

What is meant by dispute is an argument between two or more people having to do with a controversial matter, in which each disputant is trying to support his own view and nullify that of his opponent, each of them striving to establish proof to that effect. What is required when engaging in dispute is to do it in the best manner, by keeping it brief in a way that could bring the misguided back to the right path, establish proof against the stubborn, clarify the truth and shed light on falsehood. If the argument develops and goes beyond these bounds, then it becomes pointless, an argument that does not lead to anything good, and it may in fact lead to some negative consequences.

The People of the Book claimed that they were closer to Allah than the Muslims, but this was a mere claim that required proof and evidence. If the Lord of all is One and He is not your Lord alone to the exclusion of us, and both we and you have our deeds, then we and you are equal in that regard. This means that neither of the two parties is closer to Allah than the other, because differentiating when you are equal in a particular matter, without there being anything to differentiate between you, is a false claim; differentiating between two who are equal is obviously stubborn and arrogant. Rather what makes one superior to the other is sincerity towards Allah alone in righteous deeds, and this is something that is a characteristic of the believers only. Therefore they are closer to Allah than others, because sincerity is the way to salvation. This is the difference between the close friends of Allah and the close friends of the Shayṭān, on the basis of the characteristics that truly matter and are recognised by people of reason, and are only disputed by those who are arrogant and ignorant. In this verse, we see a subtle hint which guides us to the best way to present our case in an argument; it also tells us that matters are based on noticing the similarities and differences between two things.