

What Are You Arguing About?

Mark 9:30-37 (text v. 33)

Here is a question Jesus asks His disciples about an argument they were having amongst themselves—*“What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?”* The word *“disputed”* means arguing and bickering. They were definitely having an intense debate among themselves.

Debates are in the news today. If you saw the GOP debate last Thursday night, it got very heated and intense at times. They are debating who is the greatest candidate to be President. I think the disciples fell into this same kind of debate—Who is the greatest in the kingdom.

I. The AWARENESS of the dispute. (v. 33). Jesus’ question did two things:

- It let the disciples know Jesus was watching and listening to them. Jesus is also watching and listening to you.
 - It let the disciples know Jesus was holding them accountable. And we will also give account of every idle word we say (Mt. 12:36).
- A. Jesus didn’t ask this question because He didn’t know. He knows the hearts of men (Mt. 9:4). He asked to force the disciples to face the silliness of their squabbling.
- B. How much we would argue about if we realized Jesus was listening? Would we argue over someone sitting in the seat that we usually sit in? Who is more spiritual? Whose church is bigger? Would we argue about who is going to sing the solo? Would we argue about dress codes... worship formats... and music styles?

II. The AMBITION of the dispute. (v. 34).

- ➡ One of the main themes of Christ’s teaching was the Kingdom He would establish on earth. The disciples followed Christ, believing they would reign with Him.
- While traveling privately with His disciple through Galilee, Jesus taught about His coming crucifixion and resurrection (v. 31). It went right over their head (v. 32)! They were afraid to ask

—“Whoa Jesus! Hold the phone! What’s this talk of being killed? What happened to the kingdom?”

- No, they just keep on arguing about who is going to the greatest.
- A. The FREQUENCY of the argument— This argument occurred three times in Christ’s earthly ministry:
1. The occasion of our text (cf. Mt. 18:1; Luke 9:46).
 2. Over the request of the mother of James and John (Mark 10:35-45).
 3. At the Lord’s supper (Luke 22:19, 24). Right there at the Lord’s supper within the shadow of the cross they are squabbling over the same issue Christ settled twice earlier! How it must have grieved Christ’s heart. He has to repeat what He already taught them.
- B. The FOCUS of argument—AMBITION. Ambition is normally associated with an intense desire to “get ahead.”

One evidence of the works of the flesh is “*emulations*” (Gal. 25:20). Emulations are “an effort to match or surpass another person or achievement.” It is the idea of “one-upmanship.”

Ambition can be either a virtue or a vice

- Ambition prompted the attempt to build the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4).
- Ambition of Korah caused him and his followers to perish alive in the bottomless pit (Num. 16).
- Ambition ignited Absalom to rebel (2 Sam. 15:1-4).
- Ambition fueled Diotriphes' love to have the preeminence in the church (3 John 9).
- Ambition is behind most of the politics in our country.

C. The **FAULT** of the argument—**Why didn't the disciples answer** (Mk. 9:34)?

1. Could it be they were embarrassed realizing the whole argument was motivated by prideful ambition and jealousy.
2. Do you think if the disciples knew Jesus overheard their bickering their conversation may have been different?
3. How would you answer if Jesus spoke to your heart and asked, "Tell Me, what did you discuss and think about today." Would you be embarrassed to answer Him?
 - How many of our thoughts and discussions revolved around ourselves instead of promoting God's glory?

III. The ADMONITION of the dispute (vs. 35-37).

- Jesus did not need them to answer to rebuke their prideful dispute. He knew all about it.
 - Jesus is clearly not happy about this argument. Therefore He sits them down to teach them a lesson about what greatness really looks like.
- A. It was **DIRECT** (to the point)— *"If any man desire to be first..."*
- ➡ The world measures success by how many people you have working for you. Jesus' standard of greatness is determined by how many people you are serving (Mk. 10:42-45).
- B. It was **DRAMATIC** (v. 36). He illustrated it.
- ➡ In Jesus' day, children were not esteemed by the culture. They were there to serve, not be served. In the Aramaic language,

the words *servant* and *child* were the same. Jesus turned the existing paradigm on its head. Jesus gives importance and prominence to the lowest and least.

C. It was DECISIVE (v. 37).

➡ The practical application is that you receive Jesus (John 1:12) with the same simple faith of a child. A child is trusting; he will believe what an adult tells him without needing an explanation.

➡ Will you trust Jesus like a child?

SUMMATION: Jesus did not teach in the abstract. He taught by example. There is no greater example of servanthood than Jesus (Luke 22:24-27).