
good faith
DEBATES
DISCUSSION GUIDE

About The Good Faith Debates

Are you feeling pressure to understand and engage with an ever-growing array of confusing and polarizing issues? Perhaps you've witnessed bitter arguments tearing your family, friends, or churches apart.

You're not alone. I feel it too. Every week I hear from confused and concerned Christians. They want less heat and more light. They want to stay focused on the gospel. They want to put their faith into action. They want to care. But they don't know who to trust.

The Gospel Coalition serves the church by producing timely content that grapples with some of the most pressing issues of our time.

I'm praying that the Good Faith Debates will do just that. This five-part video debate series features prominent Christian thinkers discussing some of the most divisive issues facing the church today.

When we keep the gospel central, we can disagree on lesser but still important matters in good faith. In the Good Faith Debates, we hope to model this—showing that it's possible for two Christians united around the gospel to engage in charitable conversation even amid substantive disagreement.

We need better discourse than artificial cable TV fights designed to divide us. We need deep reflection on the contours of Christian freedom and obligation.

Gather some friends or family to watch together and begin your own discussion. You might even change your mind a time or two—and learn to disagree in good faith.

Collin Hansen
Vice President of Content and Editor in Chief

How to Use This Discussion Guide

Whether with a group of friends, your church small group, or as part of a class, The Good Faith Debates series and this discussion guide are designed to help you think well—and disagree well—with fellow believers about some of today's contested cultural issues.

Each of the five Good Faith Debates are available to watch on The Gospel Coalition's YouTube page or listen to in podcast format, on The Gospel Coalition podcast. You can also find them all at **GoodFaithDebates.com**.

Consider meeting with the same group five times, ideally in person or via your favorite video meeting platform. Have each participant watch or listen to the debate prior to gathering, then discuss the content of the debate using the group discussion questions below. Or you could consider watching the debates together (on YouTube) and have a discussion immediately following the episode viewing.

Some ideas for how churches might engage this content:

- Design a small group curriculum that uses these debates to "model" healthy, charitable discussions on controversial topics.
- Encourage college ministries or young adult groups in your church to watch and discuss the debates together.
- Hold a five-week screening series on Sunday nights or mid-week, screening the episode and then facilitating a Q&A on the topic following the episode. Or just pick the debate/topic most needed for your community, and hold a screening and discussion as a one-off event.
- Based on the example of TGC's Good Faith Debates format, create your own debate event series, focused on debatable topics of particular relevance to your local context, involving participants from your local church who fall on different sides of the issue.

How Should Christians Think about Gun Control and the Right to Bear Arms?

The issue of gun control and 2nd Amendment rights is one of the most intractable, polarizing topics in contemporary America. Because it is such a partisan issue, many Christians naturally view the topic through that lens. But is there a Christian lens through which to evaluate the debate? If Christian ethics are brought to bear on the issue, what is the more biblical position? More restrictive gun control or more individual freedom to bear arms?

BOB THUNE is founding and lead pastor of Coram Deo Church in Omaha, Nebraska, and a Council member of The Gospel Coalition. He is the author of *Gospel Eldership* and the co-author of *The Gospel-Centered Life* and *The Gospel-Centered Community.*

ANDREW WILSON is the teaching pastor at King's Church, London. He's the author of numerous books, including *God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In today's digital age, people are often quick to speak, slow to listen, and even slower to listen to those with whom they disagree. While they disagree, Bob and Andrew spoke to one another in a unique way. How did that make you feel? What does it look like to honor someone even if you disagree with them?
2. What should Christians think about gun control and the right to bear arms? The question is contested for good reasons. Bob argues that Christians have a moral duty to protect every person's right of existence and right of self-defense, which includes the right to bear arms. How does this change the way Christians who support increased gun control understand those who advocate gun rights?
3. The availability of guns appears to substantially increase the total number of homicides. In 2021, there were as many murders in the city of Philadelphia as there were in the entire country of England, although England has 30 times the population of Philadelphia. For Christians who oppose increased gun control, how would you respond to this data?
4. Bob and Andrew share a desire to save lives, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Why is it helpful to establish common ground in debates like this? If we share the same goal but differ in the best way to accomplish that goal, how does that change the way we debate?
5. Jesus never uses violence against people—whether to defend himself or to defend the innocent. In fact, every time a disciple tries or threatens to use violence in the Gospels, even in defense of the innocent, Christ rebukes them. How does Jesus's own posture toward violence impact this discussion?
6. What do you notice about the way that Jim facilitates? Why is it important that he immediately brings the conversation to the Sermon on the Mount? What role should Scripture play in our discussions?
7. Why are these conversations important? What are some of the practical challenges to having this conversation in a polarized society?

