

RELATIONAL APOLOGETICS

DEFENDING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH WITH HOLINESS RESPECT AND TRUTH

MICHAEL C. SHERRARD



Response to *Relational Apologetics*

"*Relational Apologetics* is a much-needed work that I heartily endorse. This book not only tackles the major challenges to faith, but also illustrates how apologetics should be done—with humility and respect. Michael Sherrard's unpretentious style and proletarian approach set it apart for those who lack the academic prowess required by many scholarly works in Christian apologetics. His book draws on the conviction, exemplified in the lives of Jesus and the apostles, that apologetics, as pre-evangelism is most affective when it is done relationally."

– D. Scott Henderson Ph.D, Assistant Professor of Bioethics and Apologetics at Luther Rice Seminary and author of *Death and Donation*

"ANYONE can read this and learn all they need to know about apologetics, and thus become more effective in their Christian walk. The style is straightforward, the flow is logical, and the message is one that will help many share their faith effectively."

– Grady "Pete" Rockett, president and CEO,
Georgia Baptist Foundation

"*Relational Apologetics* is concise, witty and, above all, practical. Sherrard's call to holiness sets this work apart from other books of its kind. Here is an approach to defending one's faith that is altogether new and refreshing while at the same time biblical and timeless."

– Dylan Higgins, Author of *The Emblem and The Lantern* Series

“I think the book really shines as a pastoral work. *Relational Apologetics* is written for people who are scared. It's for people who are scared about the things they don't know, scared of the intellectual atheists, scared for the people they love, and scared that God isn't with them when they witness. This book manages to admonish, educate, and challenge the reader to repent of that fear and to a stronger witness in a very readable and laid-back style. Reading it really gave me the sense that a pastor was going over his notes with me in my living room or over coffee.

– David Thomas, *Artery Bloggage*

"The more I read the more I kept thinking this book is brilliant. The words that kept coming to me were ‘brilliant but simple.’ I don't claim to be an intellectual heavyweight when it comes to apologetics, but Mike helped me realize I that don't have to be an intellectual heavyweight to be used by God to talk to skeptics or even those who are totally opposed to Christianity.

Not only am I going to recommend *Relational Apologetics* to others, but I am going to read it on a yearly basis to help me get better at making a defense of the hope that is within me in a "relational" way that seeks to not win the argument, but connect others to Christ. *Relational Apologetics* is a gift to God's people who desire for others to know Him and to make Him known."

– Jay McSwain, Atlanta Braves Chaplain
and President of Place Ministries

Defending the Christian Faith
with Holiness, Respect and Truth

RELATIONAL APOLOGETICS

MICHAEL C. SHERRARD



Relational Apologetics
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Michael C. Sherrard

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To the love of my life, my beautiful bride, Terri

My precious gift, the mother, and teacher of my children, and my partner in preparing them and others to impact our world for Jesus Christ.

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PREFACE



As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

-Romans 10:15

Beautiful Feet

Feet are repulsive. They are not objects of beauty. Yet, there is nothing more beautiful than the feet of those who preach the good news of Jesus Christ. It is quite easy to say that the feet of *those* who preach the gospel are beautiful. But it must be *our* feet as well. We must proclaim the hope found in Jesus. We all must be evangelists.

Sharing the gospel is not easy in our day. The world does not tolerate exclusive beliefs. We will be hated for preaching

that it is only in Jesus that man can be saved. We will be called judgmental, arrogant bigots. We may lose our jobs, our friends, and even our family members. Some may even lose their lives. But because there is nothing greater than knowing our Lord, we must sacrifice ourselves in love so that others may have the chance to know our God. That is why this book was written: to help you be able to defend your hope in Jesus and lead others to Him.

Now, I am not C.S. Lewis. I am not one who has a great philosophical mind. I'm not in the class of Josh McDowell, Ravi Zacharias, or any of the great apologists of our day. There is much yet for me to learn. This book will not answer every question. I may even be wrong at some point. A great fear I have in writing is that my view on something may change and then I will have in permanent form something I now think to be wrong. I guess upon that reasoning, though, I could at some point have my view changed again back to what it originally was, and then I would be no worse off. Anyway, the point I have come to see is that omniscience is not in the cards for me, and so writing with a limited amount of knowledge is fine, as long as it is written with that understanding. I want you to be aware of this about myself as you begin to read. Full disclosure, I think it is called.

Why this Book was Written

This book was birthed from my students' desire to know both that Christianity is the "right religion" and how to communicate that truth to others. Many of them had friends who were skeptical of Christianity. They wanted to know how to maintain their relationships with them while at the same

time persuade them to follow Jesus. They were frustrated with not knowing how to answer skeptics' questions and respond to their objections. They were tired of the arguments that always seemed to accompany their talks about God. And, quite frankly, they were fed up with feeling belittled because of their belief in God. I imagine you can relate to this.

My students' desire to know how to defend their faith is a desire that I think most Christians have. It is my desire. One that led me to study religion, philosophy, and apologetics in college. The books I read were great. The lectures I heard were brilliant. Yet, they would not be understood by most of my students or fellow Christians.

Don't misunderstand me; I firmly support the academic efforts of those brilliant men who seek to affirm Christianity through the highest levels of scientific and historical research and philosophical argumentation. However, this is not what most Christians need. They need something simple and reasonable. They need a way to explain to their neighbor, who is not a philosopher, that absolute truth exists. They need a way to explain to their amateur skeptic classmate why a belief in the resurrection is not foolish. Simply, they need an easy way to answer how they know that Christianity is right in its claims about God. This is what this book seeks to do.

Relational Apologetics is about how to share and defend your faith as a non-scholar to a non-scholar. It will not delve deeply into the scientific and philosophical arguments for the existence of God and the validity of Christianity. It will, though, provide solid, simple, and easily-remembered reasons why one should believe in each. It will also teach essential relational skills that are necessary to talk to skeptics and

maintain a healthy relationship with them. I have always been encouraged, for example, by the way that Gary Habermas maintained a friendship with former atheist Anthony Flew.[1] Healthy relationships combined with a reasonable explanation of a Christian's hope are the best type of apologetic, and they are something that all Christians are capable of.

What is Apologetics?

I have now, several times, used the word apologetic, and I should explain what it is in brief. Apologetics is the defense of Christianity. Well, apologetics itself is simply a defense or justification for something. But I will use it hereafter to mean the defense and evidence of the Christian faith. Christian Apologetics is a discipline that uses history, science, and philosophy to show that God exists and that He has revealed Himself most fully in Jesus Christ. Its purpose in Christianity is to strengthen the believers' faith and equip them with the tools necessary to explain their hope within. And I think it is a necessary part of evangelism in our postmodern world.[2]

The lies of postmodernity have built up walls in the lives of many people that serve to keep the gospel out. Lies like *truth does not exist, all religions are the same, the Bible is a forged book*, and *the resurrection was a fake,* become a

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[1] Habermas had many debates with Flew about God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For many of those years Flew was an atheist. Before his death, Flew moved his position to Deism (he still had some hangups about special revelation), and he credited much of his move to Habermas.

[2] I also think that another application of apologetics is pastoral. But that is another book waiting to be written.

barricade to the light of the gospel. We must become equipped to destroy these obstacles because we love others and want them to believe in Jesus (2 Corinthians 10:2). To be a faithful steward of the gospel today, we must become able to defend our hope in Jesus. We all must be apologists.

The Value of Apologetics

I sometimes hear that apologetics has no value in evangelism, that all you need is the gospel. People often say that you can't argue someone into heaven and apologetics has never saved anyone. They are right, mostly. The gospel *is* what saves someone, not apologetics. But people must *hear* the gospel to believe it and be saved. You would be right in saying that the Chinese language has never saved anyone. But if you are going to preach the gospel in China, you had better learn Chinese. A good missionary would learn the language and customs of the people group they are visiting. I have never heard a missionary say, "I don't need to learn Chinese; I've got the gospel." That would be a ridiculous attitude.

Likewise, as good missionaries, we need words and concepts that are suitable to convey the truth of the gospel to our culture. We must learn to speak the language of our time. For example, say you meet a person who does not believe in truth. You tell him that Jesus is the only way to be saved.

"What do you mean... *saved?"* he replies. *"*Saved from what?"

"Sin."

"What's sin?"

"Sin is all the wrong things you have done."

"I don't believe in right and wrong. Truth doesn't exist."

"Yes, it does."

"No, it doesn't."

Do you see how you are speaking a different language? If they don't believe in truth, sin is a meaningless word. It is gibberish to them and the gospel won't be understood. Apologetics helps to create a common language for the skeptic and believer to communicate. By enabling the Christian to explain things like the existence of absolute truth, apologetics allows the gospel to be heard.

An Apologetic Lifestyle

Speaking a different language is one reason why people don't hear the gospel. Another one is Christians. We are notorious for being hypocrites who are rude and arrogant. Sometimes this accusation is justified. There *are* many Christians who are hypocrites and conversations of faith *do* quickly turn into shouting matches because of us. You know. You have done it. However, whether it's because of silence, an unholy lifestyle, or just plain rudeness, *you* must not be the reason someone doesn't hear the gospel. And therein is the meaning to the title of this book.

Relational Apologetics is about your life becoming a defense of the Christian faith. Every relationship you have is an opportunity for you to connect people to their creator by displaying your hope, both in word and deed. Defending your faith is not just about answering questions and "proving" that God exists. It is about *showing* that He is real by the way you live. It is about *demonstrating* the power of God through your holiness. And it is about *drawing* people to Jesus through your kindness.

It is my belief that the best apologetic for Christianity encompasses holy people who preach the gospel with their mouths and display the gospel in *every* aspect of their lives. Truth is robbed of power when it is delivered from the mouths of hypocrites, and if we are to faithfully defend our hope in Jesus Christ, we must focus as much on *who we are* and *how we talk* as we do on *what we say.*

And so, I ask that as you begin reading this book you search yourself. Pray that God will condition you to be a worthy vessel of the gospel. Defending Christianity is a good and noble task, but if all you want to do is win an argument, your heart is not in the right place. Defending your faith is not an act of arrogance. Rather, it is an act of love. So pray that God changes your heart as much as your mind as you read.

I pray that if you need to repent for your unfaithfulness to the gospel, God will convict you in the pages to come. My prayer for you is that this book serves you as you seek to be a faithful servant of Christ, committed to speaking truth in love to all you meet. And I trust that the result of you reading this book will be a stronger desire, matched with an improved ability, to make much of Jesus Christ and not yourself.

SECTION ONE

WHO YOU ARE

CHAPTER ONE

HOLINESS



The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, and walk out the door, and deny him with their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.

-Brennan Manning

The Obstacle of Hypocrisy

There are many obstacles in coming to Christ. For many it is not an easy road. There are family issues, intellectual objections, pain, unanswered questions, guilt, pride, and so forth. Added to this list of obstacles, needs not be yourself. Sadly, though, the hypocrisy of Christians *is* a reason, and, I must say, a fair reason why people reject Christ.

I often hear pastors respond to the claim that there is too much hypocrisy in the church by laughing and sweeping it under the rug with the overused cliché, "Sure, the church is full of hypocrites, and what a good place for a hypocrite to be." Usually the pastor then adds that there is always room for one more, the idea being that all people are hypocrites at some level. But this should not be tolerated. Hypocrisy is a sin, a serious sin. It is a sin that Jesus addressed. And it is a sin that the church needs to destroy and not just joke away.

It is true that people don't always live up to the standard they set for their lives, and it is true that the one who hates hypocrisy likely has moments of hypocrisy himself. There is one difference, though, between the Christian hypocrite and the non-Christian hypocrite. The Christian hypocrite claims to know God and His will. This is no small claim. It is the grandest of all claims.

Knowing God and His will should undoubtedly affect how a person lives. It's hard to imagine that a person could meet God and not be changed. What message, then, is sent by someone who claims to know God but lives in direct contradiction to His commands? I think it sends the message that they are a fraud and a liar. I think it makes the gospel look false and devoid of power. I think it displays that they do not really believe the words that they preach. And I think it shows that they don't know God.

The truth of the matter is that your life either draws people to Christ or it pushes people away from Him. Whether you like it or not, as a Christian, you are a representative of Jesus. Your words and actions have gospel implications, and your life is intended to be a light guiding people to Christ

(Matthew 5:13-16). However, when your life is not in-step with the gospel, your hypocrisy becomes a shade that casts a shadow of doubt over the life-changing message of the cross. For when you, a believer in Jesus Christ, are no different from the non-believers to whom you are preaching, the gospel appears to be nothing more than a fairy tale: a nice story that is absent of any real power.

If the gospel is to look real to a world that is perishing apart from God, you must not look like a fraud. It is for this reason that hypocrisy must be replaced by genuine holiness in your life.

The Objective of Holiness

Christians are commanded to be holy like their God (1 Peter 1:15).[1] We are to pursue pure and righteous living, free from all sin. Perfection is our aim. This is a daunting task. It is overwhelming to know that our life is to be a holy act of worship unto our God (Romans 12:1-3). Thankfully, pursuing holiness is not something that we do on our own strength.

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[1] Just to be clear, I need to make the distinction here between positional holiness and personal holiness. Positional holiness is something that true believers possess. It is not something that needs to be sought every day. It is something we receive as a result of our hope in Jesus. Those who place their trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins are acquitted in the heavenly court of all crimes and sins and are set apart and consecrated unto God as a holy person. In that sense, all true Christians are holy (2 Peter 2:9). On the other hand, personal holiness relates to the lifestyle of a Christian. It involves the daily surrender of your will to seek to do God's will. It involves your active commitment to live a pure and God-honoring life. From this point on, when I refer to holiness, I am referring to your personal holiness.

God is working in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure, and He will complete the good work He has started in us (Philippians 2:14; 1:6).

Knowing that God will accomplish His purposes in our lives, namely our holiness (Romans 8:29), it is still our responsibility to seek to kill the sin in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:12-13). We must act on the power supplied to us every day and seek to become like Jesus. Holiness is a pursuit in this life, not a destination, and when we stop running the race to become like Christ we *will* be overtaken by hypocrisy. This is precisely where many Christians find themselves today.

Hypocrisy has caught many of Christ's followers who have ceased running after Him and have traded in the *pursuit* of holiness for the *pretense* of holiness. It is much easier to pretend to be holy than it is to pursue a holy life. And the easiest way to fake a holy life is to point out the sin in others instead of searching for the sin in your own life. You likely know someone who does this. You may even do it yourself. But understand that God is no fool, and the ability to spot the sin in others is no sign to Him that you are sinless. Rather, it is likely the sign that you are a hypocrite.

The Nature of Hypocrisy

Christians must be concerned more with their own sin than the sins of others. Jesus explained this while preaching on judgment during His sermon on the mount. He said, "Why do you see the speck that's in your brother's eye, but don't notice the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take

the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5). Here we see that, according to Jesus, hypocrisy is the result of exposing your brother's sin but not your own.

This was perhaps the greatest problem Jesus had with the religious leaders in His day. Jesus routinely called the Pharisees and Sadducees hypocrites because they were concerned more with *condemnation* than *self-examination*. They sought to expose the sins of others yet gave little consideration to their own. In fact, many of them did not even consider themselves to be sinners. But Jesus was not fooled. They were, according to Him, whitewashed tombs: something that looked good on the outside, but had death on the inside (Matthew 23:27).

This hypocrisy in the Pharisees stemmed from their misunderstanding of what it meant to be righteous and holy. They presumed upon their status as Jews, God's chosen people, and believed that Judgement was not upon them. Therefore, they were not concerned with holiness; they believed God had already made them holy. This is dangerous. Relying on past actions is the breeding ground for hypocrisy and many Christians today are falling into this trap.

Many believers presume upon God's mercy as they look back to some prayer they prayed in the past and use it as a license to sin as the Pharisees did. They believe they are covered from their sin, and so, they continue to sin. Because they are "saved," sin does not bother them too much, except when they see it in others. The yeast of the Pharisee is dwelling in many Christians today who, because of a wrong understanding of the gospel, have decided to be the judge of everyone's sin except their own.

