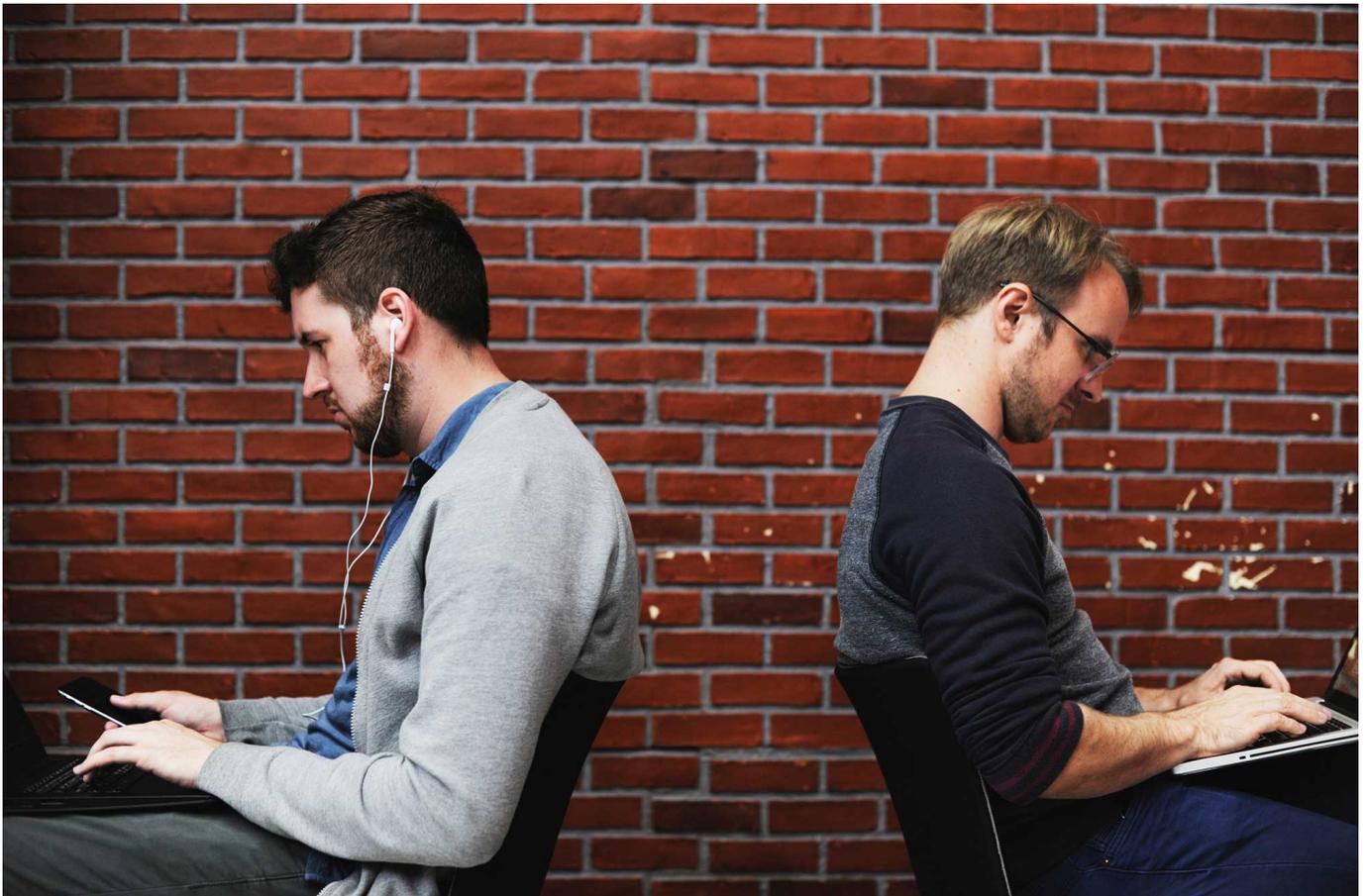


How To Handle Online Disagreements

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You get an E-mail - a Tweet - a comment - a private message through Facebook, only to discover someone disagreeing with you or even bullying you (the horror!).

Maybe you said something in a Facebook status, blog post, or lesson and someone has taken issue with it. And now they are coming to you about it - *or worse* - taking you to task.

How should you respond?



1. Take a deep breath

Remember: Everything is going to be okay.

If you catch your heart rate or blood pressure rising, do whatever you need to do to **not respond immediately**. Wait ten minutes. Go on a walk. Take a nap (the world would be a better place if everyone just got a nap). Do *anything* that will allow you time to think things over. Don't do something stupid like respond out of anger, only to eat your words later.

