

# Letters to the Church



DECEMBER '24

## DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

Perhaps you would think that getting into an “argument” is unhelpful when it comes to evangelism. Maybe this hesitation comes from an aversion to conflict or previous bad experiences with “arguments” about the things of God. But let me make the case that all of our daily discourses and negotiations are actually always based on argumentation, and so good arguments are necessary for evangelism as well.



Whether it's “Where do we want to go for dinner tonight?” or “When should we put up our Christmas decorations?” or “Is Jesus the Savior whom God raised from the dead?”, someone presents an argument for their case so that a conclusion or decision can be made. So, as part of our efforts in everyday evangelism, I would humbly argue (see what I did there?) that perhaps we need to delineate the difference between presenting a godly argument and engaging in petty fighting. Our goal in evangelism is to present truth statements to help them make a lasting decision about Jesus Christ while showing the gentle confidence and enduring peace that our faith brings.

As Christians, we'd all agree that squabbling, bickering, and quarreling are not very winsome. The Bible clearly opposes this (James 4:2, Hebrews 12:14, 2 Timothy 2:24). We do well to consider Paul's exhortation: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” (Colossians 4:6) If we lose our cool presenting the gospel, it's not only bad manners, but it could make it seem like our truth statement wasn't as strong since we felt we had to resort to replacing calm persuasion with bullying pressure.

However, we are called to present a gospel message that is hated by this world and especially by the one who runs its course. So, if our cordial presentation of the gospel makes someone else mad, there is little we can do about it. Jesus' teaching made people furious. He is and was always loving, but he also always argued for the truth. The apostle Paul did the same and had similar responses (see Acts 17:2 - 5 or 18:4 - 8). But note what angered these crowds: it was the message, not the manner of delivery.



A godly argument aims to help others distinguish between truth and error. God endowed humans with both a conscious mind and a conscience in our hearts so that we can and care to separate chaff from wheat, fact from fiction, and reality from falsehood. Rationality is one of the tools God has given us to acquire, retain, and present knowledge. The words we share can be helpful guide rails to steer consciences and rational minds toward the truth. Our enemy is a liar, but the truth we share will help them recover from his mental snares. He's not shy about arguing for lies; we can be unashamed to argue lovingly for the truth.

So often, our goal in everyday evangelism efforts is to “put a stone in someone’s shoe.” We want to give them something worth thinking more about, something that, as they walk about after our conversation, keeps poking them in a way that they can’t ignore. We often do this best by asking good questions that might lead at some point to presenting a civil and charitable argument for the truth.

Remember, evangelism is more like patient farming than an instant app. No one is forced into the faith, and sometimes, the holy persuasion takes time. We’re called to daily spadework. So, we should be content to present a loving argument that might uproot a falsehood and plant a godly thought, which might later be watered by another and increased under God’s providential care. We can present the truth statement and trust him to bring in the harvest at the proper time.

**YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,**