But a proper understanding of the gospel should cause Christians to actively pursue holiness. It should cause forgiven men and women to hate the sin that sent Jesus to the cross and propel them to purge it from their lives. The good news of God's mercy and kindness is intended to lead men and women to repentance, not guilt-free sinning. Many Christians today misunderstand this and abuse their "saved" status. They rest in their past and become numb to their sin while they judge the rest of the world. They pretend to be holy by showing how others are not. This type of living makes a mockery of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and this kind of hypocrisy must vanish from Christianity.

The Holy Apologist

The way to avoid hypocrisy is to daily seek holiness through self-examination, forgiveness, and repentance. Understand that every day you must be concerned about examining your own life more than examining others. Ask the Lord to show you the sin that remains and ask Him to forgive you. Then you need to repent. Know that repentance is a practice of the righteous, not something that is only for "pagans." Do not be a hypocritical Pharisee and pretend to be holy by judging other "sinners." Rather, be holy and let the light of your life show the darkness of others' sin.

A daily repentance, turning away from sin and toward Jesus, is perhaps the most important apologetic for God you can possess. This is because your life must reflect your message, or your message will appear to be false. But, if your message matches your life, you will be a light in a dark world that will be impossible to miss.

Know that your personal holiness is a command from God and it is one that has gospel implications. Your love and mercy towards others is evidence that God exists. Your changed life demonstrates the power of the gospel. *Your life matters*. It is not only the pastors and the theologians of the world that display the evidence and glory of God. It is you.

As we consider how to defend our faith, let us first make sure that our faith has changed us. Let us first ask ourselves if we truly hope in Christ, and then examine our lives to see if we are living as if we hope in Him. If our lives contradict our message, our defense of it will only serve to further harden the hearts of skeptics against God. Therefore, let your life be an apologetic even before your words are.[2]

[2] To be clear, I am not saying that you should never directly expose the sin in another person. Christians are called to expose sin. However, it must happen only upon the foundation of self-examination and personal repentance. It is only the Christians who are committed to removing their own sin that are qualified to help others remove theirs.

CHAPTER TWO

HUMILITY



It is better to remain silent and appear to be a fool than it is to open your mouth and confirm that you are.

-Abraham Lincoln

The Limits of Our Knowledge

You don't know everything. Nobody knows everything. Not even your condescending, skeptical coworker or classmate who has made you feel like an intellectually inferior person for believing in Christianity. So fear not. A lack of knowledge puts you in the same boat as everyone else. We all have our limitations. It is good and comforting to know this.

Realizing that you are not enslaved to the responsibility of knowing every answer to every question a skeptic might

ask you can be a huge relief. It quite simply is a burden the Christian need not carry. You must comprehend this freedom to be able to defend your faith. Many of us never even attempt to defend our faith because of a fear of not having an answer. Hear me; it is just fine to not have an answer. There is absolutely no shame in saying, "I don't know. You raise an interesting question." Understand that man's eternity is not held in the hand of your knowledge.

Not only is it a relief to understand that "I don't know" is an option, others will appreciate your honesty in admitting your lack of knowledge. People like humble people, and in a day of glory-seeking pontificators, your honesty and humility will be greatly appreciated. It will show the other person that you aren't arrogant and out to win at all costs. It will show them that you value and respect them enough to concede to a good point and allow them to look smart. Because, let's be honest, the reason you get angry in arguments is partly because you feel the other person doesn't respect you and is making you look dumb for believing in what you do. So when you can say, "I don't know, good point," it will show the other person that although you disagree with him, you don't think he is an idiot. This humility will go a long way toward developing a healthy conversation and a lasting relationship. These are each much more likely to produce fruit than will back-and-forth fact-spouting.

A Credible Lack of Knowledge

When you admit that you don't know everything, along with it being appreciated by others, it will protect your credibility. This may seem backwards because we usually think

credibility is found in *having* answers. However, respect and credibility are lost faster by offering wrong answers to questions in the attempt to win an argument than by humbly admitting there are some things you do not know. The ability to concede in an argument will guard your reputation and allow you to maintain the respect of the other person despite your lack of knowledge. It is important to understand that much of what a person thinks about what you *say* is affected by what they think about *you*.

I learned this truth as a result of having an ongoing friendship with a person who didn't believe in Jesus. I saw how my willingness to concede when I had no answer helped our relationship and benefited our conversations. There is one particular example that I think will help explain what I am saying.

My skeptic friend and I frequently had conversations about faith. I remember one day better than others because it changed the nature of our future conversations. This day we were engaged in a typical back-and-forth argument, this time about natural law,[1] and there came a point in our conversation when I didn't have a good answer to one of his points. I hated it. First, I am competitive, and beyond that I just like to be right. So I had to practice the humility of shutting up and saying, "Good point, let me think about that."

Upon my concession, my friend's countenance softened and his expression was worth the price of my humility. It was as if a burden was taken off his back. His tone became mild

[1] Natural law is the theory that morality is known by all men instinctively, and is not created by man, but discovered.

and the rest of our talk was very pleasant. In that moment, my humility allowed him to feel respected, to know that I was not out to get him, and to know that I recognized his intelligence. Backing down was the best thing I did in our conversations of faith, for it completely changed the nature of the rest of our conversations even to this day.

The Power of Humility

By reflecting upon this situation and my own natural hatred of backing down, I have come to an understanding of one of the reasons why we don't admit it when we know we have no answer. We think that if we ever lose one argument, we lose the entire battle, and our friend's soul will be lost forever. We believe the lie that our one moment of yielding will be interpreted as all the proof the skeptic needs to maintain his rejection of God. But this is simply not true. In fact, our humility expressed through an "I don't know" can become a bridge that enables us to lead someone to Christ.

Humility is a disarmer. It causes the defenses of the person with whom you are speaking to go down. When someone's guard is down they are more likely to see through their emotions and consider what you are saying. Sometimes all it takes is a small crack in the skeptic's barricade for the light of the gospel to dispel the darkness of their unbelief. Just a little light can help guide you to your destination. Humility that brings forth respect and disarmament may be the light that allows someone to see Christ.

I have found that my humility brings out the humility in others; and humility is essential in coming to Christ. The proud do not see God. When I am humble enough to admit

that I don't know something, or am able to admit that the person I am speaking with has made a good point, it affords them the opportunity to do the same. And then, their lack of defenses and their humility make them much more open to hear the truth of the gospel and respond to it in a positive manner.

The Humble Apologist

I know that many of us like to think that we know everything and some of us actually believe that we do.[2] But this attitude is of no use. It must be thrown away. Pride must be killed before it has a chance to grow into a monster that causes men to reject Christ. Arrogance, self-importance, and smugness have no place in the heart, mind, or conversations of the disciple of Christ. Therefore, be diligent in destroying the pride that is likely to surface in your conversations about your faith.

Be grateful and remember that the fate of a person's soul is not contingent on you knowing all things. Realize that in God's grace and providence you are but a small part of His divine plan in drawing men to Himself. Now, this is not an excuse for us to be lazy and not expand our knowledge, but it is a crucial understanding for us to have nonetheless. So start practicing humility in your conversations and do not fear saying, "I don't know."

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[2] Just saying J.F.C. (I imagine there is only one person in the world who understands this footnote.)

CHAPTER THREE

READINESS



But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as Holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks for the reason for the hope that is in you.

-1 Peter 3:15

A Call to Readiness

Even though last chapter's premise was that you don't have to know everything in order to defend your faith, this chapter calls for us to be as prepared as possible. In developing our strategy in how to defend and share our faith, it can't be over-emphasized that you must be ready to do so. This probably seems a bit patronizing, as if we don't already know that we must become prepared. Even so, it is a point that must be

made. For how often do we begin our day with the mindset of seeking to glorify God by leading others to Him? I can tell you that most mornings my day begins by trying to figure out just how long I can stay in bed and still be where I need to be on time. And honestly, as the day progresses, my attention doesn't shift away from selfish pursuits very easily. Yet, despite our egocentric tendencies, we must become prepared to defend our faith because people are going to ask us about the hope within us.

A City on a Hill

It's a fact of life that if you live differently than others, people will ask you why you do so. One thing is certain about man: he is curious. And when something is found by man to be different from him, he usually will react in one of two ways. He will either want to copy it, (if he finds good reasons for doing so), or he will want to kill it because of the fear brought on by a perceived threat to his own way of living. But it is certain that he will not just ignore something that he finds new and strange.

As you live your life according to Christian values, inevitably, the world will notice that you are different, and they will want to know why. Authentic Christians are lights in a dark world. Their holy lifestyles are beacons of hope in God. They, like a city on a hill, are impossible to miss. In a world of despair, people notice hopeful people, and if you are living a God-honoring life marked by hope in Jesus, expect questions about your faith.

In a strange way, it is comforting to know that your faith will be questioned by others. I know to some this idea is

terrifying. But truly understanding what we are speaking about here can revolutionize your views about sharing your faith. The idea of evangelism is tainted in many of our minds because of thoughts of door-to-door salesmen, angry men on street corners holding offensive signs about God's judgment, and people in white dress-shirts riding bicycles. We imagine that to preach the gospel we must become people we do not want to be and go places we do not want to go.

But when your lifestyle is holy, evangelism becomes a much less awkward experience. It starts happening naturally as opportunities come to you. It becomes the conversations at your neighbor's house rather than a stranger's. It becomes telling your aunt about God's love over Christmas dinner instead of pointing your finger at the random cars ignoring your "Jesus sign." It becomes the talks about a creator that come up while you are mountain biking with some friends across the Rockies. Because of the light of your hope displayed in your actions, questions about your God will be brought to you in a natural way. All you need to do is become prepared for the questions.

The Preparation for the Defense of our Faith

Being prepared to answer questions about your faith is about obtaining two things: (1) a proper heart attitude that guides and directs what you say and how you act; and (2) knowledge that will help you answer questions and explain *why* you have hope in Jesus. Often we think that defending our faith is just about knowing what to say. Knowledge *is* important but it can be dangerous when it is not accompanied by a pure heart. Knowledge often leads to arrogance, and arrogance is an

enemy of the gospel. Therefore, when it comes to defending your faith, you must first prepare your heart so that you will use your knowledge in a loving manner.

A Prepared Heart

A prepared heart is one that believes that Jesus is the uniquely marvelous King of all things; a holy and powerful God, worthy of love and allegiance. It recognizes that Jesus is not just something to be added to one's life. It understands that He is not some cosmic magician who exists to cater to whims and desires. Rather, it believes that Jesus is the supremely good Ruler of the universe, the Lord that it should surrender to.

Many of us would agree with these truths about Jesus. We *proclaim* them in our songs and our prayers. We *affirm* them in our church creeds. But *believing* them in our hearts is quite another matter. Our hearts often deceive us; they make us believe things that are not real. Perhaps the greatest struggle of life is the convincing of our heart of the reality that it should desire and serve Jesus above all things. I know you know this struggle. You can relate with the great hymnist Robert Robinson who pleaded:

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above."

Wandering from Jesus is common to us all. So often we succumb to the temptation of believing that there are things

better than Jesus, and we run to them. We stray from the God we love, and we begin to regard other things as our Lord. However, we must fight daily to keep Jesus first in our life. Every day we must convince our heart of the reality that there is nothing as good as Jesus, nothing to be desired as much as Jesus, and nothing to be loved by us more than Jesus. Jesus *is* worthy to be our Lord, to be first in our life, in an unrivaled fashion.

As you seek daily to regard Jesus as holy and Lord, you will develop the proper heart attitude to defend your faith. Defending your faith will not be done to sound smart, win arguments, or listen to yourself speak. It will not be birthed out of obligation or arrogance. Rather, it will spring forth from the overflow of your love for God and your love for others. It will become an extension of your regard for the great King whom you love and exist solely because you desire to be His good ambassador.

A Prepared Mind

Obtaining the right heart attitude to defend your faith is essential, but it must be accompanied by a mind and a mouth that are prepared to explain the reasons for the heart's hope. This is where we want to be able to say something more than "Well, I just have faith," to the skeptic who asks why we believe in God. To say, "The reason I believe in God is because I have faith" is akin to saying, "I hope in God because I hope in God and I hope I'm not wrong." This is not a good enough answer.

Understand that what the person who asks you *why* you have hope in Jesus is after is how you *know* that Christianity

is true among all of the options there are when it comes to religion. When this question comes, you must be able to offer the asker something more substantial than your subjective feelings encased in the stock answer of "faith." You will need to be able to provide *reasons* for what you believe (offensive apologetics) and provide *answers* to skeptical accusations (defensive apologetics). The final portion of this book is designed to help you do this. But to start, the answer to this question can simply begin with *your* reasons for believing in Jesus.

Most Christians never think about *why* they believe, they just believe. But to be ready to answer the question why you believe in something, you must think about it before it is asked. And so, I ask you now, why do you place your hope in Jesus? If you have not spent much time thinking about it, I encourage you to stop reading and start thinking about it now. Seriously, right now, stop and think. As you think, write down all the reasons for your faith in Jesus. And if at the end of your thinking you can come up with no good reason, hopefully the remaining contents of this book can help you secure in your mind some good reasons to have hope in Him.

We cannot be like an ostrich and stick our head in the sand when it comes to the reasons for our hope. We must face the difficult questions that both we and skeptics have about our faith. This is something that I do, and it has prepared me to answer many skeptics' questions. It has even led my wife to call me smart, which is an enjoyable bonus. Whereas many people have a moment after a conversation when they say, "I should have said...," my wife tells me I always say those "things" in the conversation. I appreciate her compliment, but

it is not due to my intellect, and I certainly have many of those moments where I wish I would have said something more. But when I have no answer to something, it bugs me to no end and I think about it for a long time. Sometimes I write down the responses I should have said just to organize my thoughts about the subject. That way, the next time I am asked the same question I have a good response.

My "smartness" is just my obsession to think about things longer than do most people. Einstein did this.[1] I've been told he said, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." Christians who desire to explain their hope in Jesus must do this. Stick with the problems that skeptics have about God long enough to be able to form a good answer. We must eliminate as much as we can the "I should have said..."

The Ready Apologist

Someday you will be asked to explain the reason you have hope in Jesus. Prepare your heart and prepare your mind. It is loving to do this. We are told to love our neighbor as ourselves and perhaps the greatest way to love our neighbor is to become equipped to introduce them to Jesus.

I know this may seem overwhelming, like a mountain of knowledge and holiness to climb. But remember that our God is great and He will supply you with all that you need. All we need to do is take the first step in obedience. With that in mind, here are five practical ways to start:

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[1] Yes, you can mock me because I indirectly compared myself to Einstein.

1. ***Pray***

Pray each day that God will soften your heart to love others. Pray that God will open your eyes to situations to share the gospel. Pray that God will help you love Him more than your own safety and respect. Pray that He will increase your knowledge. Pray that He will go before you into all the situations you will experience and fight the battles that you could never win on your own. Do not underestimate the power of your God. Ask Him for help.

2. ***Recognize Your Own Sin***

Being aware of your own sin will help you to have a compassion for those who do not know Christ. When you are able to remember that Christ has forgiven you, it creates in you a humble heart; one that desires others to be forgiven just as you have been forgiven. Furthermore, when you do not focus on God's grace in your life, it is easy to become judgmental.

3. ***Read Your Bible***

It is amazing how many Christians do not know their Bible and will attribute sayings that are not in the Bible to it: "You know God helps those who help themselves." If you don't know the Bible, chances are you do not know why you have hope; worse, you may have reasons that are unbiblical or of no use. Besides, reading your Bible is one way for you to get to know better the God whom you are defending. It is kind of backwards to help another know God when you have no desire to know Him yourself. So start reading your Bible.

4. ***Read Books Like This***

Like I said, this book is a starting place in gaining knowledge; it is not the final destination. There are so many books that can aid you in knowing what to say to those who have questions. Understand that it is an act of love on your part to study and have as many good answers as possible. At the end of this book I have included a detailed list and summary of many good books that can help you answer skeptics' objections.

