e. they are of a small or insignificant nature. Others however appear small, but if taken to their logical conclusion, lead one away from the Truth, or from Christ, and Him crucified. Some things shift the focus from Christ and His completed work, and instead focus on Man, and Man’s “potential” or the works that we do. These are the issues which give reason for concern.

When deciding whether this is a big issue or not, we should always consider the other person’s welfare as an important concern, remembering that the Truth sometimes does hurt.

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Paul states in Ephesians 4:15 that the ability to stand for, and speak the Truth in love is a mark of maturity. Having error confronted hurts, but there is no reason to unnecessarily rub salt in the wound. **This does not however leave an option for compromise on the Word of God.** We must also keep in mind that we cannot force others to see things our way, and like Ezekiel, we can only warn others. What they do with the warning is up to them (even though they are not free from the consequences of their decisions).

Another aspect of bringing correction is the reason why we do so. It is possible to be perfectly 'correct', and still be wrong. By this I mean that we may be going strictly 'according to the book,' but our reasons for doing so are wrong. Like Pharisees who followed the Law for the Law's sake, we too may be caught up in something for its own sake, simply in order to be right, while forgetting the reasons the laws were set up.

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The conclusions of the various arguments themselves are another facet, if not the main reason why we often disagree. As stated in the beginning, many arguments may seem small and trivial, but in fact are far bigger than may at first be thought. Conversely, many big arguments, when looked at carefully are in fact minor issues. Another problem affecting both aspects is communication. One of the biggest problems to my mind is that many people do not listen to others fully, and so either do not get the opportunity to hear fully, or just do not understand fully. Therefore, the full impact and import of the issue may be missed. Decisions and attitudes are made primarily on information received, and if incomplete information is received, wrong attitudes and decisions will be arrived at. Another is that sometimes, a word of correction may hurt our accepted ideas, leading to an emotional response rather than a rational response. In times like this, do we have the humility and integrity to measure our idea against scripture?

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Finally, why can we be so dogmatic? Paul said of the 'Grey Areas,' "Let every man be convinced in his own mind," but of others there was no compromise. A stand should be made on issues addressed by Word of God, if we really believe it is God's Word to us. As Christians, it is both our Foundation and our Authority.

If an issue being addressed is covered by something that Scripture had addressed, then stand upon what God has said in His Word. If a question arises regarding issues that lead to one's Salvation, then it is vitally important that the person or persons are brought to a scriptural understanding of the matter – literally, their lives depend upon it.

Subjects such as a Christian's authority in spiritual realms for example may not directly affect our salvation, but can greatly influence the way we see ourselves before God, especially if we see ourselves as "little gods" for instance, so the issue becomes, does it honour God or take away from His Glory? By the same token, do we honour Him in our actions as His representatives?

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Finally, our argument should be done in an attitude of care for the other person, with their best interests at heart, just as Scripture says: We will be known as Christians by our love and concern for each other. This includes not just our physical well-being, but our spiritual well-being too. This involves getting to know Jesus through His Book and teachings, - reverting to our Final Authority. So then, when do we have the right to be right? When the Scriptures tell us we have!

Mat 28:18-20

18) Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

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Footnotes

1. **The contents of the “Guatamala Prophecy” are still available via an internet search** [↑](#)
2. **What kind of meat was it? This was important to a Jew. Did discounted meat come from a pagan animal sacrifice? This was important to a convert.**
[↑](#)
3. **See also Galatians 5:11-13** [↑](#)
4. **Matt 7:3-5** [↑](#)
5. **Adams, J. *What about Nouthetic Counselling?* p 4**
[↑](#)
6. **2 Tim 3:16** [↑](#)
7. **Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. Simon & Shuster, 1987** [↑](#)

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8. **Deut 7:16** ↑
9. **1 Tim 3:9** ↑
10. **2 Tim 1:13** ↑
11. **For example, God hates compromise. Compare Deuteronomy 22:11 with Revelation 3:15-16.** ↑
12. **Or “*Slanderer*”** ↑
13. **Copied from the priest’s garment. See Ex 28:33** ↑
14. **2 Cor 13:5** ↑
15. **Titus 3:10** ↑