

Arguing & Debating — Right or Wrong? Good or Bad?

by Bill Crews

Arguing and debating have been given a “**black eye**,” and categorized as sinful practices because of abuses of a practice approved in the Scriptures, and because of narrow and slanted definitions.

When a person says, “I’m opposed to arguing and debating because of what I have observed when people get into religious arguments and when two people engage in a religious debate,” he really has in mind the abuses resorted to by one or both sides, abuses that not only have no place in proper argument and debate, but that are wrong and sinful. When one says, “I believe that arguing and debating are wrong,” he will have one set of definitions in mind; but when another says, “I believe that arguing and debating are right,” he will have another set of definitions in mind.

When some religious teachers are asked if they will defend in a formal debate the doctrines that they teach, they will decline and cite Romans 1:29 and 2 Corinthians 12:20 (**KING JAMES VERSION**) as their reason for declining. The first passage reads: “*Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, **debate**, deceit, malignity; whisperers.*” The second reads: “*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, swelling, tumults.*” In both verses “**debates**” is the English translation in the King James Version of the Greek word **ERIS**, which means “strife, contention; is the expression of enmity” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*), “contention, strife, wrangling” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.*). The word is rendered “**strife**” in the American Standard Version and in the New American Standard Bible in both passages. In the New International Version it is “*strife*” in Romans 1:29 and “*quarreling*” in 2 Corinthians 12:20. In the New King James Version it is “*strife*” in Romans 1:29 and “*contentions*” in 2 Corinthians 12:20. That kind of “*debating*” or “*arguing*” is wrong!

“Argue” is defined in **Webster’s New World Dictionary** as “**1.** To give reasons (for or against a proposal, proposition, etc.). **2.** To dispute (with or against a person or about a thing). **3.** To present objections.” These are intransitive verb definitions. As a transitive verb, “argue” is defined: “**1.** To give reasons for and against; discuss; debate. **2.** To try to prove by giving reasons; maintain; contend. **3.** To give evidence of; indicate: as his manners argue a good upbringing. **4.** To persuade by giving reasons.” “Argument” is defined in a similar fashion. Under “synonyms” this is given: “Argument refers to a discussion in which there is disagreement and suggests the use of logic and the bringing forth of facts to support or refute a point.” It is not wrong to argue or to have an argument; at times it is necessary. What is good or right or wise or best or truth in customs, social affairs, in government, in civil laws, in morals, in religion has often been brought to light as a result of such. What is wrong is to lose one’s temper, to be dishonest or unfair, to take advantage of, to seek personal victory. . .

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