5. ***Talk With Christians Whom You Respect***

Sometimes the only way to understand something is to talk about it with others and work through the things that you don't quite understand. Often ideas are not grasped until they are said out loud and discussed. Also, talking with other Christians is an excellent way to find answers for your own questions. You gain wisdom and experience from men and women of God who have experienced similar situations to the ones you will experience. Do not attempt to fight the Christian fight alone.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENTLENESS AND RESPECT



But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; **yet do it with gentleness and respect.**

-1 Peter 3:15

Removing Yourself as a Distraction

You may be noticing a trend. It seems as though I believe defending your faith begins with who you are rather than what you know. This is true. It's true because I believe that the power to save someone rests in the gospel and not in us or in our arguments. Our responsibility is merely to allow the gospel to be seen. However, it is often that our lives hide the

goodness of the gospel. Our sinful, hypocritical, lifestyles serve a distraction to the saving message of the word of the cross. We must remove ourselves as a distraction.

Chapter one talked about how to remove the distraction of hypocrisy. This chapter is similar as it seeks to help you remove another distraction: the way you treat people. Christians often treat people badly, especially when witnessing. We can be rude, arrogant know-it-alls that get easily frustrated and sound very condemning. Contrary to our intentions, we turn people away from Jesus because of how we act.

This may seem like hypocrisy to you, and on one level you would be right. It is highly hypocritical to thank God for the mercy He has shown you but then refuse to extend mercy to others. It is hypocritical to have received God's love and patience and kindness and not give these things to others. Even when people don't deserve our respect because of how they may be acting, the gospel dictates that we still act in a loving manner. Not giving people what they deserve is at the heart of the Christian message. For how often does God not give us what we deserve? We are glad that God's actions are not reactions to our behavior. We are glad that God loved us and died for us while we were still his enemies (Romans 5:6-11). So when we react to another's behavior and treat them badly because that is what they "deserve," we are living in a hypocritical manner that contradicts our message.

The Gospel Standard

To be consistent with the gospel, we must have an outward appearance that reflects a standard of love and compassion

regardless of what we feel on the inside. It is imperative that we treat people with gentleness and respect, especially when sharing our faith. We can accomplish this if we become the master of our feelings instead of being enslaved by them.

We live in a day when emotions control people's lives. What we feel, we do. The word "think" has even been replaced by "feel" when we speak about things we believe. "I feel like he would be a good person for the job." "I feel like he was trying to say this." "I feel like we should turn left." It seems we feel things more than we think things these days. But we must be contrary to our culture in this regard and become the master of our feelings for the sake of the gospel. Emotions belong in the passenger's seat, not behind the steering wheel.

What you feel about a person should have little bearing on how you treat them. And it's not hypocritical to treat someone differently than how you feel. When a person is driving you crazy, you are not a hypocrite when you don't punch him in the mouth. When you meet a person that holds a ridiculous view on something, you are not a hypocrite when you don't call him stupid. If something is true, it doesn't mean you have free reign to say it. It is okay to not tell someone what you are truly thinking. If a woman asks you how she looks, it is always okay to answer, "Great!"

There are times when it is appropriate to be "fake" and not let your outside match your inside. This is especially true when you are sharing the gospel. If you get angry when sharing your faith, you lose. If the other person gets angry, you lose. If anyone gets angry, you lose. You *must* keep from fighting when sharing your faith. Do everything in your

power to keep conversations calm and respectful. If people hate you because of your actions, what do you suppose they will think of your words?

Getting Out of the Gospel's Way

Have you ever been in a conversation with a disrespectful person? How did this loud, arrogant know-it-all make you feel, and how much stock did you put in his words? You probably felt small, and at some point in the conversation you "zoned-out" and quit listening. His tone and disrespectfulness canceled out anything good he might have had to say because his actions caused you to disregard his words. Christians cannot be this type of person.

We must be gentle and respectful so that when people hate us it will be without good reason. I say, "*when* people hate us," because even gentleness and respectfulness do not guarantee a proper response from others. Christians will not be able to eliminate persecution. Still, even though gentleness and respect don't guarantee a positive response to the gospel, they don't prohibit one either. And that alone is our responsibility in evangelism. We are to remove obstacles to the gospel whether it is some bad philosophy or ourselves. Then, we let the gospel go forth from our mouths and trust the power of the Holy Spirit to change a persons mind and heart.

Some Practical Advice

I know it is difficult to avoid getting angry when sharing your faith. Others are rude, conversations get frustrating, and the fear of rejection naturally raises our guard. There are a couple

of things I have learned through the years that help me stay calm and focused in the midst of emotional situations. I will share three of them with you, and I hope they help.

1. ***Knowledge is a Weapon***

I have found that knowledge helps me to stay calm. This is because much of our anger stems from the frustration of not knowing what to say or the inability to say what you mean. I remember the freedom I found from my emotions in college after reading several books on how to defend my faith. Just having the knowledge which I gained from those books lifted anger from me in conversations because I was less frustrated with what to say. Knowledge is a weapon, and when we feel armed we are less anxious. Knowledge is a weapon like water is for firefighters; it is what puts out the flames of anger that blaze because of frustration.

2. ***Conversations Can End***

I have learned that the present conversation is not necessarily the most important one. You can end a talk with a skeptic before they get saved. Often we feel the burden of trying to save someone the first time we speak with him. Though it is right to have a sense of urgency in evangelism, it is also right to understand that many people will not respond to the gospel the first time they hear it.

We are often taught that our one conversation might be the only time someone ever hears the gospel. That may be true, but when that burden becomes a pressure that surfaces in frustration and anger it works against the gospel. More often than not, skeptics need to hear the gospel more than once

before they respond. So don't be angry and surprised when they do not immediately agree with you. Expect them to disagree. Understand that their disagreement is probably not a result of your inability to communicate well. Know that their rejection of God is not about you. So don't take it personally. You are an ambassador. The problem skeptics have is not primarily with you, it is with your God.

3. ***Skeptics Are People Too***

I have learned that people of differing beliefs are often good people. Now, don't read too much into what I mean by "good" people. I can hear the screams of preachers quoting Psalm 14. What I mean is that we often view people who don't believe in God as devils and our enemies. Friendship with a non-Christian seems like a sin to many of us.

But friendship with people who don't believe in God is a good thing as long as you are the influencer. The depth of your friendship will have to be sought through prayer and council; because the more you hang around someone, the more you act and think like them. However, we must remember that Jesus acquainted himself with sinners. You can and should view non-Christians as people that you can befriend. Often this friendship is what you will need to help them see the truth of the gospel.

A Success Story

I have not always been good at what we are talking about here. I am sarcastic and opinionated. I naturally think I am right and you are wrong. I am competitive and I can be hotheaded. I know, I am an awful person. But I have learned

the value of staying calm and treating people with respect in conversations. It is something that I work on, and, if you will allow me, I will tell you one of my success stories as I conclude this chapter. (I am apparently an old man now because I love to tell stories. It's probably about time I get a good rocking chair and pipe, but I'll proceed without them.)

Of the many things I have been in my life, a schoolteacher is one of the more interesting. Teaching high school has provided me many things, and one of them is a treasure of stories. Several years ago I taught a skeptical couple. This means a boy and a girl who were dating, and both of them were skeptics about God and the Christian message. These two dressed differently, didn't participate in chapel, liked vampires, were smart, and thought Christianity was stupid. Stupid may be too strong a word, but let's just say they didn't think that the Christian message held up to reason. There were Christians in their life other than me. However, not many of them treated these two well.

I talked a great deal with these two about my faith in Jesus. I also asked them many questions about what they believed. I took an interest in what they liked. I learned about "Dragon Con" and I was introduced to "Steampunk." I asked them to play their music for me, and we would talk about the movies that they liked. And, I liked them. Truly, I liked them. I could and would consider them my friends. I also disagreed with what they believed in, and I made it my job to help them see the folly of their beliefs. I would do this mainly by asking questions. I would ask them how they explained the creation of the universe. I would question why they thought morals existed. I asked them what was one thing about Christianity

that made them think it might be true.[1] I also asked them what was their biggest reason for rejecting Christianity. Guess what they said. They said more than anything else, it was the hypocrisy of Christians.[2]

Now these two were smart. They had intellectual objections to the Christian faith. Yet, their biggest problem with Christianity was the people. What makes this so bothersome is that these two went to a Christian school. It appears that their daily interactions with Christ's followers were more powerful to convince them that God doesn't exist than anything else.

I couldn't help but feel sorry for them, and I told them so. I told them that the hypocrisy in Christians is a fair reason to have an issue with their message. I then asked them if it was enough evidence for them to reject God, or if would it be a mistake to write God off because some of His followers were jerks. They said that though "bad" Christians make them think the message is false, it was not enough to prove God didn't exist. Then they said something I didn't expect. They thanked me for being the only Christian that had ever treated them with respect. They told me that the way I treated them made them want to talk with me. They said they appreciated that I recognized that they were smart, and that I didn't make them look stupid. They told me that my respect for them caused them to consider my message. Now I have been

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[1] This answer was interesting. They said it was the fact that so many people believe it to be true.

[2] As a side note: it is really interesting that their biggest objection to Christianity and their biggest reason why it may be true were the same: Christians.

trained in apologetics. I feel that I have good arguments. But it was my gentleness and respect and not my words that caused them to consider Christianity.

The Loving Apologist

I learned much from this couple. I learned that words mean nothing if I do not love people and treat them with respect. Now words obviously have their place. If you don't think so, go ask a mime for directions. Actions don't speak, and the gospel must be spoken for it to be heard and believed. Love without direction is futile, but so is direction without love. Direction without love only perpetuates rebellion. Therefore, we must be balanced people who love with our actions *and* love with our words. One without the other just will not do.

SECTION TWO

WHAT YOU DO

CHAPTER FIVE

LISTEN



I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen.

-Ernest Hemingway

The Art of Listening

Most of what we have discussed so far has pertained to who you are. This is because a healthy apologetic for Christianity must rest upon a solid foundation in your life. You, yourself, must be committed to Christ if you are to lead others to Him. We don't want to be hypocrites, and furthermore, it is only as holy people that we will have the pure heart and renewed mind that are essential in evangelism. But now, I will shift away from who you are and spend several chapters on some

practical relational skills and conversational strategies you need to develop. We will begin with what I think to be the most important skill you need: the ability to listen.

Listening is a hard skill to develop. Not many people are good at it. Most people like to talk because in talking you have the opportunity to sound smart, win arguments, convince people of your way, and be the center of attention. I have just painted "talking people" very poorly as self-absorbed egomaniacs, and this is probably a bit too harsh. Yet, if we look inward, often this is why we talk. Don't believe me; just ask yourself how often you engage in conversations with people for any reason other than being heard.

Whether this self-centeredness is true of you or not (which it is by the way), my point is that conversations are typically one-sided affairs where people tolerate the noise from other people's mouths only because it allows them the opportunity to say something themselves. In a fast-paced world where people fear being left behind, people talk to be noticed, and listening becomes a secondary concern in the conversation.

The Love of Listening

I challenge us to begin entering conversations with the mindset of listening instead of talking. This comes only after we have resolved in our hearts to love others the way Christ loved us. And how did Christ love us? He gave His life for us. He did not seek to gain anything from us. Rather, He gave Himself fully. This is how we are to engage the skeptic in conversations. We are to enter it with the mindset of serving

them. And we cannot serve others until we know what they need, and that only comes through listening.

Listening demonstrates that we care. It shows that we aren't simply out to win. This is important because so often conversations about faith quickly turn into a competition to outsmart the other person. You know. You have been there. You have experienced what it is like to be sucked into a heated debate over something related to God and religion. You know what it is like to feel your blood boil. And you know how easily your good intention to witness gets lost in emotions and competition when someone else is belittling your beliefs. Maybe this is only me. But I think not. I hope not.

The Power of Listening

Listening can help you avoid confrontational situations for several reasons. First, it helps both you and the conversation remain calm. Conversation can be like a fire, and words are its fuel. Quite practically, the fewer words you use in a conversation the less kindling there is for a fire. The more you let someone else talk, the more fuel they use up, and the quicker their fire dies.

I have been in situations where someone starts speaking, passionately speaking,[1] and all I do is let them talk. I don't interrupt. I don't ask questions. I don't offer a rebuttal. I just let them finish talking. Often what happens is that they burn themselves out. They get out what they were thinking and

[1] This is my nice way of saying they are angry and getting emotional.

feeling, and without any interrupting or inflaming words on my part, their fire burns down, and they calm down, and then we can talk some more.

Second, listening helps you remain calm because compassion often comes through listening. I am not exactly sure why this is, but I have experienced it. When I practice the art of listening and I don't just focus on what I am going to say next, I find that I start to have compassion for the person with whom I am speaking.

Most people are not villains who shouldn't be befriended. Yet, when we only focus on the aspects of what a person says that we disagree with, and then start plotting how to attack them with our words when they shut up, in our minds, they become a villan. People who disagree with you do not have to be your enemy, and listening to them helps you see the person behind the belief that you disagree with.

When you listen, and listen well, you are listening not only to a persons words but also to their tone and the feeling that is being conveyed. You can see in the person that they are hurting or that they feel alone. You can sense the bitterness in them from something in their past. You can see that they are just like you. Ultimately, in listening well, you see a *person* and not just an opposing *position*.

The Purpose of Listening

Besides helping you to remain calm, listening is important because it is vital that you understand the position of the person with whom you are speaking. I am sure this is obvious to you. Yet, I cannot tell you how many times I have overheard people arguing about something that was never

said in a conversation. Communication can be quite tricky. It's hard sometimes to say what you mean. It's even harder to communicate when the other person isn't listening, and instead, is assuming.

Most people assume they know what you are going to say, and they assume they know what you mean. They do this because they *read into* comments more than they *listen* to them. Often we put people and their beliefs in categories before we truly listen. We then respond to the position or belief we think they have instead of trying to find out exactly what they believe and why.

Just yesterday two friends of mine, Bob and Butch, were in a discussion about the existence of hell. At one point in the conversation, Butch made the comment that Jesus' teachings on hell were ambiguous. The words, unbeknownst to Butch, were virtually identical to those in a popular new book that rejects the existence of hell, a position he, himself, doesn't hold.

Butch and the book shared the same belief that Jesus was ambiguous about hell, but Butch didn't think Jesus' ambiguity was proof that hell didn't exist. Guess what Bob did though. He immediately assumed that Butch was taking the position of those in the book who don't think hell exists. He read into Butch's comments the beliefs of others and stopped listening. Bob assumed he knew what Butch was saying, and instead of listening further, his assumption propelled him into an argument over a position that Butch didn't even hold.

We must avoid this type of situation. We must control our emotions and our tongues. We must listen fully, and not just respond when we hear something we don't like or agree with.

There are many things that work against us when we are defending our faith. We do not need the added obstacle of misunderstanding brought on by our lack of listening.

The Listening Apologist

If you wish to defend your faith well, become a good listener. Be patient in your conversations and hear what others are saying so that you can respond in a proper manner. You must not dominate conversations with your words. This is not easy. It takes practice. But you need to do it. Now let me offer three practical ways to improve your listening:

1. ***Focus on their words and not your response***

Nearly everyone struggles to stop devising clever retorts or responses. Usually what is happening in conversations of faith is that while one person is talking the other person is thinking about what to say. This isn't actually a conversation. It's two people lecturing to an audience who isn't paying attention, and it's not effective.

You need to practice not thinking about your points when someone else is talking. This is hard. It is a discipline that you can learn, though. When you notice yourself forming a response before they are done speaking, stop yourself and refocus. Witnessing to skeptics is usually a marathon. You must pace yourself. Don't try to sprint to the end. Don't worry about jumping in and rebutting everything they say as soon as they say it. Rather, slow yourself down, trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to remind you of the truth you know, and do not be concerned with winning.

2. ***Ask Questions***

This is actually what the next chapter is about, but I'll give you a bit of it here. If you find that the person you are talking with is long-winded and hard to follow, there is no problem asking them to restate their belief or position slowly and concisely. Remember, it is vital that you understand what they believe before you respond, so ask a question if you didn't catch it the first time.