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Prov. 29:20)

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Prov. 12:18)

2. Ask yourself if it's true.

Listen to what the person is saying. **Even if they are mostly wrong, perhaps there is at least some truth to their words.** Maybe you are right, but your tone was wrong. Or maybe your tone was right, but your message was wrong. Even if the person coming to you is rude or ignorant, **try to find some common ground upon which you both can stand.** You'll be better for it.

Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future (Prov. 19:20)

3. Invest your words and time wisely.

I see people on social media who are *always* in an argument with someone, or so it seems. And I wonder, "How do they have time for their families, visiting sick people, and studying the Bible?" I have so many other priorities in my life than spending hours of my precious time getting involved in a fruitless argument. (Let's be honest; most online arguments are just that: fruitless.)

Online arguments are a matter of stewardship. Your life on earth is but a vapor, and

you - *O Christian* - have a precious Message to communicate to the world, so don't waste it on people who are not interested in the truth. Jesus warned us not to "give dogs what is holy" and not to "throw your pearls before pigs" (Matt. 7:6). His words mean something. Make sure you don't waste the valuable time and message with which we have been entrusted.

Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16)

4. Don't feed the trolls.

The internet is full of humans who have zero interest in the truth, let alone a civil discussion. I am convinced that **some people simply exist to argue for the sake of arguing**. They cannot be reasoned with - they cannot be satisfied - and they will not sleep until you die out of utter exhaustion.

The only way to respond to these people is by **not responding at all**. Don't respond to their pokes or their passive aggressive jabs. Whatever you say will be used against you, so don't say anything at all.

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent (Prov. 10:19)

5. Don't get caught up in worthless discussions.

Many conversations are pointless. Do you seriously think Genesis 6:2 teaches that angels had sexual relations with women? Do you really think the concept of the Trinity is wrong? Do you actually believe those peddling the notion that Jesus literally returned in AD 70? Please, save it.

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless (Titus 3:9)

6. Write as if your words will be published in tomorrow's newspaper.

It's only a matter of an unscrupulous person 'copying & pasting' your last, taken-out-of-context E-mail and forwarding it to a media outlet. Once that happens, it's hard to undo. **Choose each word knowing where they could end up.**

Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin (Prov. 13:3)

7. Read through the eyes of non-Christians.

The Bride of Christ must be protected at all costs. When non-Christians see Christians arguing about matters that highlight division within the church, no one wins.

Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers (2 Tim. 2:14)

8. Earn the right to disagree.

Maybe this is unique to me, but **it really rubs me the wrong way when I only hear from certain people when they disagree with me.** It's, of course, okay to disagree with someone every once and a while, but it doesn't take long before a pattern begins to develop and a person becomes **"that guy who always disagrees."** Don't be that guy.

On the other hand, when people have made it a point to befriend me and show interest in me, their opinions really matter to me. And then, the few times they do disagree with something I've said or done, I take their words to heart.

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12)

9. Be charitable.

Love should automatically assume the best in someone's words. Sure, maybe they said something clumsy or foolish. But perhaps they just didn't think their argument through before speaking. Be kind as you "teach them the way more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Remember: You don't like it when people split hairs with your words. **So be sure to return the favor to those around you.**

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13:7)

10. Keep in mind the following points when dealing with people who disagree:

a. The stereotype that "liberals are the patient, loving ones" and "conservatives are a bunch of calloused grumps" is wrong.

Over the years, people who self-identify as being theologically liberal - as well as people who self-identify as being theologically conservative - have disagreed with me over various positions. In my experience, *by far* it has been the ones who are markedly liberal in their attitude toward Scripture that have been the most distasteful in their handling of disagreements. **Don't be surprised, when making a stand for your faith in Jesus, that the most vitriol comes from the ones who cry "tolerance" and "love" the loudest.**

b. Hurt people hurt people.

In my experience, most trouble-makers are already troubled people. Maybe they have been sexually, emotionally, or physically abused as a child, or maybe they endured a traumatic experience growing up. As a result, psychologically, they are like a wounded bear. Be extra patient with these people. **And keep in mind that often the kindest thing you can do to them is to stay away from their shenanigans.**

c. People don't have to agree with you about everything.

Seriously, they don't. No one can claim to infallible knowledge and wisdom. **Both you and I are probably wrong about something.** Thankfully, there is a degree to which Christ cleanses me of my sins with His own blood despite my imperfect knowledge and obedience (1 John 1:7). Likewise, I need to treat my brethren in much the same way.

Your comments are welcome and encouraged, even if they are in disagreement. However, please keep your comments relevant to the article. For my full comment policy, [click here](#).

This list appeared first in my interview last week on the [Preachers in Training podcast](#).