

What to do when two people who love Jesus have two different points of view?

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Our Bible study group is reading through 1 Samuel. Now beginning in 1 Samuel 15, God does some things that make some of us furrow our eyebrows in confusion. First, He orders Saul to slaughter all the Amalekite men, women, and children. Then He suggests that Samuel go visit Jesse but lie about what he is actually doing there. Then God sends a spirit to torment Saul to make him even more depressed than he already is. Naturally, our little group got into a discussion about the disparity between the loving God that we know through Christ and the morally questionable tactics described in these passages. In response, I described what I call the "constant tension" of trying to read the text as honestly as I can without bringing my own presuppositions to it. I admitted that I have real trouble with the description of God's character in these verses when compared with the loving, sacrificial Christ that I've experienced in my life.

Then a man that I don't know very well voiced his frustration at our need to wrestle with these issues. He believed that it was not necessary to figure everything out, just to respond to God as he works in our lives individually. He was not argumentative at all, but said that he was past the need to have all the answers and was at a point in his Christian walk where he could just trust God and obey. Wondering how God could act in a way that seemed morally questionable was a waste of time because it was God's; and we all know that God can't sin. I considered whether to respond and finally decided that there were too many issues to address. Rather than start a new conversation, I just let it go. So the teacher moved on.

What I wanted to say was that I think that it is important to wrestle with these issues. This is the Bible. It's God's word to us about Himself. What is more important than understanding something as central as God's character? As for the implication that it's more spiritually mature to just obey without needing to understand, I don't think these are mutually exclusive options. I wrestle with these issues because I take my spiritual life seriously, because I want to get to know God better, not because I don't trust Him. Finally, the Bible is supposed to challenge and change us. How can it do that if we don't open ourselves up to the possibility that it might say something different than what we expect?

On the drive home, while the kids were screaming in the back seat, the question I continued to ask myself was this: If I believe to the bottom of my heart that it's important to wrestle with the hard questions, to interact with the text as honestly as possible, and take all of the Bible seriously (not just the easy parts), then what is my responsibility when talking to a believer who doesn't share my views? In one sense, it's not necessary that I address any of these issues. If the person is saved, what's the point? This man and others like him have effective ministries where God has placed them. On the other hand, if being passionate about these things is the ministry that God has given to me, am I shirking my responsibility by not addressing them when they come up? Am I not acting with integrity by not challenging beliefs I honestly disagree with?

This question is a little easier to answer when dealing with non-essential doctrinal positions such as predestination or where one falls on the pre/most millennial continuum. We just make ourselves look silly when we split over the New Perspectives on Paul. But what about bigger issues like how we interpret the Bible? What about when this person's ministry and mine intersect? How do we interact with both respect and integrity? Or do we just both go about our business hoping that we never have to deal with each other?