You can do this by asking them to summarize what they just said. Or, what I find effective is to summarize what I think they just said and say it back to them. Typically when someone has finished talking I will say something like, "So let me make sure I understood you. You believe that...." and then I say back to them what my understanding was of what they just said. This is effective because it ensures that I understand them. I often find that when I do this people see how their position is flawed, which is just a bonus.

3. ***Pray***

One of the things I do when talking with a skeptic is to pray short prayers throughout the conversation. Usually they are only a couple of words where I ask God for wisdom, the ability to control my emotions, and the ability to hear what they are saying. I also ask God to let me see through their words to the reason that propels them to think like they do.

It is good to ask God to give you eyes that can see past clever arguments into a person's motive. Clever words are a smoke screen for a deeper issue. Arguments that appear to be logical are just a mask covering some emotional or volitional

problem.[2] Man's default position is a belief in God (Romans 1:19-32). In the attempt to hide from Him, they will devise seemingly wise arguments to convince their heart that it is right in its rebellion. Ask God for wisdom to see why they are rebelling.

Praying throughout the conversation is an act of faith whereby you understand that it is the Lord that draws men to Himself, and you are but a tool in this process. It will keep you humble and calm. It will keep you focused on the well-being of the other person and keep you from becoming consumed with winning. All of this helps you to listen. And beyond the benefit of listening, it keeps you relying on the Lord and not your wisdom, and this is right where you want to be in dealing with a skeptic. So pray, pray, pray.

[2] Volitional pertains to the will. Often rebellion against God manifests itself in intellectual ways. Some people know that God exists; yet they do not want to bow to Him, and so they create intellectual reasons why they shouldn't. A person who knows truth can suppress it. As they suppress truth, they will try to come up with reasons to justify their rebellion.

CHAPTER SIX

ASK QUESTIONS



The important thing is to never stop asking questions. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.

-Albert Einstein

A Good Friend and a Good Question

If I could be anyone other than myself, there are a few people that I wouldn't mind being. One of them is my friend, Cameron Ford. There is one incident from our high school days that displays the type of guy he is. One night, we went to see a movie with another friend. This theater, like many theaters, had the show times available to be seen from your car. As we sat in the car thinking about how to waste our eight

bucks on some mindless nonsense, a couple of intoxicated young lads came our way. They apparently thought we were checking them out as the taller one said, “You got a problem? Whatcha lookin at?”

Now before we go any further, know that I am prone to be a sarcastic jerk that often cannot keep his mouth shut, especially when my manhood is being called into question. So, instead of calmly telling the nice young man that I wasn’t looking at him, but simply trying to see what movies were playing, I responded to the irate ruffian, now in my face, by saying, “Problem? You’re in my face. What do you want... a kiss?” This did not help our situation. He immediately stepped back, and with a little slur in his speech said, “Ahh nah, this dude’s a gay! I’m gonna punch this guy in the face!”

At this point, I realized my stupidity and braced myself for a punch to the face. I don’t know why we didn’t think to drive away or role up the window. But boys will be boys (which means stupid). I started to put my arm up to block the impending blow when Cameron from the back seat said, in his slightly Californian accent (though he is not Californian), “Dude, why are you so angry?”

You would have thought Cameron had put a spell on the guy about to punch me, for he froze in his tracks and simply said, “Uh… I don’t know.” All of his rage melted away in a second just because of a simple question. The story ends with me not getting punched in the face, Cameron offering the gospel, and the guy apologizing to us – all because Cameron asked a question.

The Power in a Question

A great companion to the skill of listening is the ability to ask a good question. Questions are powerful. They make us stop what we are doing and think. In the midst of a busy life and raging emotions, often we don't know why we do what we do or think how we think. Questions make us consider our beliefs and actions. This is good. Many beliefs have no good reason to exist; yet, they become a part of our lives over the course of many unthinking years of just acting.

God asks questions. It is one of the first things we see God doing in the Bible. When Adam and Eve hid from God because they had sinned, God asked them, "Where are you?" The ensuing conversation contained two more questions, "Who told you that you were naked?" and "What have you done?" Then again, in the very next chapter of Genesis, God is found to be asking more questions. This time it is to Cain who killed his brother Abel. God asks Cain, first, "Why are you so angry?" and then, after Cain has killed Abel, "What have you done?"[1]

Now I ask you a question, why does an all-knowing God ask questions? Surely He knew what Adam, Eve, and Cain had done better than they did. They certainly couldn't see the full ramifications of their actions, especially Adam and Eve, and so, why does God ask? Did God need their help in figuring out what had just happened and what He should do next? The answer is obviously no, and so it must be that the questions were not for God's benefit, but man's.

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[1] See Genesis chapters 3 and 4.

The questions that God asks men are intended to bring them to a point of being able to explain their own actions, to look inward at their motives, and see their own folly. We know this value: the value of getting someone to look in and see what he is doing for himself. We know it because we have experienced what it is like to try and make somebody see himself for who he really is or what will come of his thinking, only to watch our words of caution bounce off a hard surface like arrows off a shield.

Avoiding the War of the Words

The reason shields often come out in talks about faith is because these conversations can easily turn into a war of words. In war the goal is to destroy your enemy, and shields are great to have when someone is shooting at you. As our words are often viewed as weapons of attack, a natural response is for one to protect himself from the oncoming blows, and this is precisely what happens. What can begin as a loving attempt to show someone the truth of the gospel can quickly turn into a battle of wills and emotions contesting to win an argument.

Asking questions is a way to bypass the natural defenses that arise in conversations of faith. First, questions typically don't seem like an attack of fiery arrows that need to be stopped by a shield. Not always, though, for body language and tone can make even a phrase like "you look nice" be a cut down. But for the most part, when offered in a pleasant and sincere tone, questions can cut through the defenses that are prone to surface in conversations about faith. They cause the attack on a person's beliefs to come from within.

Second, questions switch the burden of proof from you to them. Often we feel the weight of needing to have all the answers to the questions and accusations formed against our God and our belief system. However, using questions turns the table on whomever you are speaking with. Instead of needing to use your knowledge to prove to them something about God, questions use the knowledge (or lack thereof) of the other person to expose some flaw in their thinking or some truth about God. When it comes to sharing our faith, especially with skeptics, asking questions can prove to be more effective than all the right and irrefutable arguments we can muster. Here is an example of what I am talking about.

Say a friend of yours mocks the idea of God always existing. He phrases it in a way like, "Who created God?" You respond with, "Well, no one made God." At this point in the conversation your hands are sweating because you know you are cornered. I mean, how do you prove that no one created God, and what sense does that make anyway? How can something have always existed? You know your friend is thinking this too.

Instead of feeling cornered and just ending the conversation at your friend's next question by saying, "Well, you just have to have faith,"[2] ask this question; "If God does not exist to create, where do you think life came from?" The reason you ask this question is because the origin of life is a problem that skeptics need to be able to answer just like Christians.

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[2] Interestingly enough, this *is* the only answer for this particular question for the believer and skeptic alike, as we will see.

Most skeptics believe their view of the origin of life is based on science and reason and not on faith. So consequently, those who believe in an unmade, eternal god are foolish. But follow this train of logic. For the skeptic, life has either evolved from nothing or from preexisting matter. These are really your only two choices other than a creator. The first option makes no sense. How can something come to exist uncaused and out of nothing? Something would first have to exist to bring itself into existence, which is a contradiction and makes no sense.

Therefore, for the skeptic, the only logical explanation is that there was some preexisting matter that evolved into all we now know as life. You see the problem right? The only logical position for the skeptic to take is that there was something that has always existed and had no maker, which is exactly what Christians believe.[3]

A simple question, as in the example above, can take a tense situation and seemingly irreconcilable positions and create a certain sense of unity between the skeptic and the believer. There is a sense of unity because, as in the previous example, there is not a scientific answer to everything; some things are believed out of faith. The believer has faith that God is unmade and has always existed, and the skeptic believes, on faith, that some matter has always existed. Each person is a person of faith. Now, once this is realized in a conversation, you are able to move on to reasons why you think your faith is more grounded in reality than your friend's.

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[3] This usually opens eyes and allows for a good conversation.

The Questioning Apologist

Asking questions is a valuable tactic to use in defending your faith. Don't forget that other people have the responsibility to provide reasons why their way of thinking is right as opposed to simply telling you why your way of thinking is wrong. You are not resigned to be a punching bag for skeptics who get to throw blow after blow without needing to defend their own beliefs.

It is okay to lovingly press skeptics for answers on things like why they think God doesn't exist, where life came from, why truth is relative, and so on. When doing so, make sure to listen intently so that you can ask more specific questions about what they say. Most likely, if you are paying attention, both you and your friend will see some problem with their explanation, and often what happens is that the skeptic comes to realize that his position is not as certain as he once thought.

I probably ask more questions than I make statements. This has proven to be such a valuable tactic to me. It keeps the pressure off of me. It allows me to learn a lot about what the other person believes. It helps me to stay calm. It creates an actual conversation and not a lecture. And it allows me to gain the respect of the person to whom I am speaking. I can't express enough the value of earning respect through genuinely listening and caring for people. Asking questions and listening is kindness, and your kindness can be a gateway to their repentance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STAY ON TOPIC



If a situation requires undivided attention, it will occur simultaneously with a compelling distraction.

-Hutchinson's Law

The Chase

You must learn to not chase rabbits.[1] In case this expression is lost on you, I mean to say that you must learn to stay on topic. Conversations easily wander. Typically, thinking is not linear.

[1] Chasing a rabbit is an expression used when someone strays off their original topic and begins talking about something else unrelated (at least that is how I use it). I guess I could be using it wrongly. You never know about the origins of expressions.

People are easily distracted, and the mind likes to follow whatever shiny new idea that enters its domain.[2] However, to be effective in talking about weighty and potentially confusing subjects like God, effective communication requires you to be able to focus on one topic long enough to say something meaningful.

As conversations wander naturally on their own, they also are purposely taken off course. This is known in logic as a red herring. In nature, a herring is a fish that gains a reddish color when it is smoked, along with a very strong smell. Because of its smell, red herrings are very good at masking other smells. It is said that a red herring would be dragged across a trail by criminals and hunters alike to create a false trail that dogs would follow. Thus, by analogy, the phrase came to be used to describe any false trail.

Now, conversations usually don't have smelly fish that distract you. They do, however, have things similar. In the attempt to win an argument, people will use random facts and stories that are completely irrelevant in order to divert you from the original topic or question you have been discussing. They create, in a sense, a false trail, a red herring, for you to follow.

I remember a time I was talking with a woman about the nature of truth and out of nowhere she explodes with a story

[2] This is also known as SNIS: Shiny New Idea Syndrome. I don't know if it is an actual syndrome. One of my friends, Jonathan Cooper, probably just made it up, it does describe well how my mind works. *(I need friends who don't make up words.)*

about "crazed" Christians blowing up abortion clinics.[3] She then explained how judgmental and "mental" Christians were. In her mind, there may have been a connection between the existence of truth and supposed Christians blowing up abortion clinics. If there was, it never came out. This was mainly because I didn't follow that false trail. I didn't chase the rabbit.

When you start to notice someone changing topic, it is your job to bring him back to what you originally were talking about. Don't chase after every topic that a skeptic dangles in front of you. Rather, stay focused and lead the way back to your original conversation. You can do it simply by saying something like, "I agree that Christians, or anyone for that matter, shouldn't blow up an abortion clinic, but let's keep talking about truth." A redirect as simple as this usually works.

Redirecting is a valuable skill to possess. It's particularly important in the previous conversation because how people *respond* to truth is a different subject than if truth exists. Furthermore, not only is it a different topic, it is a highly emotional topic. And once emotions about a woman's right to choose enter a discussion about truth, you might as well resign to talk another day. You have lost the battle simply because you have started to fight a new one.

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[3] I will go into detail about the nature of truth in chapter 9. But for now, either truth is absolute for all people, in all places, at all times, and in the same way, or it is relative and is determined by the individual. This was what our discussion was about.

The Switch

There are several reasons why people intentionally switch topics. One is that they are doing so because they genuinely think the two topics are related. The woman from my example before may have genuinely thought there was a connection between the existence of truth and Christians blowing up abortion clinics. She may have thought that people do extreme things because they are convinced that their position is the right one. She did make the comment that all truth does is divide people. She added that we should all be tolerant of other people's views and not blow things up when we disagree.

I agree with most of what she said. I generally agree that blowing things up is not the answer.[4] But, what Christians blow up has absolutely nothing to do with whether truth is relative or absolute. The topics of the existence of truth and what people do with what they think to be true are separate issues. You must spot things like this and point it out.

A second reason why people switch topics is because they know they have been defeated. When a person is faced with a question that they cannot answer, often they will either make something up or change the subject. Most people are prideful and admitting defeat is not an option. Changing the subject is what most people do, and a really crafty person will change the subject without you knowing it.

The abortion debate is a great example of topic switching. The majority of abortion advocates cite the woman's right to

[4] Unless you are on Mythbusters where apparently the answer to everything is to blow something up.

choose as the reason that abortion should remain legal. The two sides are pitted against one another as pro-life and pro-*choice*. The pro-choice position is characterized by a belief that a woman has reproductive rights and can do with her body what she thinks is best. But, a woman having the right to choose what to do with her body is a separate topic from abortion. Or, at most, it is a secondary topic within the abortion discussion.

The abortion argument, unless I am mistaken, is about one thing: whether or not the fetus is a person or just matter. This really is the only question worth debating in abortion, and it is the only one that is relevant. For no one, except vile criminals, would argue that a woman has the right to choose to kill a child. Either the fetus is just matter like a tumor, or it is a person who lives in a womb. If it is matter like a tumor, then doctors and families should have the right to determine what to do with it. If it is a person who lives in a womb, then it has rights, namely the right to life. This is what the debate on abortion is about. A woman's right to choose is only a relevant discussion in the abortion realm once the main issue has been settled: is the fetus a person or not?

So do you see how the "right to choose" is merely a crafty way to change the subject? Abortion advocates must defend that a fetus is not a person. However, most of them cannot. [5] This is partly because there is no consensus in the medical field or scientific community on when "life" begins,

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[5] Largely, this is because the question of life and personhood is a philosophical discussion and is not something that can be answered scientifically or medically. See *Defending Life* by Francis J. Beckwith for a detailed analysis of this topic.

when "the matter" becomes a person. Since the average person is not equipped to even debate that point, the topic changes. It moves from the status of the fetus to the rights of the woman. It assumes that the real issue of whether a fetus is a person or not has been settled, and then it moves onto a different topic: the woman's right to choose. This is subtle, it is crafty, and it has nothing to do with the original argument.

The Focused Apologist

Don't be overwhelmed at this point. Please don't start thinking that you'll never be able to spot things like this. You will. You will begin to have this ability as you begin to learn how to listen, ask questions, and grow in knowledge. But honestly, you really don't even need to know a great deal to be able to stay on topic. Here is how.

If you listen to someone and they make several points and you aren't sure if they are on topic, ask them. Ask them how what they have said relates to what you have been talking about. Brilliant isn't it? I'm sure right now you are asking yourself why you spent money on this book. Good advice is not always complicated advice. Still, let me elaborate a bit on this tactic to make you feel better about your purchase.

In conversations of faith, people will say *a lot*. Often people will throw out every objection they can think of, seemingly at once. Most people have not organized and categorized their objections against God; they just know they don't believe in one. So when you start talking about God, be prepared for them to tell you every reason why they don't believe in Him. Even if your conversation begins with, say, the nature of truth, understand that their position on truth

likely falls under their main category of God not existing. As such, at any point, something other than what they think about truth might come out as they try to convince you that they are justified in their rejection of Him.

But all you need to do to stay on topic is to listen well. If at any point you don't understand how what they said relates to what you originally began talking about, ask them how it relates. Remember this great truth: he who makes the claim bears the responsibility of supporting the claim. It isn't only Christians who have to prove their beliefs. You are allowed to ask others to support their statements. So, when a person says something, and it isn't clear to you how it relates to your topic, ask them to show how it does. Doing this not only helps you stay on topic, but many times it shows the other person that they have no good reason to defend the topic you are on.

