

Be Open-Minded, but Don't Let Your Brain Fall Out

by Dr. Jay L. Wile, Ph.D.

Let's start with what "Open-Minded" Means

"Receptive to arguments or ideas"

– The Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Note what it DOES NOT mean:

- ☞ Gullible
- ☞ Wishy-Washy
- ☞ Unwilling to believe strongly in things
- ☞ Post-Modern
- ☞ Being a proponent of relativism

Why is Being "Open-Minded" Important?

- ☞ If I hadn't been an open-minded atheist, I would not be a Christian today.
- ☞ Consider the Pharisees. Why did almost all of them (except possibly Nicodemus) miss who Christ is?

They knew the Scriptures better than anyone in their time!
The Old Testament contains 332 prophecies that all came true in Christ

They missed it because they had their preconceived notions of who the Messiah would be, and they were unwilling to be open-minded!

Genesis 18:1-15 tells about Sarah laughing at the idea that she would bear a child in her old age. She was not receptive to the idea that God can do anything.

James 2:1-13 is about judging people. It uses the example of a rich man and a poor man coming to church. Verse 9 says, "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." Where does such partiality come from? Closed-mindedness.

Your Open-Mindedness MUST be Tempered...

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" -**Ephesians 4:14**

"Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But **examine everything carefully**; hold fast to that which is good"
-**1 Thessalonians 5:19-21**

How Do We Achieve This “Tempered” Open-Mindedness?

1. Look at issues from more than one side. If you read only one side of an issue, it is easy to miss vital information, especially when you are not knowledgeable in a subject related to the issue.

So...are you a Calvinist? Then read some Arminianist works. Don't read a Calvinist who says he is telling you what the Arminians believe. Read an Arminianist. The beauty of doing this is that no only might you gain fresh insight from Scripture, you might actually learn more about the issue itself.

Two Examples of How This Works

The Old Earth/Young Earth Issue:

“What did the early church believe about creation? In its first 16 centuries the church held to a young earth. Earth was several thousand years old, was created quickly in six 24-hour days, and was later submerged under a worldwide flood.”

-James R. Mook, “The Early Church on Creation,” AiG

This is just not true! Many early church theologians (Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hilary of Poitiers, etc.) believed the days weren't even days, and others believed the Genesis account was figurative. By the 12th century, a figurative interpretation of the creation account was widespread in the church. The early church did believe in a young earth, but not because it believed the Genesis days were 24-hour days.

I learned this from reading old-earth creationists and examining their references.

The Vaccination Issue:

Pro:

When a measles outbreak occurs in a school, the vaccinated children are 22 TIMES less likely to contract the disease than are the unvaccinated children.

Anti:

When a measles outbreak occurs in a school, the majority of students (usually about 60%) who get the disease are vaccinated.

Both statements are true, but one is deceptive. Hopefully, if you read both sides, you will see that and investigate the issue more.

2. Avoid believing things for emotional reasons. Emotions are not bad, but they are not reliable and are easily manipulated.

Examples of what I mean:

- ☞ Believing something because someone you respect believes it
- ☞ Believing something because you really want it to be true
- ☞ Believing something because of the charisma of a proponent.
- ☞ Believing something because people pressure you to believe it

Examples of Things Christians Believe for Emotional Reasons:

- ☞ Christ is not the only way to heaven.
- ☞ NASA discovered the fact that the sun stood still in the sky as reported in Joshua 10:12-13 by tracking the orbits of the planets backwards.
- ☞ Charles Darwin recanted his theory and became a Christian on his deathbed.
- ☞ Scientists drilling deep in the earth discovered hell.
- ☞ Laminin (a cell adhesion protein) is shaped like a cross to symbolize how Christ holds all things together.

3. Don't be afraid to admit that you are wrong. Being wrong is a part of being human. We will all find we were wrong about some things when we get to heaven!

4. Respect those who disagree with you.

I am not talking about "being nice," because that should go without saying. I am talking about not dismissing someone's argument (especially someone more knowledgeable than you) because you disagree.

