

Must We Agree?

The diagram, below, has proven helpful to me and to other members of the Bible Explorers Club, LLC as we continue to manage our inevitable differences in personal conclusions based on interpretation of scripture. It is our prayer that it will help you, too. This is the foundation for our rules of engagement:

1. I will seek to understand before I seek to be understood. While seeking to understand, I will listen intently and non-judgmentally—even if the other Christian can cite only “what ‘we’ believe” dogma or the opinions of “experts” to support his conclusions. (See James 1:19,20 for solid rationale.)
 - (a) “I can tell you feel pretty strongly about that... How strongly DO you feel about it...? Please share with me how you reached that conclusion... and what else...? and what [other] scriptures can you think of that may support your conclusion...? and what other rationale can you offer that may help me to understand...? Is there anything else that may be helpful to me...? ...etc.”
 - (b) I will conduct a verbal review of what I have learned about my collaborator’s conclusions and the rationale for them. Once we are agreed on that we will be ready for the next step in our collaboration.
 - (c) “You may or may not know that I have come to a very different conclusion. To what extent would you like to learn what my conclusion is...and how and why I came to it...?”
 - (d) “This is my conclusion... These are some of the scriptures that have prompted me to that conclusion... [after reading each scripture...]: If no one had ever told you what that scripture means, how might you paraphrase it...? ...etc.”
2. Before subsequently engaging in debate I will collaborate objectively with my fellow Christian to determine how eternally important it might be – for us both – that we agree on THIS particular matter.
 - (a) From this point forward, I will neither offer nor accept “expert” opinions or “What ‘We’ Believe” dogma, because they consistently yield debilitating third-party bias. We must collaborate to confirm or to adjust our respective conclusions using only God’s written word – as apposed to any collection of derivative works or mystically derived “revelations.” Why? Because all rationale except “It is written” is counterproductive for those who honestly seek our Lord’s original truth.
 - (b) I will neither offer nor accept personal opinions, because they are valueless. I will only offer my current conclusions and the scriptural (and, sometimes, the historical) rationale for them. I will anticipate reciprocation.
 - (c) The only “expert” input I will offer (or accept) will be that which is based on scholarly research; e.g.: historical, geological, astronomical, archaeological or mathematical. The commentaries of Bible “experts” concerning the interpretation of Scripture can only yield third party bias. They are not allowed. [The only anticipated exceptions to that rule is Abbingdon’s Strong’s Concordance of the Bible and occasional reference to “Interlinear” texts.]

Just like in team sports, regular **SKILLS PRACTICE** for Disciples is defined as managed confrontation with other players on the same Discipleship team. And as in sports, there should be a competent Practice Coach for each team of Disciples. (Pay close attention, preachers.)

Those who practice most inevitably gain the most competence and confidence. They aren’t restricted to “the bench” when the home team faces a real opponent that is also well rehearsed. Where does that leave those who don’t practice at all?

What might cause a person to not want to practice the skills that are critical for effective Discipleship? Fear of confrontation and conflict are the likely culprits. But God has not given us the spirit of fear, remember? Instead, he has given us the spirit of courage and love and a sound mind. To waste either of those gifts would be a shame. To not develop either of those gifts would be the same as wasting it.

What would be the sense of putting on the whole armor of God if you had never practiced wearing and using each item of that armor? Find a team with a good Coach ASAP. Let’s get onto the playing field!