You must serve as an anchor to your conversations. You cannot let them drift wherever they want. Subjects about religion and God are difficult, and you cannot tackle them all at once. You must be able to focus on one subject at a time and within that subject one question at a time. You can do this if you listen and ask questions. If you do, you will begin to see much more fruit from your conversations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

STICK WITH WHAT YOU KNOW



Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy.
-Benjamin Franklin

A Recap

Before we move on, I want to summarize what has already been said and then offer one more practical bit of strategy. First, here is my summary of what we have discussed so far: defending Christianity is done properly by a person who desires to glorify God by pursuing holiness and by becoming prepared to gently and respectfully share their faith. I hope you have seen up to this point that defending your faith requires you to focus on who you are as much as what you know. I hope you have begun to see that there is a right way

to go about this, but that it is also not very complicated. Defending your faith is as simple as being a holy person who is willing to listen to others, ask them questions, stay on a chosen topic, and explain why you believe in Jesus.

Now to conclude this section of the book, I want to offer one last bit of practical advice. I began this book making the point that you don't have to know everything. In this chapter, I want to make sure that you stick with what you know. The burden of proof rests upon the person who makes the claim. So, practically speaking, the more you say, the more you have to defend.

The "Expert"

When it comes to "proving" that God exists, many people will say almost anything. I have heard all kinds of arguments used to prove that Christianity is the right religion, many not so good. In the attempt to defend their faith, normal everyday Christians instantly become experts and statisticians when talking about religion (*Did you know that 72% of the ocean floor is filled with fossils that are indigenous to high altitudes which proves the flood...)*.[1] You must not be one of these "experts."

It's very easy in conversations of faith to be sucked into the temptation to talk about a subject like an expert when you really only know a little bit about it. I had a friend who was the king of this. He was a passionate person. He was not quiet either. He liked to share his beliefs. One day a conversation about the flood in Genesis came up. He instantly chimed in.

[1] This statistic is completely made up.

He passionately, angrily, explained that there is not enough water on the planet to cover the tops of the mountains in a flood. He went on and on about this, offering information about the polar ice caps and how fast mountains grow until I asked him how he knew all of this. He said he read it. I asked where. He said he didn't know. I said, "No offense, but you are no geologist and you may be right, but I am not going to take your word on this. I need to see your evidence." He said he didn't know where it was. He still has not shown it to me.

The point is not that he was factually wrong. Some of what he said may be right for all I know. But he was not an expert in the field he was lecturing about, and he expected people to listen to him as if he were. Not only was he wrong about some, most, of his information, everyone knew that he was no expert in this field, and his arrogance discredited him even before his words had a chance to. People hate this. I hate this. I don't listen to people who go on and on about a subject I know they are not an expert in. You don't either, unless you are a fool. So don't be that type of person.

Unfortunately, Christians are guilty of this all of the time. We read some book by Josh McDowell and think we are professional apologists and debaters. After reading (and by reading I mean glancing over a few chapters) about out how the universe points to a Creator, we start talking like astronomers. We discover that our bodies are an evidence of design and we begin giving presentations as biologists. We become like a boy who hit a homerun in a little league game and now thinks he is ready for Yankee Stadium.

The problem is not what we know, but how we use it. It is good to read books by Josh McDowell. It is good to learn

how the universe and its design are indications that God exists. But often these bits of knowledge inflate our sense of expertise and cause us to bite off more that we can chew in arguments.

We do this because we sincerely believe that God exists and Jesus is His Son, and we want others to believe this too. So in the attempt to persuade someone, we will pull out what we believe to be impressive information and irrefutable facts then present them with the confidence and experience of a professional. This approach does not work though. People are smarter than we typically give them credit. And just ask yourself if you would allow the average car salesman to give you advice on the stock market.

The Dangers of Being an "Expert"

Christians must only speak about the things they know with the level of experience and expertise that they truly possess. People are led to Christ everyday by those without a Ph.D. Besides, it is dangerous to talk like an expert. When you talk like an expert, and yet are not one, you leave the door wide open for mistakes. When you don't understand something fully you are prone to misunderstand it. You inevitably will say something wrong. You will misquote statistics, draw wrong conclusions, and often just get confused and use some information in the wrong context. A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing and acting like an expert will eventually make you look like a fool.

But making mistakes is only part of the problem of talking like an expert. The more you say in an argument, the more you have to defend. When you make a claim, it is your

responsibility to support what you said. It is your job to be able to prove that it is true. You aren't allowed to throw out statements without the ability to support them. So don't offer information that you don't know much about. For when you talk out of your league, as they say, the chances are good that you will say something that requires a follow up statement.

For instance, let's say you make the claim that the Bible is historically reliable. You say something like, "The Bible has been proven to be historically reliable so whatever it says about Jesus must be true." Sounds like a good argument right? But what happens when your skeptic friend asks you how you know this? What do you do when he asks you who confirmed that it is historically reliable? What do you say when he asks you which Bible? Some Bibles contain the Apocrypha. Are they historically reliable, too? What about the contradictions in the Bible? Doesn't one gospel say that there were two angels at Jesus' tomb and another says that there was one?

My point is not to scare you into silence, but to show you what happens when you make a claim. The more you say, the more you need to defend. So if you are not prepared to enter a discussion about the historical reliability of the Bible, don't start throwing out random quotes and statistics about it. What you know about the reliability of the Bible may be sufficient for your understanding of it, but teaching it or defending it to another is a different matter.

The Correct Use of Knowledge

So how do we use the knowledge we possess and avoid getting ourselves in trouble by acting like an expert? Here is

what I suggest. Let's use the previous example. If you can't defend the historical reliability of the Bible, don't bring it up. If someone asks you about it, that's another matter. And in that case, you have two options.

One option is to say I don't know. "I don't know" responses are much safer and effective than saying something that is wrong or can't be supported. Not knowing something shows only that you don't know everything, yet being wrong shows that you make bad conclusions from data. This hurts the gospel, because it allows the skeptic to feel secure that not only are you wrong about your arguments for the historical reliability of the Bible, but that you are also wrong about things like the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Another option, and a better option in my opinion, is to state what you think and then offer to study it some more with the skeptic. Let's apply this to the current scenario. You could say something like, "I believe that the Bible has been proven to be historically reliable. I have read that it was, but I am no expert in it. I would love to learn more about it. Would you want to study it with me?"

In asking to study something with your friend you have accomplished two things. First, you haven't appeared to be an expert. Instead you have appeared to be humble and honest. You have shown yourself to be a person committed to finding truth and not just a person defending a personal belief. It shows that you respect skeptics. This is all very good.

Second, if they say yes to your invitation, you have established a relationship that will be ongoing. Many people act like snipers in conversations with skeptics: one shot and they're out. However, we should treat our conversations more

like climbing a mighty mountain; something that will be long and require careful steps and great preparation. Establishing an ongoing relationship with a skeptic is very important. Remember that they likely have had years to think about their position and let their heart grow hard towards God. Expect it to take time for them to see Jesus then praise the Lord if it happens quickly.

The Reasonable Apologist

Understand that there are no magic bullets in defending your faith other than the gospel. The gospel has the power to save and to break through anything. The power of the Holy Spirit is unparalleled, but your words are not. Don't think that one impressive statistic or fact is going to overpower years of rebellion and skepticism. So don't stretch what you know and start making claims that you can't back up.

Sticking with what you know is the second best piece of advice I have ever received in terms of defending the faith (learning to ask good questions is probably the first). It shows that you are a reasonable person; one who is not prone to overreacting and making foolish decisions based on wrong information. It simply gives you credibility and it forces the skeptic to wonder if you are right. If you can't be proven wrong, and he is an honest person, the skeptic will reconsider his own position.

Some of you may be thinking that I am telling you to never be wrong, that I am telling you to only talk about the things you know certainly. You are correct; I am. Don't be amazed by this. As if I would suggest that you should say whatever you want in a conversation, even if it is wrong, just

so you can win the debate. Love people by respecting them. Talk about what you know, humbly admit what you don't, and commit yourself to study more both alone and with skeptics whenever you have the chance. I encourage you to know what you know and know it well. Fearlessly proclaim the gospel, and fearlessly be willing to look weak when you are at the limits of your knowledge.

SECTION THREE

WHAT YOU KNOW

CHAPTER NINE

TRUTH



Half a truth is often a great lie.

-Benjamin Franklin

It's All Relative

My daughter is a relativist, and she is two years old. One day my wife and I saw our sweet little devil bite her brother. We pulled her aside and told her that she is not allowed to bite. Here is what transpired:

"K.K. you are not allowed to bite your brother."

"I didn't."

"Yes, you did. We saw you."

"No, I did *not* bite him!"

"K.K., we saw you. You need to tell the truth."

"I did not bite him and that is *my truth*!"[1]

Obviously I am joking about my daughter being a relativist. Well, only kind of, I guess. My wife and I still haven't figured out how her cunning little mind works. Anyway, this story about my precious little girl depicts a philosophy about truth that is popular today, a philosophy that is an enemy of the gospel.

We live in a society where the vast majority of people believe in something called relativism. Relativism is the philosophical position that all beliefs are equally valid, and that all truth is relative to the individual and is not absolute. Basically, it's the belief that people get to decide for themselves what is true and what isn't. Like my daughter saying that it was *her* truth that she didn't bite her brother.

Relativism is in direct opposition to the belief that truth is absolute, and it presents a serious problem to Christianity. As I have already said, relativism is very popular today. It is everywhere. It is held and taught by pop-stars, professors, politicians, and even priests. It is a belief that is expressed in television, songs, religion, and classrooms. There is little doubt that you have encountered a relativist, and I am sure you have heard something like, "Well, that's just my personal truth! You know, what is true for me doesn't have to be true for you."

You may have even met someone who flat out claims that truth doesn't exist. But, (and here is why relativism is a threat to Christianity), if truth doesn't exist, knowledge of God is

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[1] The story is completely true, and it is exactly how my two year old speaks. Please pray for us. My wife and I are in trouble.

impossible. If truth cannot be known, the truth of God's existence cannot be known. Therefore, if you hope to explain that God exists, you must be able to first explain that absolute truth exists. Let me explain a bit more.

A Dangerous Perception

If truth is relative, meaning that the individual gets to *decide* what is true rather than *discover* what is true, all we could know about anything is what we've made up for ourselves based on our preference, experience, and intellect. If truth is relative, we wouldn't know God as He is. We would only know our personal perception of Him, an illusion of our own creating. However, having a perception of God is the same thing as not knowing Him.

Furthermore, having a perception of God that is not accurately grounded in reality is a futile exercise absent of any value, and it is dangerous. Perhaps I perceived that God was like a giant kitten who purred loving thoughts all day long toward me; but if He was more like a lion waiting to devour me, my false perception would be to my demise when I tried to pet Him. If God exists, I must know what He is like and what He expects from me, or I must hope He does not care about me or how I live. I can only know these things if truth exists and is absolute.

The Truth on Truth

You can see why a discussion on truth is so important. If absolute truth doesn't exist, God, for all intents and purposes, doesn't exist. You can also see why attacking truth is so popular today. If you destroy truth in a society, you

effectually remove God from that society. If you cause a society to reject truth, they will reject Jesus: the way, the *truth* and the life (John 14:6). Destroy truth, and Jesus, the embodiment of God's wisdom and truth, falls into the category of mythic heroes and wishful fantasy.

But we are not in this position of futility and wishful thinking because absolute truth does exist, and it can be known. I will explain. First, a definition of truth. Truth is that which corresponds to reality. Something is true if it matches the way things really are. And if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, and at all times: it is absolute.

For instance, the statement "I can type in English" is true because it matches reality. No matter who you are, where you live, or what time it is, it is absolutely true that I just typed in English. Or, to use our earlier example, it was absolutely true that K.K. bit her brother. We saw it: her brother had teeth marks, and despite what her *personal* truth was, the reality of the situation was that she absolutely bit him. The statement "you bit your brother" is true because it matches reality. Pretty elementary, isn't it?

Though as I have said, people deny truth's existence. They do this even though the denial of truth's existence is an affirmation that it exists. For example, the statement "truth does not exist" is either correct and is meaningful, or is false and is worthless. However, if it is correct, it contradicts itself. See how? Just ask yourself, is the statement "Truth doesn't exist" true? Basically you are asking, "Is it *true* that *truth* does not exist?"

You cannot answer the previous question in a meaningful way. If you say yes, then you have just said it is *true* that truth

doesn't exist; that is a contradiction. If you say no, then you are a nonsensical person who willingly says things you know to be false. So truth exists. You can't deny its existence without affirming it in the process.

So now the question turns to whether truth is absolute or relative, which is really what people mean when they say that truth doesn't exist. They mean that objective, absolute truth does not exist. They believe truth to be relative: something that the individual can determine for himself. They believe that what is true for one person doesn't have to be true for another. This is because, according to them, we all perceive things differently and no one can say whether one person's perception is better than another's.

Essentially, relativists believe that you can't know things objectively: the way things really *are*. They believe that all you can do is know things subjectively: the way things are *to you*. And this is why. Relativists believe that we come to know things through our senses: our mind (reason) or our body (experience). However, they do not think that anyone can know if their senses are working properly.[2]

For example, have you ever wondered if the way you see red is the same way everyone sees red? As a color-blind person, I have wondered this often. A relativist would say that there is no way we can know who sees red correctly; the way it really is. They say all we can know is how we perceive red.

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[2] I include social conditioning in the "senses not working" category. There are people who think that factors like where we grew up, who our parents were, and what the values of our society were, determine that we are all conditioned to think a certain way; and as such, we cannot be objective in determining truth.

Therefore, what may be red to me, could be blue to you. All society has done is made us agree to call the same thing red, when it reality, though, we could both be wrong.

The basis of their claim is built upon a belief that there is no objective way to determine if our senses are working because it would require our senses to be working to do so. It would be like needing a working clock to set other clocks, but needing to know if the clock you are using is telling the right time, which brings you back to where you started.[3] Their conclusion is that there is no way to objectively determine if our senses are working properly, and, as such, all we can know for certain is what we perceive. If I perceive this room to be cold, it is true to me that it is cold. If according to my reasoning, situations, and social upbringing, abortion is good, then it is my personal truth that it is good, and there is no way you can objectively tell me otherwise.

Truth, then, becomes like an opinion, like your answer to the question of whether or not Coke tastes good. As there is no objective way to decide if a person's tongue works better than another's, whether Coke is good or not is left up to be decided by the individual. The person gets to decide what is "true" based on their perception, their taste, of Coke. This is how all of life is according to the relativist. Just as no one can know objectively if Coke is good, they can only know how they perceive it, no one can objectively know if anything is good or true, they can only know how they perceive it. Therefore, because we cannot know if our senses are working

[3] Please don't give me "use the sun" or some equation. You understand my point.

and working in the same way as others, truth is what we perceive it to be; it is relative.

But they are wrong. All of life is not comparable to taste buds. Take my color-blindness for example. The only way I know that I am color-blind is because there are people whose eyes are working properly. In order to know what something is not, you must first know what it is. To know that a car is broken, you must first know what a working car is. The same goes for our senses. In order to know that our senses are not working, you must first know what working senses are; otherwise, all you have is a guess.

But therein lies the problem with the relativist position. How do they *know* that our senses are not working? To know this would require the very thing they say doesn't exist: working senses. Therefore, at most, all they can have is a guess about the nature of truth. It would be fair for them to say I guess that truth is relative. It would be obnoxious for them to say that they *know* that truth cannot be *known* objectively and is, therefore, relative.

To be consistent, a relativist would have to conclude that their view of truth is just an opinion. They cannot say that it is *true* that truth doesn't exist and they cannot say that they objectively *know* that truth can only be known subjectively, for those are both contradicting statements. But now ask yourself, is their opinion about truth representative of the world we live in? Is everything that we call truth really just a matter of opinion? Are there no truths that are absolute? Is it not possible to know things the way they are?

