

# How to Disagree and Remain Friends

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | January 21, 2021



The three supreme principles of God's kingdom are truth, love, and freedom. Let's examine how to apply these principles in our relationships to maintain friendships even when we disagree.

## **Truth:**

The first application of truth is to be honest with yourself on whether someone is an actual friend or merely a friendly acquaintance. This may sound simple, but in practice it is not. Many people believe falsely that someone is their friend when they are merely friendly. Our social media world has magnified this confusion by "friending" others or by counting how many "friends" one has. Not all social media "friends" are actual friends. If we fail to recognize this difference, we create false expectations in both our interactions with them and their treatment of us, which can be a minefield of miscommunication, misunderstanding, hurt feelings, conflict, and argument. So, thoughtfully and truthfully review who is a real friend and who is merely a friendly acquaintance.

Then, once you have separated out the friendly acquaintances from your real friends, another truth will come to light—with real friends, *the person is more important to us than the argument!* With real friends, each person knows that the other one genuinely cares about them and, in such a relationship, differing viewpoints are not only tolerated, but they are also appreciated! Different perspectives add to the richness of life, challenge us, create opportunities for growth, but more than this, those

perspectives share aspects of our friends with us and, as we come to understand our friend's views, we come to understand and know them better. Under the umbrella of love and affection, we can have intense debate and disagreement that can even be blunt, direct, and passionate because both parties know they are loved and valued and every exchange works to bring them closer. Such "disagreements" on ideas, concepts, and perspectives may remain while each friend continues to value the other person.

Problems can arise when we lose focus on love for the person and make the idea, concept, perspective, or argument more important than the person. This can especially occur when the concept under discussion is one from which we derive a personal sense of safety, security, and comfort. In other words, if the idea being challenged would make us feel that something is wrong with us, cause us to feel guilt as if we had done wrong, or increase fear and insecurity (this happens a lot in both religious and political discussions), then our own insecurities, fears, and guilt and the need to make ourselves feel better can cause us to interpret the other person's arguments as an attack against us personally. We can avoid this by stepping back in our own hearts and minds and reaffirming one's personal value to be a lover of truth. Once we make that a personal priority, we never fear new ideas or perspectives that challenge our current views because we realize we are finite and truth is ever unfolding. The only way we advance is to be willing to have our views challenged, reason through the evidences, and assimilate better views when we are convinced of their worth. True friends are the ones with whom we can safely have our ideas challenged and help us grow!

But when we are not friends, when love does not permeate the relationship, then as disagreement intensifies, we become vulnerable to feeling personally attacked and this can lead to hurt feelings and dislike of the other with subsequent "defriending."

## **Love:**

With whomever we are dealing, love first seeks to understand before seeking to be understood. This means that when we love, we seek to understand not just the argument, the concept, or the position, but the person themselves. We seek to understand who the person is, what their struggles are, why they hold the position they do. We seek to understand the other person's capacity and abilities to comprehend and process differing views. And then we let them know we understand and value them as a friend, as a child of God, regardless of the specific issue under discussion.

The more accurately we understand the other person the more efficient we can be in our responses. Our understanding not only of their position, but of their mindset, abilities, and motives gives us insight into whether the best approach is presenting our views or loving silence. Love wisely realizes that not all people are ready to hear every truth. Jesus said to His disciples, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear" (John 16:12 NIV84).

So, use your good judgment and determine who is a friend and who is not, and then endeavor to understand the mindset of the other person, what they can handle and what they cannot, and decide what is the best approach—sharing or silence. The mature Christian uses their godly wisdom to discern what to share with whom, always remembering the person is more valuable than the argument. This is the application of love, sharing the truth that love directs to be shared to uplift and benefit another, but withholding truths that love determines another is not ready to handle.

## **Freedom:**

After being truthful with yourself on whether a person is a friend or merely a friendly acquaintance, after lovingly seeking to understand and value the other person and their position, after presenting what love and wisdom directs to be shared, then leave the other person free—free to agree or disagree, to accept or reject your views or ideas. It is only in an atmosphere of freedom that love grows. It is only in an atmosphere of freedom that hearts and minds are genuinely changed. Recognize that new ideas take time to be understood, assimilated, and to replace old ideas. Freedom in your friendships allows each person to be accepted for who they are even if certain ideas or beliefs differ. In other words, the friendship doesn't hinge on agreement. If we don't give freedom, our violation of the law of liberty will damage love and instill rebellion in the heart—and the friendship will begin to fracture.

So assess who is a friend and who is not, remember to value them more than the argument, seek to understand them fully, and then love them by sharing what godly wisdom determines is most helpful for you to share—perhaps offering thanks for giving you new insights that have helped some of your views change or lovingly presenting ideas designed to help them grow—and then leave them free to accept your view or not.

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