Is "Woke Church" a Stepping Stone to Theological Compromise?

The "woke" debates have fractured the church like little else in recent years. On one side are Christians who believe Scripture demands the church lead the way in addressing topics like racism, injustice, gender inequality, poverty, and climate change. On the other are Christians who accuse the "woke" gospel of just being a new generation of the "social" gospel, which in previous iterations often meant gradual theological compromise. What are we talking about when we use the word "woke"? And which should be the bigger concern for the church today: caring too little about activism on the social issues of the day, or caring too much about the wrong issues?

SEAN DEMARS is a pastor at 6th Ave Church in Decatur, Alabama. Prior to this, Sean and his family served three years in the jungles of Peru, taking the gospel to the unreached people groups.

REBECCA MCLAUGHLIN holds a PhD from Cambridge University and a theology degree from Oak Hill Seminary in London. She is the author of many books, including *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* and *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When this conversation comes up, it often feels like those on the left and the right are talking past one another, using the same words yet with different definitions. What do you notice about the way Sean and Rebecca define the term "woke"? How does this help you better understand their respective arguments?
2. Rebecca says, "Woke was originally used to mean being awake, aware of, and alive to the history of racial injustice in this country." Using this definition, how does your view of this debate change? Is it beneficial for Christians to be "woke" in this way?
3. Of all the things that can fall under the umbrella of being "woke," how do we as Christians parse out the things that are biblical from the things that are worldly? What does it look like to disentangle the cluster of issues included in the "woke" movement, distinguishing the biblically mandated justice issues from the worldly distortions?
4. Philippians 2:3 says, "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." How do Sean and Rebecca demonstrate humility while discussing this contentious question? What does this teach us about how we should approach questions like these?
5. Sean says to Rebecca, "I agree so much with what you said up there and I know that the heart of this whole dialogue is to show that we're really on the same team." How does this reminder unite Christians who may feel at odds with one another? Why is it helpful to reiterate the "same team" bond we share with fellow believers, even if we disagree on some things?
6. Far too often, this debate takes place on Twitter or Facebook. What other venues are better suited for these conversations? In your own life, where have you experienced the most productive dialogue on this topic?
7. Should churches discuss contentious cultural issues like these, or are the "woke" debates a distraction from the church's mission? If churches should engage in this debate, what might that look like?

Should the "Pro-Life" Movement Be Holistically (Womb to Tomb) or Narrowly (Womb) Focused?

Sometimes pro-life activitsts are criticized for only caring about vulnerable life in the womb, but caring little about vulnerable lives outside the womb. Is this a fair critique, and are there ways the pro-life movement should be more expansive in its efforts to celebrate the sanctity of life? For Christians, do the theological and moral foundations of the pro-life argument (e.g. imago Dei) call us to align with other causes (e.g. fighting racism and social injustice, climate change, and so on) that might break rank with political coalitions typically aligned with pro-life policy? Or is there an argument to be made that a narrowly focused pro-life movement is essential and that expanding focus can be counterproductive?

SCOTT KLUSENDORF is president of Life Training Institute and author of the book *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture.* He travels frequently in the United States and Canada, training pro-life advocates to persuasively defend their views in the public square.

KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR is research professor of English and Christianity and culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and has been a long-time pro-life activist. She is the author of several books, including *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life in Great Books.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Karen defines abortion as "the intentional and deliberate and premeditated taking of an innocent human life." How does the doctrine of imago Dei lead us to oppose abortion? Why is it important that Christians use this as their foundation for opposing abortion?

2. What is the foundational difference between Karen and Scott's arguments? Where do they agree? Where do they disagree? Why does it matter?

3. Scott shares four ways the church can care for their congregation in regards to abortion. Which of these has been emphasized in your local church? Are any of these missing? How can your church take steps to care for your people well?

- Preach a biblical view of human value
- Preach that abortion is a sin and it intentionally takes the life of an image-bearer
- Equip the congregation to make a case for the pro-life view in the public square
- Minister to the precious men and women who have been wounded by abortion

4. Scott differentiates between what it means to be pro-life organizationally and what it means to hold to a Christian ethic. Why is this distinction important? Do you find Scott's argument compelling?

5. What does it look like for pro-life Christians to hold to a whole-life ethic? What might this look like practically in your own life and context? How might your church manifest a whole-life ethic in its missional activities and community involvement?

