

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Ever seen a rock on a fencepost? It didn't get there by itself. And it's a useful analogy for some of the conversations you've been trying to have about religion and politics. You've already found out this frustration doesn't end with an election day. And people don't know how to argue.

You need probing questions to make conversations less conflicting and more conducive to changing hearts and minds and wills. Here's a variation on an approach to critical thinking taught in worldview academies and some seminaries. Jesus, the ultimate teacher, used a similar question-answer approach. Even at age twelve He amazed other temple teachers.

1- What do you mean by that? *"You keep using that word, but I do not think it means what you think it means."* Can you have a real conversation without using the same meanings of words and concepts? Many people argue away without realizing they're talking about apples and oranges and lemons. Asking *"what do you mean by that"* shows you're genuinely interested in understanding the other person's point of view. You try to get on the same page.

Subsets of today's society assign peculiar meanings to terms with long-accepted definitions that they've decided are no longer in favor. You're talking in an echo-chamber unless you use the same definitions. You don't have to agree with their definition, but you can't have conversation until you try to understand them, then interact with them.

2- Where do you get your information? Everyone has opinions, but few know how they were formed. Nebulous *"they say"* responses don't mean anything. Long ago, "news media" proved to be propaganda outlets for leftwing activism. Everyone has bias. Where did your information sources get their information? *"You can have your own opinions, but not your own facts."*

Christians unapologetically begin with God's written-down revealed Word, the Bible, as the only inerrant, infallible, objective source of truth, knowledge and wisdom, the only unchangeable standard of truth. When people are pressed to defend their information sources, and realize how hard that is to do, it leads to the next question. Why do you trust your source to be truthful?

3- How do know that is true? Remember, "truth" can only be properly understood as *"that which corresponds to reality, as perceived by God"* because only God knows all things. His truth is true for all people in all places and all times. Many people appeal to the Bible as authority.

And many try to mold Scripture to their politics. But too few know what they're talking about when it comes to the Bible. They twist passages out of context, try to make generalizations draw specific conclusions, or take a specific point and try to make sweeping generalizations. The Bible is like the Constitution. The question is, what did the original author mean for the original audience? Then you can discuss how its timeless principles apply to your life situations.

4- What would it take to change your mind? Now you're getting somewhere. As people are unable to adequately defend their opinions, or realize how their bias just doesn't hold water, they should become more open to other information. Or at least listen to another point of view. But many display "paradigm paralysis" with their inability to accept a new reality. You must be prepared to help them get up to speed on the real facts of the matter. Pray!

Holding values and opinions extends beyond the intellectual to the emotional and volitional. People choose to believe things, with their hearts and minds and wills. Not some but all of these aspects are required for saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You believe with your whole being. It's a response to God's evidence and persuasion, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

5- What if you're wrong, and you die? This personalizes topics to point to what really matters. Opinions abound about everything. But what really matters in the ultimate sense? Every human concern extends from us being made in the image of God. His commands to us extend from His holy character. The "Biblical Christian worldview" begins with the Bible, which sorts out the meaning of life. It's about being in right relationship with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle said, *"knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others, as ambassadors for Christ."* This comes not by argument but by the Holy Spirit applying God's truth (2 Cor 4-5). That's why Christians never stop sharing the life-changing Good News that Jesus saves. He is ultimate truth. And this is critical to the crucial conversations everyone needs to have! ☐