

Understanding Others' Positions

As Christians with full and forgiven hearts, we understand the imperative Christ laid on our hearts to share His good news with others. These others can be family, friends, co-workers, or strangers. But even with this understanding, it can be difficult for us to begin the conversation.

1 John 4 tells us to test the spirits because false spirits are in the world. It goes on to talk about the perfect love that has been given to us: how this love casts out fear and makes us bold. It also allows us to love others. With this love then, we seek to understand the positions of the people to whom we speak so we can share with them the love of Christ.

We ought not to assume we know what they believe. Assumption is one of the biggest dangers in relationships. Assuming we know what they believe may put them on the defensive and start an argument, offend them so that they hear nothing else we say and effectively disengage from the conversation, or waste our time (pearls before swine/Matthew 7:6). Even worse, however, is when we assume the person is already Christian or isn't interested in hearing about Christ and consequently avoid sharing the good news with someone who needs to hear about Him. What is a good way to avoid assumption? Begin the conversation by asking questions about what they believe.

During Jesus' ministry, He asked questions to invite those he asked to reflect on their own beliefs and as an opening to a greater discussion:

Matthew 16:13: **"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"** (to Peter)

Matthew 22:41: **"Jesus asks the Pharisees "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"**

As the Son of God, He knew the answers, but He did it for their (and our) benefit. When we ask questions, we also receive the benefit of hearing the answer and thus having a better understanding of the other person's beliefs from which to start sharing the Bible with them.

Starting the discussion in a respectful, non-combative way, with questions genuinely asked to understand the other person's beliefs, worldview, and opinions, shows love for the other person, and we know it is important to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Especially of those who are un-churched or ex-church, we want to ask questions that help us drill down to the most foundational aspects of the other person's thinking, the basics of their worldview. A worldview is a network of presuppositions through which the person interprets every experience (knowingly or unknowingly). How a person answers the questions below determines their worldview:

What is real? (metaphysics)

How do we know what we know? (epistemology)

How should we live? (ethics/morality)

These are the three main categories a worldview can be separated into. [For more info on the discussion of worldview, please see the apologetics materials...]

Listening to the answers so we understand the positions of those we want to share God's truth with shows them love and respect. And listening before speaking also allows us to target the truths we share to the truths they need to hear.

Knowing what and being ready to share what they need to hear is also important. We want to "**always be ready**" (1 Peter 3:15) with answers to the questions we ask others to answer. For believers, the answers to these questions are found in the Bible, which is how we know what we know—through the inspired word of our Creator. But for unbelievers, their answers to these questions, since they will not be coming from God's revealed word, will not follow the laws of logic. Sharing the answers you have in Christ is the reason for which you asked the question.

Once we have asked questions, we better know our audience. In Acts 26:3 Paul demonstrates the importance of knowing our audience. He flatters the king, speaks to the rulers of the Jews about his past, tells of the miracle of his conversion. His words impacted his audience in a positive and respectful way. His love for Christ and for his fellow man led him to share his story in a way that his audience both then and now can connect with.

The most important things to remember in any discussion of sharing our faith are 1) God has commanded us to share His word with others and 2) He does all of the work.