

# Bite Size Bible Study

## Opposite Sides #154

By Pastor Lee

When you are confronted by two seemingly opposites, do you plant your feet solidly on one side or the other and refuse to consider the other? As humans we tend to be that way. We see one option as right and good and the other as bad or evil, and our way is right and good.

Take for instance Genesis 1. There are groups of individuals that insist that that the world was made in six days and there is nothing that will convince them that there is any other possibility. Then there are those who insist that the process took billions of years and they are just as adamant for their position.

Who's right – Who's wrong?  
Maybe both. Maybe neither.

That's only one of hundreds of controversies in religious circles. Neither side is willing to consider the other side's reasoning for their position. And of course God is always on their side. This seeming inability to accept that someone else may have a different opinion has led to broken friendships, broken homes, split communities and even war.

By accepting that someone else has a different view of something is not to necessarily accept his or her view, it is to accept that person.

*Keep pursuing shalom (peace and well being) with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses out on God's grace, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and thus contaminates many.*

Hebrews 12:14-15 CJB

Where do our opinions and views come from? I submit that they are a product of what we have experienced, what we have been taught, and one's expected behavior required in their culture. That leaves a wide range of possibilities for differing views and opinions.

As we grow into adulthood the people of our culture teach us. They tell us what is expected in their culture and pass on their knowledge of the their understanding of the things within their culture and we experience each of these ideas in that culture. Since cultures differ greatly, it is not a surprise that each culture would have understandings that are the same and others that differ.

Take for instance clothing: An Inuit in northern Canada would consider themselves well dress if they were wearing a caribou parka. A person in the US may consider himself or herself well dress in an Armani suit. A Yanomami of the Amazon Rainforest would consider

themselves well dressed in a small loincloth and their face and body decorated with paints, beads, and elaborate feathered headdress.

Who's right – Who's wrong?

It is almost totally determined by the culture and environment. The same is true of the many other things we get into arguments over.

Take for instance God: Is He one person, a duality, a trinity or a pantheon? In the Islamic tradition He is one person. In parts of Christianity He is a duality. In other parts He is a trinity or three in one. In other traditions there is not one god but many.

Who's right – Who's wrong?

Where are your feet solidly planted? Do you know everything about the God who created everything? Are there things He hasn't reveled to you? Could your understanding be missing some important information? Could someone else possibly understand some pieces of information that you are missing?

I think it is a sad commentary that many religious cultures have forbid its members to study other religious cultures. I understand their position – they want to protect the members from heresy (as they see it), especially the newer members. But that implies two things. 1) That the culture has all the correct and complete understanding. 2) The Holy Spirit is incapable of guiding that person.

Without a modicum of understanding of a different religious culture, or even differences within our own religious culture, how can we speak with them with *shalom* (peace and well being)? If we know nothing of their ideals and understandings, we will eventually "step on their toes" and start a conflict.

**Who's right – Who's wrong?**  
**Maybe both. Maybe neither.**

Understanding another person's beliefs doesn't mean that we have to accept their beliefs for ourselves, but we should allow them the dignity of those beliefs for the sake of peace, and allow God to lead them in the proper understanding at the proper time.

**It is the Holy Spirit's job to teach them – not ours.**

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