Do we not know that two plus two equals four? Do we not know that when objects are thrown into the air they fall

back down? Do we not know that fire is hot? Do we not know that we exist (you cannot question your own existence without first existing to question it)? Is it not absolutely true that the Holocaust was wrong? Do we really think that it is a mere opinion that killing millions of Jews is bad? Do we really believe that racism is a valid personal truth and treating a person like an animal because of the color of their skin is okay? Is it not absolutely true that loving your children is the right thing to do? Do we really think the opinion to beat children is the same and just as true as the opinion to not beat children?[4]

You see the ridiculousness of this position on truth. I say we live in a world where truth can be known and is absolute. I think you agree. I don't think you believe that two plus two can equal four *and* five. And I don't think you believe you live in a world where things like murder and rape are the same things as love and mercy.

First, common sense tells us so. It makes no sense that opposite claims can both be true. Love and hate are not the same. Being punched in the face is not the same thing as *not* being punched in the face. So the idea of equally valid

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[4] I have intertwined the topic of truth in morality both into this paragraph and into this chapter. Some may see a need to separate them more clearly (like my editor), but I think that truth in morality is just an application of the nature of truth. For example, it is true to say that objects fall back to earth. This is according to the law of gravity. It is also true to say that murder is wrong. This is according to the natural or moral law. Whether there is a law of gravity or a moral law, is another discussion. However, I think that the law of gravity is just as self-evident as the moral law, and I think the section above shows that to be true. Therefore, I feel justified in using either to make a point in a discussion on truth.

contradicting personal truths is ridiculous. We both can't be right about competing claims. If I say the earth is flat, and you say the earth is round, we both can't be right. One of us has the *truth* and the other has a wrong *belief* about what is true. This is common sense. This is how people think and live, and there is no good evidence to suggest otherwise, which leads me to my second point.

If common sense and experience teach us that truth is knowable and absolute, there needs to be overwhelming evidence that it is not. Yet there isn't. As we have seen, the proponents of relativism only have a guess about truth. They can't state that it's *true* that truth doesn't exist. They can't claim to *know* that our senses aren't working; and therefore, they can't conclude that they *know* that objective truth can't be known.

Relativists, at best, have a guess about the nature of truth. A guess. Rational people don't start living their life centered on a guess. Rational people certainly don't start to teach others and recommend that their guess should become the center of their lives and society. Rational people don't say, "I know that I can't know," or worse, "I don't know that I don't know, but you should believe as I do." No, only hypocrites, the insane, or tyrants, say and do these things.

Understanding What You Already Know

Do not be brainwashed by empty philosophy. You are a much better philosopher than you think. Sometimes that which is simple and easily understood is that which is correct. We understand that lying exists, and lying only makes sense in a world were truth exists. We have watched our children steal a

cookie, and with cookie in hand say, "I didn't take cookie." We know that rape is always wrong. We know that two plus two is always four. We know that truth exists and that it is absolute.

Not only do *we* know this, but *all* men know this instinctively. I argue that most people don't believe in relativism; their lives show they do not. Instead, what they have believed is a half-truth. They believe that people should be treated with respect regardless of what they believe, which is true. But also they have believed that the only way to do this is by understanding that all truth claims are equal and relative to the person holding them, which is false.

I think this is where most people are. Most people, as I have said, are not philosophers. They are not students of Hume and Kant. They don't have philosophical objections to truth; they have emotional objections to truth. They have a homosexual friend, or they know a person who was raped, and they react emotionally against the truth claims that say homosexuality and abortion are wrong. They reject truth because they reject the idea that anybody could say that the lifestyle of their loved one could be wrong.

Yet despite their emotions, people give evidence to the fact that they really believe in absolute truth by the way they live. Would a relativist become angry with someone who stole from him? Do relativists argue that their position is the correct one? And, let's go back to lying for example. Do relativists really live in a world where they let people say whatever they want without question? When a relativist shows up for work on time and his ambitious co-worker tells the boss that he was thirty minutes late, does the relativist not

argue for the truth of what happened? By their actions, even the relativist knows and admits that lying exists. However, a lie can only exist if there is a truth that is not being told. This is how people think and understand life. It is simple. Your job is to compassionately help them to see the folly of their thinking.

They *Can* Handle The Truth

You must be ready and willing to gently and respectfully show how relativism is a self-defeating claim. Explain that relativism contradicts itself and proves itself to be false. You can do this. It is not something that is difficult to refute. In most cases, you can do it simply by asking your relativistic friend if it is *absolutely true* that truth is *relative*. You must be able to do this and show people that they are wrong. They must be willing to believe in truth so that they can submit to *the* Truth, Jesus Christ.

I may have been a bit sarcastic and harsh at several points in this chapter, more so than I am with relativists. I have vented a bit here.[5] I do not encourage you to vent to people who believe in relative truth. Although, there is a time and a place for most things. There may come a time when it is appropriate to show them your frustration so they can see the depths of their absurdity. I just encourage you to use prayer and discretion when explaining truth. I merely add this disclaimer at the end because I do not want to encourage gratuitous sarcasm. I contain in myself enough for all.

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[5] I hope you can forgive me for allowing a portion of these pages to be a vent to the steam of frustration that is bursting forth from the kettle of my soul as it sits on the eye of stupid philosophy.

CHAPTER TEN

GOD



Tonight, instead of discussing the existence or non-existence of God, they have decided to fight for it.

-Monty Python

Evidence

I don't mean to fight, but I think God exists and have reasons for thinking so. I hope at this point I have shown that truth exists and it is absolute. If I have, a meaningful conversation on God's existence and the evidence for Him is possible.

There is much evidence that God exists. The word evidence may seem strange to many, for talk about God is usually thought of as something that deals with the unknown. We often hear of people having *faith* in God, but rarely do we

hear people talk about any *evidence* for Him. However, there is evidence, and it is good. Faith is certainly a part of religion, but faith without any evidence is foolishness. This is not the Christian position.

What I want to do in this chapter is present you with a simple and convincing way to answer how you know God exists and why Christianity is the "right" religion. It's the answer I give people when they ask me. It's not very short, but it is simple. It involves three things: the *possibility* of God's existence, the way He *could* make Himself known, and the way He *has* fully made Himself known.

My Approach

Before I give my answer, I want to briefly explain my approach. Most people are not scholars. Most people are not academics and researchers who have dedicated their life to a single idea. Furthermore, most people's objections to God are not intellectual; they are either emotional or volitional.[1] It is not so much their mind that rejects God, but their heart.

When it comes to God, man naturally concludes that God exists (Romans 1:18-23). However, many suppress this truth. They cover it up with their emotions, pain, and intellect. The truth is rejected by their heart before it is covered up by their mind. Therefore, your role is to help them uncover a truth that was once there. Academia may help some to recover this truth, and there is certainly a time and place for it. The place, though, is not likely to be in your living room or office. This level of academia is probably not what your neighbor needs.

[1] Volitional refers to one's will.

He just needs a simple good reason to reconsider a truth about God he once believed. Here is how I do it.

My Three Steps

First, I begin by trying to establish a reasonable case for God's existence. Do not be burdened with *proving* God exists. All you must do is open the door for the *possibility* of His existence. Most people already have this door open and you can then move onto the next step.

However, if you find someone who is completely closed off to even the possibility of God's existence, take him to the beginning. Ask him how he thinks life came to be. Ask him why there is something rather than nothing. As he doesn't believe in God, he will likely give you some naturalistic answer involving evolution and billions of years.

At this point, don't argue about evolution. Instead, ask him what there was in the beginning. Ask him if the universe has always existed, or if it came to exist out of nothing.[2] Ask him for his evidence. He may throw out some scientific theories such as an eternal universe or dark matter. Likely you will find that he is not an expert in this field, but is forced to believe this way because of his prior assumption that God does not exist.

Understand that you are not asking these questions to be smug. You are simply trying to expose the level of certainty in their position. What you need is a crack in their defense. Helping them to see that they don't really have good reasons

[2] You can point out that it is nonsensical to think that non-existence can bring forth existence as it would first have to exist to bring itself into existence.

for their beliefs will make them more open to yours. What will happen next is that they likely will then ask you for *your* evidence. This is good.

Chances are you won't be prepared on the spot to present them with the cosmological[3], teleological[4], and natural law[5] arguments for God's existence, but you can say, "I would be glad to study it together." Beyond obvious reasons, I ask you to study the evidence for God's existence with them because the evidence we have supports a belief in God. If your skeptic friend accepts your invitation, and if he is an honest, truth-seeking person, he will likely become open to the *possibility* of God's existence, which is all you need for the next step.

Once it is established that it is at least possible that God exists, my next step is to ask if miracles would be possible. I ask if it would be possible for this God to do things out of the natural order in the world He made. Most people say yes. They understand that if a supernatural being exits, He could do what He wanted in a world He made.

Then once the possibility of God and miracles existing is conceded, I ask this: "Could God use miracles to tell the world who He was?" I ask if it is possible that God would choose to invade the planet He made to let people know who He was. Many people say that it's possible for Him to do this. Now the question becomes "*Has He*?"

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[3] This argument for God's existence is based on the origin of life.

[4] This argument for God's existence is based on the amount design in the universe.

[5] This argument for God's existence is based on the fact that a universal moral law exists.

There are various miracles that you could begin to use to convince your skeptic friend of God's existence. However, the resurrection of Jesus not only shows that God exists, but also that Christianity is the right religion. The resurrection of Jesus is what Christianity hangs on. If the resurrection did not happen, Christianity falls into the mire of man-made religions. But if it did happen, it is reasonable to conclude that God exists and that men can have hope in a heavenly savior. I recently had a skeptic women agree with me on this. She said, "The resurrection is kind of the one thing that would seal the deal if it could be proven." I think she is right.

Before I give any evidence for the resurrection, I want to make a brief point about evidence. I don't want you to think that evidence is all that is needed. I don't want you to think that if you can just present evidence people will believe. Because, remember, people lived with Jesus, saw His miracles, and still did not believe. If men have rejected the Son of God to His face, you can expect people to reject Him to your face. Furthermore, what one person considers to be good evidence another will find lacking. Just ask yourself how you would respond to evidence about UFO's.

Since prior beliefs affect how people view evidence, I find that it is helpful to ask the person you are talking with what kind of evidence would cause them to believe in God. This question serves several purposes. First, it causes them to be honest with you. From their answer you can deduce if they are genuinely seeking truth or just arguing with you. Second, their answer can guide you into what kind of evidence you present. The person you are speaking with may be at a point in life where facts don't matter, and so you take a soft and

compassionate approach and just talk about how Christ has changed you and your family's life. Perhaps, though, you find they *are* looking for truth, and evidence is what they need.

If I find that evidence for the resurrection is what they are looking for, I present what are considered by historians to be virtually undisputed historical facts.[6] What is agreed upon by historians regardless of their religious persuasion is that Jesus died by crucifixion, His disciples had experiences they believed to be actual appearances of Jesus risen from the grave, and they believed it so strongly that they were killed for preaching the message of Jesus risen.

These facts are important from a historical standpoint because the disciples were early eyewitnesses of the resurrection and the sincerity of their testimony is corroborated by their painful deaths. People do not suffer for a lie when there is nothing to be gained; none of the apostles

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[6] Gary Habermas presents a list of 12 undisputed historical facts: (1) Jesus died by crucifixion; (2) He was buried in a tomb; (3) The disciples were discouraged and fearful for their lives; (4) Jesus tomb was found empty soon after his burial; (5) The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus; (6) Due to these experiences the disciples were willing to die for their belief; (7) The proclamation of the resurrection took place very early; (8) The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified; (9) Their preaching centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus; (10) Sunday was the day they gathered for worship; (11) James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he believed he also saw the risen Jesus; (12) Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer, due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus. See *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* by Gary Habermas, pages 9-10.

recanted their testimony of a risen Jesus, and the only thing they gained was their death. The best conclusion to be drawn from this data is that Christ rose from the grave.[7]

Finding a Way to Present Your Proof

What I just described is something that you could explain to someone today. It is something that happens to me nearly every week. You just need to look for opportunities to steer conversations toward the Cross. Here is an example of how I use this evidence.

Last week I was discussing a sonnet by Jon Donne with several high school students. (I know you discuss sonnets all the time.) The sonnet by Donne was one that mocked death, comparing it to a sleeping pill. Actually, it compared it to opium but said that opium was better. Anyway, the theme of the sonnet was that death was nothing more than a slave who was used to cause people to fall asleep only to waken unto eternity, and therefore, it should not be feared.

I asked the students if this was a good view of death. They concluded that it was provided there *was* life after death. So I asked, "Is there life after death?" Some said yes, and some said no. I asked them how they knew. No one had an answer. So I asked, "Do we just have to have faith one way or the other? Are we just left to wish and hope for an

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[7] If I could do you any service on the topic of the resurrection, it would be to point you to the works of Gary Habermas and Mike Licona. Each of them is at the top of the list when it comes to the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. The historical evidence presented here can be found in their works in much greater detail. See topical resource list.

afterlife, or can we know?" This seems like an important question to answer. They agreed.

They then asked me what I thought. I told them that I think we can know if there is an afterlife because I think we can know if God exists. They of course asked me how. I in turn asked them if it was possible that God might exist. All of them said yes. Mind you, of this group of eleven, at least seven of them are not believers in Jesus; yet all of them agreed that it was possible that God might exist. As I said earlier, this is what most people believe.

With an agreement that God might exist, I asked if this God could do unnatural things in this natural world. I asked if miracles would be possible. They all said yes, every one of them. I asked them why they thought miracles could be possible. They explained that if God existed and made the world, He could do what He wanted in it. They agreed that walking on the water you created is not really that hard to believe. I said they were smart. And then I asked, "So, if God exists and could perform a miracle, could He not use a miracle to tell us who He is?" They all responded to my question with a yes. So I asked, *"Has He?"* They just looked at me, but I could tell that they wanted to know. So I told them about the resurrection of Jesus.

I told them that I think the resurrection both tells us that God exists and which religion is the right one. I then told them about the evidence. I explained that virtually all historians who have studied the resurrection believe three things: that Jesus died by crucifixion, that the disciples believed they saw Him risen, and that they died for preaching that He had risen. I then asked how they would explain these

facts, how they could explain the rise of Christianity without the resurrection.

One student said, "Well, maybe Jesus didn't actually die. Maybe He survived." I said that is a fair idea, but let's talk about it. A theory that Jesus survived the crucifixion would have to involve the following: before Jesus was crucified He was beaten, flogged, forced to carry a cross, and given a crown of thorns to be embedded in His head. We understand what a beating is. We can imagine a crown of thorns, regardless of the size of the thorns. But, let's make sure we know what flogging is.

Flogging is when you are whipped by a device that has several leather straps with bone and metal and other sharp objects attached on the ends. Their purpose is to dig into the flesh and rip it off when it is pulled back. It tenderizes and defleshifies you. (They were repulsed at my made up word "defleshify.") I told them that many men die just from this type of torture alone.

After the pre-torture of Jesus, He was crucified. Many people are now familiar with the crucifixion. But just to be sure that my students had the facts straight, I explained to them that one dies by suffocation on the cross and how it is excruciating.[8] Hanging on a cross forces your lungs to stop working because the way you hang prevents you from breathing. The only way to breathe is to push up from your feet that have been nailed to the cross to relieve the pressure and take a breath. You live as long as you have energy, or

[8] By the way, the pain endured on the cross was so severe they invented a word for it: "excruciating" from the Latin meaning "pain of/from crucifixion."

until they break your legs to keep you from taking another breath.

Jesus' legs were not broken, but this was the manner in which He died on a Roman cross. To ensure that He was dead, the trained Roman guards stuck a spear into Jesus' side. After Jesus was taken off the cross, He was wrapped in seventy pounds of linen, placed in a dark and damp cave-like tomb, and there He remained for three days.

