

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2019

Week 2: January 6-12

What To Do When Christians Disagree

Read: Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:16-17; Matthew 7:1-5, 12; 10:11-14; 18:15-21; John 13:34-35; 15:12; 17:20-22; **Romans 12:9-21**; 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 1:10; **6:1-8**; 10:14-22; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6, 15-16, 25-27, 32; 5:11; Philippians 1:4-6; 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 13-15; 2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; **4:8**; 1 John 3:11-23; 4:7-11, 21; 2 John 5. Also Read: Psalms 133-134 in their entirety.

Arguably, this is one of the more practical questions that we will address this year. Here, we are not talking about the disagreements that we will have with the rabid atheistic professor we might have in school or the non-Christian neighbor that might live down the street. Here, we are talking about what to do when two professing Christians disagree over an important matter — a matter significant enough that if not handled well, it would divide you.

I am also making a huge assumption as I approach this question, and the assumption is that the two professing Christians want to be in fellowship with one another. Sadly, oftentimes people don't bother working through disagreements because they don't want to be in fellowship. The problem here is that, as Christians, God calls us to be in fellowship with one another in Christ — we are all parts of Christ's body after all and are thus intertwined. So, if the disagreement is not being resolved because one of the persons has no interest in fellowship, that is an indication that the one who rejects fellowship may not be a Christian and (as noted in the passages above) there are different rules we follow when we are engaging with the enemies of God as opposed to dealing with Christians.

So, here are some guidelines as to how one handles disagreements:

First, look inwardly. Insure that your disagreement with the person in question is a genuine one and is not based on jealousy or resentment of the other person. As Jesus puts it, "take the plank out of your own eye before you take the sliver out of your neighbor's. Insure, also, that your attitude when approaching the person in question is and will remain an attitude of love and kindness. You are debating with a brother or sister so treat him as a brother or sister, not as a rival or as an underling.

Second, recognize that the Scriptures are our only guide and standard for faith and the practice thereof. Here's the thing, folks, to work through any disagreement, one needs a starting point. Tradition is good and Creeds or Confessions are good, but all of these things are fallible. The only thing that we do have, which is infallible, is the Word of God. We must — first and foremost — agree to let the Scriptures speak to our disagreement and then submit to the plain teaching of the Word of God. Without this commitment, we will just spin our wheels in the mud of human opinion.

Third, recognize that prayer needs to be a part of the sorting out of all disagreements. John Calvin, for example, believed that if God's people came together in a prayerful way and in the spirit of submission to the Word of God. If you couple this with a genuine interest in the needs of the other person, then it is my conviction that 95% of our disagreements would melt away pretty much on their own.

Fourth, approach the other person and the other idea with humility. In the end, be reminded that none of us understand all things exhaustively. That said, there are rights and wrongs and there are basic rules of logic that govern how we are to think about and evaluate ideas. Mutually exclusive principles cannot both be true in the same way, in the same sense, and at the same time. In fancy terms, that is called "The Law of Non-Contradiction." In

my grandparent's day, that was just called "Common Sense." At the same time, recognize that there are truths to be discovered and as such, someone is going to be "right" while others are wrong. God has given us minds to think and reason through these matters — these minds are the primary things that separate us from the "Animal Kingdom" — so we have an obligation, if we wish to be truly human, to use our minds to reason these matters out. As C.S. Lewis would say, "We are men, not rabbits."

Fifth, use Matthew 18 as a model for working through these discussions. Go and talk the disagreement through face to face in a non-confrontational way when both of you have time to sit down and talk constructively. If you cannot come to a point of resolution, seek the counsel of another mature Christian or several. If still no point of resolution is made, then seek out the counsel of the church (in the case of our congregation, this would take the form of sitting down with the Pastor and Elders).

Sixth, what you don't do is to appeal to the state or civil government for resolution. Truly, this makes no sense if one is debating over the sense of baptism, but sometimes we argue over rights. Perhaps one Christian thinks another Christian has stolen from him, has acted improperly, or has caused damages to another Christian's property. One can easily see how two Christians could find themselves at an impasse over events like these, but the civil courts are not the direction in which the Christian should go. Instead, the Elders have the responsibility of sorting things through. "Why should Christians seek resolution from those who have no standing in the life of the Church?", Paul says. As ones who will one day judge angels, this most properly falls to mature Christian leadership while the Christians in disagreement