5. Remember 1 Thessalonians 5:21 ("examine everything carefully") and 2 Timothy 2:15 ("Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.")

This is probably the hardest of all of them, because it requires a lot of work. There are a lot of bad ideas wrapped up in arguments that initially sound very convincing. You need to be diligent when you investigate new ideas. You might find treasure, but you might find trash. You have to learn how to distinguish between the two. Here are some thoughts on how to do that:

Be Skeptical When Little or No Evidence is Given

My general rule of thumb is that extraordinary statements require extraordinary evidence.

On the issue of global warming, for example, the statement is that the actions of people can, in essence, cause massive disruption to the planet. That kind of statement needs extraordinary evidence.

The only evidence offered, however, is computer models that can't even reproduce the past and one kind of temperature measurement (surface temperatures) that are the least reliable on a global scale.

Check References

When evidence is given, make sure that the evidence really does say what the author claims it says.

In 2006, neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine's book, *The Female Brain*, claims that studies show that women use on average 20,000 words per day, while men use only 7000.

In fact, I cannot find a single study that says this. The most recent study I have found say they each use about 16,000 words per day on average. [Matthias R. Mehl, *et al.*, "Are Women Really More Talkative Than Men?," *Science* 317: 82, 2007]

It is impossible to check all references, because some people use a LOT of references. In some cases, it is to give the "air" of being scholarly. However, you can check key references. Try to find the vital parts of the argument and check the references related to those.

Be skeptical of "lone gunmen"

While a single individual might very well be right about an issue, it is easier for such a person to end up being wrong, because he or she just doesn't have all the expertise necessary to tackle an issue. Groups with a variety of experts are more likely to be correct than a single individual.

Kent Hovind makes a lot of mistakes in his presentations because he does not subject himself to peer review. For example, he talks about a dinosaur fossil being carbon dated as tens of thousands of years old to show that carbon dating is wrong, but the carbon that was dated was NOT from the fossil.

Be skeptical when experts are dismissed

Experts have a lot of knowledge, and it is just silly to dismiss them because they disagree with you. However, this happens all the time.

- ☞ Young-earth creationists dismiss old-earth theologians like Gleason Archer, who knows at least eight old-testament languages.
- ☞ Old-earth theologians dismiss research done by experts like Russell Humphreys simply because his research indicates a young earth.

The fact that they are experts doesn't make them right, but it does make them people to hear out. Argue with their evidence, not what you see as motives or preconceptions

Be skeptical of conspiracy explanations

Often, people make excuses for the fact that most of the evidence doesn't support their claims because of some conspiracy. There might be financial interests or other interests that supposedly keep the evidence from being shown.

While it is certainly POSSIBLE for things to be covered up, it is less and less likely in today's society. If an argument depends too heavily on the idea of a conspiracy, it is probably not an idea that has much merit.

Be skeptical of information found only on the web.

Although the internet is a great resource for information, it is also a great resource for lies:

- ☞ The moon landings were not faked.
- ☞ It is **IMPOSSIBLE** for a company to give you money or other prizes by tracking the number of E-MAILs that you forward!
- ☞ Noted historian Tim Wood **DID NOT** write an article saying Obama is comparable to Hitler.

To avoid being fooled by such nonsense, seek a reputable source that evaluates such claims, like:

<http://www.truthorfiction.com>

Because it is so quick and easy to publish on the internet, it can actually be used as a check against itself.

If you are researching something on the internet and come across a fact that is new to you, copy and paste that fact into a search engine and see what comes up. If you copied and pasted many of the things I have debunked into a search engine, you will find evidence that debunks each of them.

Check Everything With Prayer and Scripture

God does speak to us through prayer and the study of Scripture. Obviously, you can mistake the devil for God (2 Corinthians 11:14), so you need to exercise discernment.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ are a great resource as well. I have a trusted brother that I discuss many things with. He helps me to see things in new ways, and he helps me to evaluate new ideas. If you want to use such people to help you in your quest for tempered open-mindedness, however, they need to be open-minded themselves.