I told my students that to believe the theory that Jesus survived the cross you would have to believe that He woke up after three days, unwrapped himself, folded the linens, rolled away a stone, took out a couple of trained Roman guards, walked on nailed-pierced bloody feet, presented Himself to the disciples in this condition, and they said, "Oh my God! You have risen from the grave and are Lord!"

I asked my students, "Does this seem likely?" One responded and said, "More likely than a resurrection!" I said he was probably right in terms of probability, but then asked if Jesus arriving in this condition would lead the disciples to think that He was God and perpetuate their preaching of His deity, forgiveness of sins by faith in Him, and a future hope of a resurrected body like His. First-century people were not idiots. They would have known the difference between a resurrection and a survival.

Many students agreed with this assessment. Some did not. One of those asked if it is possible if the disciples just hallucinated. I told them that was a fair question and many people hold that view. But, I asked him, "Do people share the same hallucination? If you and your friend were 'tripping' would you see the same thing?" He said, "No, and I know."

We laughed. Modern psychology agrees with him. Group hallucinations do not happen.

At this point another student chimed in and said, "I think they just made it up!"

So I asked, "You think that the disciples made up that Jesus rose from the grave and then died for their conspiracy for no reason? Why do you think this, do you have any evidence?"

He said, "No, but that's just what I believe."

I encouraged him to base his belief on something more substantial than his opinion because so much is at stake. He said, *"Ahhh."* Not all stories end well, but hopefully this is not the end of this student's journey to Jesus.

Our group conversation ended with some believing, some being more open to Christianity, and some were exactly like they were before we talked. I encouraged them to have reasons for their beliefs. Much is at stake when it comes to God, and if He exists, you want to have settled that issue before you meet Him in the afterlife. I told them that I look forward to future conversations with them, and to this day, many more conversations have followed.

Your Turn

You can do this. You can talk to people. You can tell them what you know and ask questions. You can even remember the historical evidence for Jesus. I challenge you to start presenting it. Start driving conversations toward the cross. Begin placing your hope in Jesus to save others. If you are reading this you believe that Jesus can save you from your sins. Why don't you believe He can save others? Open your

mouth and let the gospel come out married with the evidence of His resurrection that you now know.

I encourage you to study and become familiar with the evidence for the resurrection. Most people are surprised to hear that such a thing exists. I have presented a shell of the evidence that is there. I have done this to give you a starting place. But continue to learn and read. I have provided you with excellent sources in the topical resource list at the end of this book that will strengthen your faith and equip you to explain your hope and preach the gospel.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RELIGION



But of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong.

- C.S. Lewis

The Narrow Road

Christians are not passive when it comes to their religion. We do not sit back and allow others to remain in their false beliefs. We believe that there is one God. We believe that there is one way to heaven. And we believe that Jesus is the only way to get to either of them. We believe there is truth in

other religions, but where they differ from Christianity, they are wrong and Christianity is right.

Despite the claims and wishes of post-modernity, Christians remain firm in their rejection of the notion that all religions are the same. Subsequently, we are called arrogant, narrow-minded and judgmental. It is ironic, though, that those who call Christians judgmental for thinking they are right do not consider themselves to be judgmental in telling Christians that they are wrong. It seems the land of "tolerance" cannot tolerate our differing belief.

In an era of history that prides itself on its tolerance and inclusiveness, telling people that Jesus is the only way will be met with opposition. The interesting thing about it, though, is that it is not so much your appeal to Jesus that they will reject as much as it is your appeal to *only* Jesus. You will meet many people who have drunk deeply from the poisonous well of "all roads lead to heaven." But all roads don't lead to heaven anymore than all roads lead to your house. All religions are not the same. After you have shown that there is good evidence to believe in God, you must be able to tell your friends that Jesus is the only way to Him.

Obviously Different

I think it is obvious for most people that all religions can't be the same. Most people live in the land of black and white, right and wrong. Most people agree that if I tell you to take a left to get to my house and my wife tells you to go right, one of us is wrong. Likewise, most people understand that if

Christians believe there is one God, and Hindus believe that there are millions of gods, and Atheists believe that there are no gods, and Mormons believe that you can become a god, then somebody is wrong.

We have already established that competing truth claims cannot be equally valid. It is possible that competing truth claims are both wrong, but they cannot both be right. The same goes for religion. Opposing religions cannot be equally valid. It is possible that all religions are wrong, but they cannot all be right. Most people know this.

There has been some confusion, though, about what is meant in saying that one religion is right and others are wrong. To say a religion is wrong is not to say that it is completely devoid of all truth. Many religions practice and teach many of the same things. Many religions have a fair view of morality for example. Most religions do not allow murder, rape, lying, and stealing. Many religions do some good in the world. But the evidence of similarities does not equate to them being the same. And furthermore, why should the similarities in religion be more important than their differences? The differences matter.

For example, some religions have practiced human sacrifice. Are they just as valid and right as those who protect human life? Some religions think you can use women as you want because they are less valuable than men. Are they just as right and the same as those who cherish women? Do we really want to say that those who practice polygamy and the wedding of nine year olds are as equally valid as those

religions that protect children? You and your skeptic friend both know the answer to this.

Why Religious Pluralism is Popular

Even though I think people understand that all religions are not the same because the differences in religions are too easily seen, religious pluralism, the belief that all religions are equally valid, is still gaining traction in our society. There are two reasons for this.

First, people don't like telling other people that they are wrong. This is especially true today as tolerance is becoming the highest virtue in our society. Rather than fight, many people just adopt a "live and let live" attitude. They think it is wrong to tell other people that their beliefs are wrong and our society is quick to praise this attitude.

But even more than people being "tolerant," the second reason religious pluralism is gaining traction is because our society is falling victim to a belief that is immersed in assumptions. The belief that all religions are the same is based on the assumptions that (1) God cannot be known; (2) God does not care if you know Him before you die; (3) God does not care how you live; and (4) God will not hold our ignorance of Him against us.

The assumption essentially is that God cannot be angry with us for not knowing who He is. The conclusion that is drawn from these assumptions is that it doesn't matter which religion you choose because God doesn't care, and therefore, neither should we. But this is a rather huge assumption with

profound implications, and it is a religious belief itself. This big theological claim is one that would require evidence for us to believe it. Without evidence, holding to the belief of religious pluralism requires an enormous amount of faith, and I would call it blind faith.

Logically Different

What is painstakingly ironic about religious pluralism, though, is that the moment you have evidence for religious pluralism you can no longer have religious pluralism. The evidence would point to its religious claim being right, which leaves many other religious claims to be wrong. It becomes exclusive. It makes a claim about God that should be believed and thereby states that all opposing beliefs are wrong. When religious pluralism has a good reason to be believed that causes one to reject other religious claims, namely the religious claim that there is only one way to heaven, it ceases to be pluralistic.

Religious pluralism is an idea that can only exist in ignorant assumptions. And furthermore, these assumptions must be accompanied by a tremendous amount of faith; a faith that this God will consider sincerity to be just as good as accuracy.

To be a religious pluralist, you must hope that God is not like my old high school math teacher. It didn't matter to her that I got most of the problem right, and that I was genuinely trying. As she always said, "90% right equals 100% wrong in math, sweety."

What Jesus Thinks

Experience and logic show that all religions are not the same and equally valid as one another. But beyond this, if Jesus rose from the dead, would He not have the right perspective on religion? If Jesus said there was only one way to God, could we trust Him?

Contrary to the view that there are many paths that lead to God and heaven, Jesus said there is but one, and it is small. "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:13-14)."

The previous words are the words of Jesus, the man who claimed to be God and died on a cross and rose again. Jesus claimed that no one can come to God except through Him, that whoever doesn't believe in Him is condemned and the wrath of God is upon them, and that eternal life is given to those who believe in Him.[1] It is certain that Jesus taught an exclusive path to God and heaven.

At this point, the skeptic has several options. He can call Jesus a liar, he can say Jesus was wrong, or he can say the scriptures are wrong. People are not likely to go for options one or two. People don't like to call Jesus a liar. And as far as Jesus being wrong, we have already seen that the historical evidence supports the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead. And since Jesus rose from the grave, affirming that He

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[1] John 3:16-19; John 3:36; John 14:6-7

was divine, I think we can conclude that He would not be wrong about who God is and how to get to Him.

The only reasonable point to contend with would be the reliability of scripture. This is where most skeptics will go next. A person could come to believe that truth exists, that God is knowable, that Jesus died and came back from death, that Christianity is one way to heaven, but think that the Bible is wrong in recording Jesus' teachings on the exclusivity of religion. We will discuss the reliability of the Bible next.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SCRIPTURE



Occasionally I see a bumper sticker that reads: “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.” My response is always, what if God didn’t say it?

-Bart Ehrman

The Attack on the Bible

Christians must think through their view of the Bible and be prepared to answer questions about it. We live in a society that hates the Bible. The attacks on scripture today are harsh and violent. You can visit a chat room debate, talk to a neighbor, or watch a talk show on television and you will see for yourself the violence spewing forth from the mouths of both Christians and skeptics alike about the Bible.

I have heard many complaints about the Bible and its reliability in my life. Some of them were quite comical. One guy I spoke with who thought the Bible was a forged book asked me, "Who the hell is John, Paul, and the other dude? Did these blokes hang out with Jesus or were they frauds who lived like 100 years after the alleged Jesus died and made up all this BS? John, Luke and... I don't know... Ringo seem like fraud people who make up stuff to me." This fellow was a joy to talk with.

Or, for another example, you can take the friend of mine that thinks the Bible is full of contradictions. My friend walked into my office one morning and the first thing out of his mouth was, "I'm mad at the Bible!"

I laughed and said, "What did it do to you this time?"

He replied, "Why is it that nobody can get straight what the last words of Jesus were? You would think that they would have gotten right something that important, but they all say something different about what Jesus' last words were."

He wasn't kidding when he said he was mad at the Bible. He really was very angry that morning.

I am sure you can insert your own example into this discussion. You likely have met a person who dislikes the Bible yourself. The question before us in this chapter is what to say to the person who rejects the Bible. Must we be able to prove to people that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God?[1] Does a person have to "believe in" the Bible to be saved? These are questions we need to think about.

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[1] *Inspired* means given by God directly to man and written through the hands of men, and *inerrant* means without any mistakes.

We must be prepared to answer objections raised against the Bible because many people will use the cliché expression of not believing in it to end a discussion with you about God. It is often used as the skeptic's secret weapon to end debates and conversations. But that need not be so, and I will explain.

A Separate Issue

I don't let skeptics avoid the topic of God by dismissing the Bible. The Bible, for me, is a separate discussion. It is, obviously, an important discussion as many Christians believe the Bible to be the Word of God. But it is not a foundational discussion for a belief in God's existence. Simply put, when a person says to you that they don't believe in the Bible, you should ask them, *"So?"* Ask them what their belief about the Bible has to do with God's existence. You can even point out to them that it is possible that the Bible could be false and God be real. The fate of the Bible is not, strictly speaking, related to the fate of God. You cannot deny the Bible and think that God will die.

Though it is true that the Bible is not essential for a belief in God, the obvious follow up question is, "Well, if the Bible is a fake, how do Christians know they are right about God and salvation?" First, I have not said that the Bible *is* fake, meaning a forged or inaccurate book about God and salvation. I simply have a made a point that forces the skeptic to keep talking with me. This is a strategy I use to keep the conversation going by removing a crutch the skeptic leans on in their unbelief.

I say strategy, but don't misunderstand me; it is not a gimmick or deceit on my part to say that the Bible could be a

man-made, mistake-filled book and God still exist, for that is a true statement. It is a true statement that disarms many skeptics by removing the secret weapon in their arsenal of objections. Then, once they are disarmed, a conversation on the reliability of the Bible has the chance of being profitable.

The Main Issue

You may have noticed that I have used the words reliable and authoritative and not inerrant in referring to the Bible. I do not argue for the inerrancy of the Bible with skeptics and I will not be arguing for inerrancy in this chapter. This is not because I do not believe it to be so. Rather, it is because I believe that debates on the inerrancy of the Bible should be had among Christians. They are not necessary, in my estimation, in the battle for men's hearts and souls.

Moreover, the Bible *could* contain mistakes and we still be assured of our salvation. Therefore, you need not defend the inerrancy of scripture with a skeptic. They can be saved without it. Don't muddle your evangelism with unnecessary debates that are hard to win. And the inerrancy of scripture is a hard debate.

The reliability of the Bible, however, is not a hard debate. The historical reliability of the Bible is one of the most certain things in life contrary to what you might hear. Despite the objections you hear from your friends, the snippets you hear on the History channel, or the titles of books you see on the best-seller rack at your local book store, the Bible is unequivocally the most reliable ancient document in the world. I say this not from a Christian perspective, but from a literary and historical one. In fact, the Bible's trustworthiness

is so great that if we were to discard it as untrustworthy, we would have to discard all other documents from ancient history for their unreliability.[2] For, in terms of historical reliability, the Bible is in a class by itself.

First, it should be mentioned that when talking about the reliability of the Bible we are not talking about one book. We are talking about a collection of books written over a fifteen hundred year span by over forty authors in three languages. It is interesting: most people don't know this.

When most people say they don't believe the Bible, they are, in their mind, rejecting one book written by one person at one point in history. It is a fair confusion. The majority of world religions owe their religious texts to a single person. This is one of the things that makes the Bible so unique, and you should make sure that your skeptic friend is aware of this. You don't get to dismiss the Bible in one swoop. You have to dismiss sixty-six individual books written by different people at different times in history.

Now, you do not have to defend all sixty-six books. What I do is defend twenty-seven of them, and in doing so I create a good reason to accept all of them. The way I argue for the reliability of the Bible is to argue for the reliability of the New Testament. This is for two reasons.

First, I think the biggest concern you should have with a skeptic is to convince them of the resurrection of Jesus. You need not be sucked into a discussion about worldwide floods or people living in whales. You can deny the flood and

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[2] See Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict. Vol. 1.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.) 15-74.

Jonah's time in the whale and still be saved. I recommend that you not waste your energy fighting these battles with your skeptic friend.

But even more than my first reason, if you prove the general reliability of the New Testament, you have also proven the general reliability of the Old Testament, and perhaps, a bit more. Included in the New Testament is Jesus' affirmation of the Old Testament, which contains, by the way, a direct affirmation of both the flood and the story of Jonah. If we have an accurate record of Jesus' teachings, we can trust the Old Testament because Jesus taught it as the Word of God.[3] So if the New Testament is reliable, the Old Testament is as well. Let's see if that is the case.

Is the Bible Reliable?

When judging an ancient document for its reliability, the first question to ask is how many copies of the original manuscript there are in existence. Original copies of ancient documents do not exist; paper is too easily destroyed. So copies of ancient documents are as good as it gets, but copies are sufficient.

It is possible to reconstruct an original manuscript from its copies. And the more copies you have, the easier it will be to sort through any copy errors and ascertain the original text. Here is an example how you can reconstruct an original from four hypothetical copies of Philippians 4:13:

1. I can do all t#ings through Christ who strengthens me.

[3] See for example: Matthew 5:17-18, 21:31-32; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:17, 24:44; John 10:35.

2. I can do all th#ngs through Christ who strengthens me.

3. I can do all thi#gs through Christ who strengthens me.

4. I can do all thin#s through Christ who strengthens me.[4]

In the above example it's very easy to tell that the original said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This is the process by which you reconstruct the original manuscripts from the copies. The more copies you have, the more accurate reconstruction you will have.

So how many copies of the New Testament do we have? At last count, there are nearly 15,000 manuscripts in existence today. Furthermore, there are 36,289 quotations of the New Testament by the early church fathers that could be used to reconstruct the entire New Testament minus only eleven verses. By comparison, the ancient document that comes closest to the New Testament in amount of manuscripts is the *Iliad* by Homer with 643 manuscript copies.[5]

Not only is important to have many copies, but early copies help to assure accuracy as there is less time for legend to creep in and falsities to go unchallenged. This is the second criterion for obtaining an accurate reconstruction of an original document. Typically, the copies of ancient documents that exist are about one thousand years removed from the

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[4] This example is taken from Norman Geisler and Frank Turek's book *I Don't have Enough Faith to be an Atheist,* pg. 228.

