



Argument.

Say or write that word, and it brings up a certain image. Usually one of discourse, shouting, fist shaking, and name calling. It draws a picture that many would paint as being hypocritical to what Christianity teaches. In today's divisive political interactions, all people seem to be able to do is resort to yelling and name calling. But, if someone says something we disagree with, how are we supposed to handle the disagreement? How do we keep it from devolving into a shouting match?

### **Are We Even Supposed To Argue?**

The New Testament is full of instructions on needing to give an argument. 1 Peter 3:15 says we need to be [ready to give a defense](#) for what we believe. That means if someone challenges us, we need to be ready to present an argument for why we think Christianity is true. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul says he and the apostles "try to persuade others". This passage appears in a section where Paul is discussing reconciliation, so he is making an argument to others regarding how we are reconciled to God through Jesus. Paul also spent many of his days in Ephesus in synagogues and lecture halls debating and giving arguments for the kingdom of God (Acts 9:8-10). Acts 17:16-34 has Paul in Athens "reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews" (v17). A few verses later, he is in the Areopagus - a great lecture/debate hall on Mars Hill - making the case for the One, True God. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul tells them they need to "put away falsehoods" and "speak the truth with [your] neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25). We *have* to tell our neighbors the truth about the Gospel whether they agree with it or not. Paul is the most prolific writer in the new Testament, and he spent most of his days arguing,

Many people think of being a Christian as having a passive, non-confrontational persona. Most of this is drawn from Jesus telling us to turn the other cheek, love our neighbor and all that. This points more to the method of our presentation, though, and not if we should or should not argue in the first place.

Before I get into the how, I want to go through a few definitions. First, let's talk about *what* an argument is. An argument is the act of giving reasons for what you think to be true. In the New Testament, the Greek word that is translated to "argue" is *suzeteo* - which means "to discuss, dispute, or question". If you make a statement, and someone else disagrees with you, then both of you must provide arguments for why you think you are right. I have two kids. Whenever I want their opinion on something - like where we should eat dinner, or what we should do on vacation - I am asking them to present an argument for the position they hold. I don't *literally* say "make your argument". It's usually a question - like "why do



you think/feel that way?”. But, they are making an argument none the less.

If you think about it, arguing is how we get to the truth of something. If you think something is true, and I think something different is true, the only way we get to the truth is to give arguments for our positions. Let’s say every time you eat spinach, your muscles puff up and you become super strong. And, let’s say that every time your sister eats spinach, she gets sick and breaks out in hives. You think eating spinach makes people strong and she thinks eating spinach makes people sick. You can’t both be right. So, you need to argue/discuss/defend/debate/make the case for your position to try and come to the truth. In this case, the truth may not even be either one of your conclusions. But, you can’t discover it until you give arguments for your position.

### **How Should Christians Argue?**

Using terms like “give a defense” or “arguing” makes the whole procedure seem very combative. And we’re not supposed to be combative, right? So how do we approach such interactions? For some people, using the word “arguing” or “having an argument” makes them a little uncomfortable. I think that’s because we link the act of giving an argument to being *argumentative*. That’s the fist waving, dig your heels in, shouting match imagery I referred to earlier. It’s so easy for us to let our emotions get the better of us when someone doesn’t appear to be getting what we are explaining. Both sides feel they have the truth, and nothing gets people more fired up than when you tell them they are wrong on something they firmly believe.

As [Christian Ambassadors](#), we need to take a more diplomatic approach to giving an argument. We need to have the wisdom to navigate the conversations, and the character to not let things get heated. When Greg Koukl from Stand To Reason speaks on this, he puts it this way:

If I get mad, I lose. If he gets mad, I lose. So, either way, if someone gets mad, I lose

He’s quick to point out that some people will get angry about things that go against what they believe. You can’t help that. The Gospel is offensive to some. If they get upset at the message, that’s not your fault. But, if it’s because of the messenger, then you have to re-evaluate your tactics and demeanor.