6. Scott says, "Our Christian worldview applies to everything and our responsibility as pro-life Christians is to vote to limit the evil and promote the good insofar as possible, given current political realities." How can Christians approach voting to limit the evil of abortion?

7. What do you notice about the encouragements Karen and Scott give one another? How does this foster unity and camaraderie among those in the broader pro-life movement?

How Should the Church Address Racial Injustice?

Few issues have divided the church in recent years more than the topic of race and justice. Even if there is agreement that injustice and systemic racism still exist, approaches to address these issues sharply divide many Christians. For churches and Christians who believe silence and apathy are not biblical options on this topic, but who are confused and frustrated about the best way forward, what should they consider? What are the best things Christians and churches can do to help bring necessary change?

BRIAN DAVIS is currently a pastor at Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. He and his wife, Sonia, have two sons and a daughter.

JUSTIN GIBONEY is an attorney and political strategist in Atlanta, Georgia. He is also the co-founder and president of the AND Campaign.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Barna Group, less than half of white Christians agree that historically the U.S. has been oppressive to minorities, while over 75 percent of black Christians agree with this statement. Does this surprise you? What does this reveal about the current state of race relations in the United States?

2. Justin says, "Biblical love is not simply a sentimental disposition or kind remarks. Love in this instance is action." 1 John 3:16 tells us that love requires sacrifice. How might a church practice sacrificial love in efforts to bring about racial justice?

3. Brian says, "The local church's work is not to transform the world, but to transform the saints." According to Brian, the local church best addresses racial injustice by producing the most God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, gospel-sharing people. Do you agree? How does this differ from Justin's perspective?

4. Theologians often view issues within the church as either first, second, or third-order issues. Justin warns us not to turn the race conversation into a second-order issue because the Bible teaches human dignity is a first-order issue. But if others argue that racial justice is a secondary issue, how can we come to consensus on its urgency for the church?

5. Many cities in the Jim Crow South were characterized by a "fight, flight, and forget" mentality toward desegregation during the 1960s. How does the church move forward on racial justice without simply forgetting racial conflict?

6. Which biblical texts help us understand systemic racism and the call for Christians to pursue justice? How do these texts serve as a foundation for this discussion?

7. Justin and Brian agree that our culture has an issue with "identity idolatry," where people can value their ethnicity above their identification with Christ. Why is this a problem? How can churches develop a healthy doctrine of ethnicity, celebrating ethnic identity without making it an idol?

Is "Evangelical" a Political or Theological Identity?

What is an "evangelical"? Whatever the term meant historically, what does it mean today? To some ears, the term brings to mind MAGA hats more than church pews. To others, the term connotes certain theological commitments and missional postures. Has the term outlived its usefulness by taking on a meaning far from its original usage? How should faithful Christians use or not use "evangelical" as an identifying term?

RYAN BURGE is an assistant professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University and a pastor at First Baptist Church in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. He is the author of *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, And Where They Are Going.*

ANDREW T. WALKER is associate professor of Christian ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a fellow with the Ethics and Public Policy Center. His books include *Liberty for All: Defending Everyone's Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age* and *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The term "evangelical" is a theological term derived from the Greek word "euangelion," which means good news. How does this original meaning relate to the current understanding of "evangelical" in our culture?

2. In his opening statement, Andrew says, "My own understanding of my evangelical identity has more in common with a conservative Nigerian Anglican from the Global South than a white factory worker from the Midwest who votes Republican, but never goes to church." What does this teach us about the unity of believers? How does this challenge the way you perceive your own identity and membership in various communities?

3. In 2021, 42 percent of self-identified evangelicals said they went to church less than once a year. What does this reveal about the way our culture understands the meaning of being "evangelical"? How does this differ from what the term should mean, in your view?

4. Ryan mentions self-identified "evangelical Muslims" who see the term evangelical as denoting one of two things: being religiously devout or conservative Republican. What should Christians make of this usage of "evangelical"?

5. Pastors such as Robert Jeffress at First Baptist Church, Dallas, often primarily preach on conservative political issues. How do the viral words of pastors like Jeffress affect the way the media depicts and the culture perceives evangelicals?

6. Andrew says, "Any demographic research that allows the use of evangelical to be applied to those who consider themselves Muslim, Hindu, or who reject the divinity of Jesus Christ exhibits profound theological malpractice, a historical characterization, and muddled polling methodology." Do you agree? If so, how should this change the way we use the word evangelical?

7. Would there be value in adopting a new term to describe Christians who hold to the historic tenets of the Christian faith? What would be the pros and cons to adopting a new term?


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