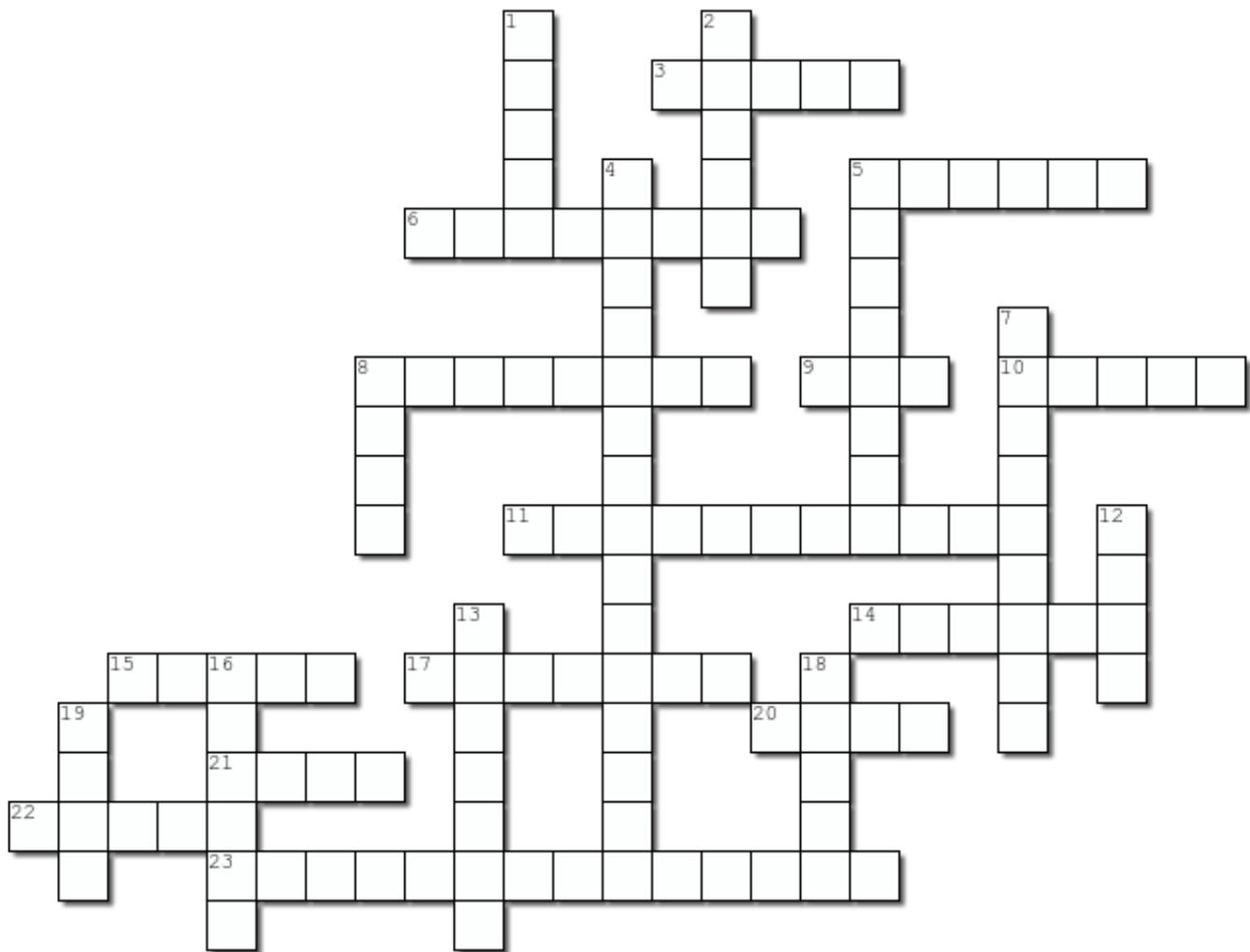
Seventh, as God says to Isaiah, "Let us reason together." Arguments are proven with reasons, not by getting upset and getting your feelings hurt. In the end, we ought to want to be right and have our wrong views corrected in Christian love. True Christian unity is only ever really present when Christians are united around the Word of God.

Eighth, do not be discouraged, but be patient with people. God is patient with us, so too, we must be patient with each other. Some of our wrong beliefs are deeply ingrained within us and it takes a complete paradigm change to alter them. So, if that paradigm shift does not happen overnight or even over a period of months or years, do not lose hope so long as there is a willingness to continue the discussion as Christians.

Will you solve all of your disagreements by approaching them in this way? No, we are sinners living in a sinful world. Also, there are some with whom you will have a disagreement that will profess Christ but not bear fruit in their life. God knows their heart and we can trust in that, but recognize at the same time, often, these will be those who will stubbornly disagree with you for the sake of disagreeing and will fail to submit to the Word.

Yet, by approaching things this way, you will solve more disagreements than you will if you don't approach those disagreements at all. And, since we want to be in fellowship with other, shall we not endeavor in that direction?

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Across

3. We are to seek this out amongst one another.
5. We are to walk this way as Christians.
6. Everyone who hates his brother is a _____.
8. Christians must not have civil _____ with one another.
9. Do we seek the approval of man or of God?
10. 'Be _____ and do not sin.'
11. The Lord's servant must not be _____ but be kind toward everyone.
14. We must not be participants with _____.
15. We are to live in _____.
17. 'One Lord, One Faith, One _____'
20. You are to shake this off your feet from a community which rejects the Gospel you bring.
21. Overcome evil with this.
22. What is our only standard by which we measure faith and life?
23. John says this is an old commandment, not a new one (3 words).

Down

1. We are called to outdo one another in showing this.
2. And in all things, cover your disagreements with this.
4. We are to do nothing out of this (2 words).
5. Doing good to those who do evil to you is like pouring this on their heads. (2 words)
7. We are to put this away, out of our midst.
8. This covers up all offenses.
12. 'Never be _____ in your own sight.'
13. We are to live in _____ with one another.
16. One day, Paul writes, Christians will judge _____.
18. '_____ not lest you be judged.'
19. John states that we should not be like this son of Adam who was 'of the Evil One.'