Before I started studying Scripture, I would put myself in the argumentative category for



sure. I've always been highly opinionated, and felt the need to express and defend my position. But, what I realized over time was the more I dug my heels in to defend my position, the more the other person did the same. Arguments devolved into vocal grappling competitions. The truth didn't matter anymore; it was about Being Right and being declared the victor.

As I started to read Scripture, the character traits of "the art of argumentation" jumped out at me. First off, whenever arguing is put in a negative light, it's a specific type of arguing that we are told not to do (Ephesians 4:25-32). The Greek word for this type of arguing is *machomai* - which means "of those who engage in a war of words, to quarrel, wrangle, dispute". This word is translated as "quarrelsome" in most English translations. It appears in 2 Timothy 2 three different times. We could also use the term "bickering". These are the kind of arguments which have no point other than to just argue. They are unnecessary and devolve into raised tempers and name calling if we are not careful. When you read 2 Timothy 2, and Paul uses the word "quarrelsome" he is usually giving instructions on teaching others. He tells us not to let our instructions turn into a war of words, but to remain peaceful and calm with those who disagree with us.

Not everything is worth "digging our heels in" over. Christian denominations have a tendency to do this, and "split hairs" over things that don't really matter regarding our salvation. They "quarrel" over things like how to do communion, how and when to do baptism, what type of music is part of the service, how the church leadership should be organized, and on and on. It's OK to argue over these things as a way to get to the truth, but we shouldn't quarrel over any of these things. And they shouldn't divide us. Whether you dunk a hunk of bread in a goblet of wine, or eat a little wafer and drink grape juice from a plastic cup - it's still Communion, and it still serves the same purpose.

### **Aren't We Supposed To Make Everyone Else Christians?**

I used to ask myself this question all the time. I knew Jesus tells us to "go make more Christians", but what about those who don't want to listen? A lot of the time, your arguments may not work. People will deny a truth claim for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they have worked out rational reasons, sometimes they have emotional reasons (they don't want it to be true), and sometimes they see how accepting something like what the Gospel teaches would completely shake up their worldview. And they don't want that to happen. So, how do we handle that? We're so convinced of the truth of the Gospel, and we are supposed to make disciples of all nations, but they just don't want to hear it.

Christians sometimes get a bad rap for "forcing" their religion on people. I can see events -



especially in the past - where this is true. But, my favorite example on how to deal with people who don't agree with you comes in Matthew 10:14 when Jesus tells his disciples to "shake the dust off [their] feet" if no one wants to listen. Make your case, and if they don't want to listen, move on. Don't get upset and let it turn into a war of words. Be a good ambassador by presenting the message with wisdom and good character. Let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

### **Dealing With Disagreement**

When people don't agree with you, it's can be tough. It's a blow to our fragile ego when someone thinks we are wrong on something we are convinced we are right about. So, how do we keep from letting our emotions get the better of us? 1 Peter 3:15 tells us we need to give arguments, and thankfully, it also says how. It says we need to do so with "gentleness and respect". This is where the "love your neighbor" part comes in. Over and over and over again, Scripture tells us to maintain a loving attitude towards our enemies, to those who slander us, to those who persecute us. And, almost always, the instruction is to disagree with someone peacefully. And then pray for them (Matthew 5:44, Proverbs 24:17, 2 Timothy 2:24, Luke 6:28, Romans 12:14, 1 Peter 3:9, 2 Timothy 2:22-26). If you feel the discussion is getting heated, it's OK to disengage. Take up the discussion another time after emotions have come back down. Don't water down the message, though; it can be hard for people to agree with. But, don't let your character get in the way of people hearing what you are saying.

So, as you prepare yourself to make the case for the Christian worldview, remember that your interactions are not about winning a war of words; they are about representing the truth in a gentle and hospitable manner.

### **Share this:**

- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Reddit \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Pinterest \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Pocket \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to email this to a friend \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to print \(Opens in new window\)](#)