

How do you know who to believe?

If it comes down to having to trust the word of a drug-addicted felon with a criminal record longer than your arm or that of a truly God-fearing, dedicated Christian, your choice might be fairly easy. Other choices might not be so easy and that's we'll discuss in this article.

Let's say you are listening to a debate between two Christians, both of which have PhDs in Greek and Hebrew and are respected by their peers. The first person makes certain claims about what the Bible actually teaches regarding a topic on which you are certainly not an expert. The second claims something which is the exact opposite. Let's further say this subject is very significant and what someone believes about it will affect their view of other key teachings of the Bible. In other words, you can't just say it doesn't really matter one way or the other. In addition, they are both sharing very technical details that are beyond your comprehension. Who do you believe? do).



That's a much harder decision to make!

Here's what can generally happen in this type of situation. You hear the initial claims from the person espousing what you already believe and you think their arguments are strong. In some cases, however, when the other person speaks, they seem to make some pretty strong points about why the first person is wrong in their understanding. You might be a bit uncomfortable, but you can't really argue with what they are saying. Then the first person offers their own rebuttal to the second person's arguments, effectively defeating their case and you are back to feeling confident in your original belief and in the credibility of the first presenter. This situation could potentially continue with each person refuting the other's arguments, back and forth, until eventually there's nothing else to share and they have usually gone so deep that you are not in a position to know who is correct about what they are saying. Now who do you believe?

We are not dealing with any specific question here; we are just laying some groundwork and establishing general principles for these types of scenarios. You've no doubt already been in this type of situation. The reaction of many is to just walk away believing what they have always believed and telling themselves that somehow the other person is just wrong. (I've done that many times myself when I was younger, but it's really not the most mature response.)

Here's my advice... don't trust either of them! I'm not saying you should have a cynical attitude towards them, as if either was purposely being dishonest. I'm saying your trust should not be in any particular person, but in your own understanding of Scripture. Yeah, but you're not an expert in Greek and Hebrew, and they are! That's alright. I'm not either. When you stand before God, He is not going to ask you what your response was when Dr. So-and-So talked about "unwarranted expansions of semantic fields" or anything else about Hebrew or Greek. If that was the case, then the only way you

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could really know the truth would be to obtain advanced degrees in biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), enough to know more than virtually anyone else, so you could always know who is correct in their claims. This is not at all realistic. God is more concerned about you spending time yourself reading the Bible in English (or whatever your native language is) and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you in your understanding than He is about your personal pursuit of some level of expertise in the original languages. (*See important additional note at the end of this article.)

You may not initially know for sure what the truth is about a particular subject, but if you keep reading (including other related passages) and seeking, God will be honored and will continue to enlighten you throughout the process. That may mean you have some incomplete or even incorrect beliefs along the way, but God is gracious and will continue to strengthen and guide the entire time. It's not about having all the correct views instantly and being done. It's a process and a life-long pursuit. The core tenants of Christianity are crystal clear. Other issues of a more secondary nature can sometimes be challenging to figure out and that's where we need to be in prayer and always letting the Holy Spirit be our ultimate guide, as opposed to simply siding with some "expert" out there who happens to be espousing what we already believe. Whatever our view is on any particular subject, we need to be able to personally go to Scripture and show why we have come to that conclusion, as opposed to saying, "Well, that's what I heard, so that's what I believe." That can be very dangerous and then our trust is not really in God or His Word, but in man, which God warns us against.

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalm 119:18)

Let's all make a commitment to be "in the Word" everyday... myself included! It is a tremendous and obvious understatement to say that much more could be shared regarding this topic, but our space is limited in these brief articles. If you have any questions related to this month's question or any other issue, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@TheStartingPointProject.com.

*It is not my intention whatsoever to disparage those who do have training in Greek and Hebrew. On the contrary, I have great respect for those who have taken the time and effort to acquire this level of knowledge and I have learned a lot over the years from such men and women. However, I must always compare what they claim to my own, Holy Spirit-led understanding of God's Word and His guidance. Many times, God has convicted me that the expert whose works I am reading is indeed correct and I must change my views. Even in these cases, however, my trust is ultimately in God and not the expert. Sometimes the conviction comes that they are right about part of what they wrote and wrong about others.

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ORIGINAL OPENING...

Some choices are obvious... but not all! In explaining why, we'll briefly examine three scenarios.

Scenario One: You are serving on the jury for a felony crime case and hear two conflicting testimonies. One from the defendant, who has a criminal record longer than your arm, has been addicted to hard drugs since his youth and has already been caught in countless lies. The others are from five independent, upstanding members of the community who have the respect of everyone in town through their life-long history of selflessly serving others. Because of the nature of the crime, no direct evidence was available to corroborate any individual testimony. Who would you believe?

I'm sure you would tend to believe the independent, upstanding members of the community. That doesn't seem like a hard choice. (Now I am not implying that it could never be the case where the criminal is actually innocent in a particular instance and that upstanding people could never lie, but for the most part your decision would not be too difficult to make.)

Scenario Two: You are listening to a debate between an atheist and a Christian, both of which have PhDs in astrophysics and are respected by their peers. The atheist, claiming God does not exist and everything in the universe came from nothing, makes some seemingly strong scientific arguments. The Christian, claiming God does exist and He created everything just like it says in the Bible, also makes some very powerful scientific arguments. They are both sharing very technical evidence that is admittedly "over your head". Who do you believe?

I'm guessing (if you are a Christian or at least somewhat religious) you would side with the scientist who is a Christian. Not a real hard choice. In this case, your decision has virtually nothing to do with the evidence being discussed, because you are not in a position to know the truth regarding the facts they are offering. Your decision is based more upon the general worldview that each particular scientist holds.