[5] Norman Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics,* 531-537.

original. The *Odyssey* is a rare exception with a copy in existence that was made only five hundred years after the original. The New Testament, however, has most of its copies made less than two hundred years after the originals and some even within one hundred years.[6]

The New Testament is leading the way when it comes to manuscript reconstruction. New Testament manuscripts are the most numerous and earliest of all ancient documents by far. There is little doubt that we have the correct version of the New Testament. Even some of the most critical adversaries of the Bible agree that the New Testament we have today is the same as the original manuscripts.[7]

Is the Bible Truthful?

Because we can have a high degree of assurance that we have the correct version of New Testament, the only question remaining for us is if the original manuscripts told the truth. Did the writers of the New Testament invent their stories? Were they accurate in what they wrote about Jesus and His teachings, and how can we have assurance that they were? Just knowing that we have an accurate copy of the New Testament is not enough. We could merely have an accurate lie.

A lie, though, is not the case. There is good evidence to assure us that the writers of the New Testament told the truth.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] See Frank Turek's article "Is the New Testament Reliable? Even Bart Ehrman Says Yes" (accessed on November 20, 2011) available at www.crossexamined.org/blog/?p=157.

I am going to be brief in my response here. But we have assurance that the New Testament writers told the truth because their writings meet certain historical tests. For example, its content is composed of early eyewitness testimony from multiple independent sources including trustworthy eyewitnesses, enemy attestation, archeological confirmation, and even embarrassing details to the authors.[8] Their truthfulness is further corroborated as the writers suffered persecution and death for their teachings. That, by itself, is an indication that what they wrote they believed to be true.

The Bigger Picture

The New Testament passes every test the historian can throw at it. For practical purposes I have kept my answer here short, but I encourage you to study this further. You will meet people that want you to explain more than what I have offered here. The good news is that I have been short for a reason, and that reason is not lack of evidence. So you will have no problem finding answers to the skeptic's questions about the Bible.

To close I want to present you with a bigger picture. When it comes to the reliability of the Bible, I want you to be able to move past this objection to the *reason* for the objection. Most people haven't studied if the Bible is reliable; it is a catchphrase for them to say they don't believe in it. They use their rejection of the Bible to feel justified in their

[8] For a detailed explanation see: Geisler and Turek *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist,* pg. 230-297.

rejection of God. I want you to use what they think about the Bible to expose a deeper issue: their unbelief. I'll let the story below explain.

I began this chapter talking about my friend that was "angry at the Bible." I won't go into detail about our entire conversation about his objection that the Bible contradicted itself. I will tell you how the conversation ended though.

I asked him, "You have a problem that the gospel writers say something different here, correct?"

"That's right."

"Would you also have a problem if the four gospels were identical to each other?

"Yeah, if they were identical it would be a good indication that they got together and made it up."

"So you are angry because there are differences, but you would be angry if they were all the same?"

"Uh-huh," he said.

I pounced on his honesty and asked him, "Are you sure you have a problem with the Bible? It seems that your problem is that you *want* to have a problem with the Bible."

After a moment he said, "You know, you're right."

There was obviously much more said; I have shortened and paraphrased our conversation. But it was the biggest breakthrough I had with this friend of mine. He was able to see that he was not looking to see if God existed. He was trying to find ways to reject Him. There is a difference. Help your friends see this. Ask them if they are seeking truth, or trying to justify what they already believe. Discussions on the Bible are an excellent place to do this.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EVIL AND THE PROBLEM OF PAIN



If God is all-good, and all-powerful, why does He allow evil to exist and bad things to happen to good people?

-every person who has ever existed

A Roadblock of Pain

I think at this point I have provided you with a sufficient way to explain why Christians are reasonable to hope in Jesus Christ. We have seen that truth exists, making it possible to know the God who has revealed Himself in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as verified by good historical evidence and reliable written documents found in the Bible. I hope you

have seen for yourself that there is more to Christianity that mere wishful thinking, and I hope you feel more comfortable to share your faith with others. And now, as we near the end of this book, I want to arm you with a response to a common objection to God: the problem of pain.

To begin, I would like to say that evil and the problem of pain is a subject that demands gentleness and sincerity. Coldness and academia are not of much use to a grieving and hurting person. For many, the problem of pain is a serious and difficult issue to get past in coming to Christ. Evil is real, and really bad things have happened to people undeservedly.

Now please, at this point, do not throw up Christian jargon that says we are all bad and deserve what we get. Our sin certainly demands separation from God, and He is certainly right to punish us for our sins. However, it is quite another thing to say that a four-year-old girl is deserving of the cruelty perpetuated by the hands of her depraved father. This is a cruel and stupid thing to say. Evil is real, and really bad things have happened to good people, and this has caused a real, emotional reaction against God and the belief in His existence.

In addition to those who have experienced a personal tragedy, there are some that use the problem of pain as an intellectual reason to reject Christ. They believe that because God is supposed to be all-good and all-powerful He would both want to destroy evil and be capable of destroying it. But because evil exists, they believe either God is not good or that He is not powerful enough to get rid of evil. As a result, either way you have it, He isn't a God to be worshiped, and it is most likely that He simply does not exist.

Clearing the Roadblock

Whether the objection of evil and pain is raised from an emotional or intellectual position, care must be given to the manner in which you address it. You must discern whether a person is coming from an emotional position or an intellectual one. Determining that will determine how you proceed. But what I have most often experienced is that the problem of pain is an emotional roadblock that prevents some from coming to Christ.[1] So we will address that position first.

I begin by expressing my concern for a person's pain. Do not disregard, sweep under the rug, someone's grief by offering callused, un-thoughtful remarks, such as, "God moves in mysterious ways." A mother who has lost a child will want nothing to do with a God whose mysterious ways involve the killing of children.

Don't pretend to know the mind of God in situations of great pain and evil. I would not even offer the remark that God must have a plan. Again, grieving people do not care much for God's plan when their personal pain is involved. I understand that these remarks are offered to give hope, but they do not. It is very difficult to see past pain to purpose.[2]

Instead of purpose, first offer comfort, which can lead to hope. It is not wise to assume to know why God allows some bad things to happen, and if I were to lose one of my children,

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[1] Gary Habermas thinks that most doubts are emotional in nature. Gary Habermas, " Emotional Doubt" (lecture, National Apologetics Conference, Charlotte, NC, October 28, 2011.)

[2] Offering the idea of purpose or God's plan to a Christian may be of some value, but remember we are talking about people who have yet to come to Christ.

I would certainly struggle with it. But, on another level, though I may not know the specific purpose for particular pains, I am grateful that God does allow bad things to happen to good people in general. And my gratitude is for one particular reason: if God did not allow bad things to happen to good people, He never would have allowed Jesus, an innocent and good man, to suffer and die on the cross, and we would all still be in our sins with no hope of salvation. I am grateful that God allowed the worst evil possible to come upon the best man ever, and that for no wrongdoing of His own.

This is comforting because, though I may not be able to understand why God may not save people from some specific pains on earth, I know He is not above allowing Himself to experience pain, and the pain He endured can save us from pain eternally. It comforts people to know that the pain they feel is not a foreign idea to our God.

Jesus knows full well what pain is like, and it is because of His pain that He now holds keys to infinite happiness and the deed to a future land of no evil. The path to this land was crossed through the valley of suffering, was purchased by pain, and was brought forth by the hands of evil men. So when in pain, I know that my God knows firsthand our pain, and I can rest in that. I can take comfort from the One who has been where I am.

The Intersection of Freedom and Evil

Now, at this point some will raise an intellectual response to their emotional pain and say, “Why did it have to be this way? Why didn’t God just create a world where people could feel

no pain and do no wrong? In this type of world one could not hurt another, and if man never could sin, then Jesus would not have to die." This is a fair question to ask, but let's consider the consequences of such a place. It would have to be a place where freedom did not exist. It would have to be a place absent of the ability to choose. Quite simply, in this world, you could never make a decision because a wrong decision could be made and evil and pain might follow. Rather, you would have to be made like a robot or a tree and simply do what you were made to do.

This type of world would not be worth creating. Because, in eliminating pain, things like love and friendship would have to be eliminated as well. For love cannot be known by force: it has to be discovered by beings that can choose to give it or reject it. With the ability to choose to love comes the ability to choose to hate. The greater ability something has for good, the greater potential it has to become evil. Freedom is both good and dangerous.

Therefore, either we exist as robots, incapable of enjoying the few things that make life worth living, or we exist with the ability to make decisions, some of which will cause pain. You cannot have it both ways.[3] And in the world where reasoning and decisions can be made, the God who is the

[3] I think I have to make an additional note here. I am not seeking to get mired in the debate over election and free will in this section. That is above my pay grade as they say. I firmly acknowledge both God's sovereignty and our volitional freedom. I think each are taught in scripture. I do not fully understand how they relate to one another. Though, I am certain that God is not held hostage to our freedom. That is to say, God does not cater to us and our free decisions, nor is he bound by them.

wisest amongst the beings He created deemed it worth the risk to create a world in which evil could exist so that things like love might be known. At this point, it would be difficult to argue about what should have been with the being that gave you the ability to argue. Unless you suppose you have risen above the ranks of the Most High and can see more clearly than He who made all things.

The Intersection of Sin and Pain

So, evil exists largely because men are free to make decisions, some of which will be bad, and for God to remove evil He would have to remove freedom. I think this is a fair answer to the question of why God allows evil, but it does not address why He allows the pain that comes from things like cancer, or hurricanes, or birth defects. To which, I do not have a good answer, other than sin.

Christianity says that our sin has affected this world and our bodies. It is acting like a disease and is ruining what was originally a good world. And, as far as the power of sin goes, God has dealt with it. He has dealt with it on the cross of Jesus. And just because sin is allowed to wreak havoc now does not mean it will always be allowed to. There is a future hope that the mess we have made of this present world will be cleaned up. And for that we wait earnestly.

The Problem of Pain is a Problem for Skeptics

To conclude this brief discussion on pain, I would like to speak specifically to the intellectual objection. What I say now is specifically for the one who has no personal tragedy causing them to question God's existence, but from a purely

intellectual position claims that evil and God cannot exist together.

Whereas the emotional objection is centered on mostly *why* God would allow evil, the intellectual objection states more forcefully that, logically, God (as we know Him) and evil cannot exist together. This argument is based on the idea that since God is supposed to be all-good and all-powerful He would want to be rid of evil (because He is good) and would thus do so (because He is all-powerful). The resulting conclusion is that because evil exists God must not.

There are, though, at least two major problems with this position. The first, as I have already explained, is the connection between choice and evil. Much of the evil in this world is brought on by the doings of man. To rid the world of evil, the world would have to be rid of morally free creatures. So there is no contradiction in a good, all-powerful God allowing evil to remain.

The second problem with this objection relates to how we could identify something as evil if God were not to exist. For when we say that something evil has taken place, what we are really saying is that something has happened in a way that never should have happened; that it is wrong. We are not simply saying that something has happened in a way that we personally do not like, such as being served a steak well done when you preferred that it be cooked rare. Rather, instinctively we know that evil is something greater than mere personal taste.

Mankind universally understands, for example, that it is not just that we *prefer* people not murder each other. Even despite our personal feelings about who may have been

murdered, we see that it is fundamentally wrong. But from where did this idea of wrong come?

If something comes about by accident, it has no purpose. It does not mean that it cannot come to have a purpose, but the purpose would be decided by whoever stumbles across it and makes it so according to his or her own desires. For example, say a man stumbles across a rock that has broken off of a bigger rock by chance. He finds it and decides to use it for a hammer. The rock now has purpose, but it very well could have been used for a thousand other things. Therefore, there is no right or wrong way to use it. It was not created for any specific purpose, thus you cannot use it wrongly.

Likewise, if God did not exist to create life, life is the result of randomness; it is an accident without specific purpose. And if life has no purpose, there is no way things should be, and, consequently, no way things should not be. There would be no way to use life wrongly, because life itself was an accident. Even if men assign life purpose, they are still just acting like the man that stumbled across the fallen rock and gave it a random purpose when it could have had another. It would be an arbitrary purpose, one devoid of any real significance, and one that is not binding.

But when it comes to evil we are saying precisely that somewhere life is being used wrongly. For instance, we call molestation evil because we believe children should not be used in that way. We call racism evil because we believe people should be judged on their character not their color. We call the torture of innocent people for pleasure disgusting and pure evil because we believe one should not use another's pain for personal satisfaction. And we call the Holocaust evil

because we believe one should not use their power to annihilate people they do not like.

But why *should* things be one way and not another if life is an accident? The word "should" here is problematic for the skeptic. Why *should* you not steal? Why *should* you not rape? Why *should* you not murder? Why *should* you treat people based on the content of their character and not their color? The problem of evil is actually a problem for skeptics more than it is a problem for Christians because without God or a transcendent standard of right and wrong, which could only come about by a God, there is no good answer to "why." Ask the skeptic these questions, wait for his answer, and you will see from his answer the problem of his position.

They will be forced to say the above things are wrong either because it hurts others or because it doesn't benefit society, which is really the same answer. But, again, why is it wrong to hurt others? Why is wrong for me to do things that benefit me and not society? Who cares if society goes to hell as long as I am fine? Who says hurting people is a bad thing? Who's to tell me that I can't say an action is good if it helps me? How can the skeptic say otherwise?

The skeptic likely would go back to saying that hurting others is wrong because it doesn't benefit society, and a functioning and safe society is to everyone's advantage. But, again, what if I prefer to live in a society that is unsafe where I can take what I want. How could you tell me that your way of thinking is more correct than mine, and furthermore, why "should" I prefer your society to mine? To what standard of rightness are you appealing? You cannot simply say that I ought not be selfish because it doesn't answer the question of

why I should be unselfish. And if you were to say because it benefits society, we would be right back where we'd begun (thank you C.S. Lewis for that last bit of wisdom).

If life just happened to happen, as the skeptic says, then there is no way things should be. And if there is no way things should be, every rule we have made is according to personal preference. It may be true that people prefer to live without fear of their possessions being taken, and even if a majority of people prefers this, it is completely different from it being wrong. For wrongness implies going against something's intended purpose, not just a group of people's preferences. Without a transcendent standard of what is right, there is no way a skeptic can argue that I "should" do anything.

Contrary to the skeptic's position, we understand that evil is something more than just infractions on man-made rules and preferences. We understand that things that are evil are violations of something sacred and ancient that we had no hand in making. Furthermore, we know that even if mankind said that torturing innocent people was legal it would still be evil. We just know that there is a certain way that life is supposed to be. But how can life have any meaning and purpose without a creator? Purpose can only come to be *on purpose*; it cannot come by accident.

The notion of evil only makes sense in a universe of purpose that contains a standard of purpose and goodness. We call things evil when they violate this standard. But, again, from where did this standard come? It can't be a result of evolution. An accident is not binding. No, this standard must come from one being outside of creation that had an intention

for life. This being is God. He, Himself, is the standard of goodness that we compare actions to.

Even though the problem that evil and pain cause people is a serious issue, it is an issue that is proof for God's existence. With love and compassion, help people see this. This may seem surprising, but use the problem of pain as a way of gently leading a person back to the God who loves them, has created good things, and will free them from pain perfectly one day.

EPILOGUE



Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

-Matthew 11:18

Why Me

When it all boils down, many people refuse to think that God would accept them, and so they reject Him. I have said before that most people reject God because of emotional and volitional issues. Intellect merely covers these issues. It is the mask to the real issue. Though we have talked about evidence and logic and arguments, we must remember that many people will not bow to God because of their heart. Many people feel guilty and inadequate. Many people do not love

themselves. Many people do not like themselves. Many people have had abusive fathers. Many people have been rejected and hurt by their families. Many people punish themselves for their past mistakes. Many people cannot forgive themselves and believe that no one else could or should. It is sad, but many people cannot come to God because they think that God will not come to them.

As I end this book, I want to encourage you and help you to encourage others by helping you know that God is greater than our sin. Often we feel trapped under the weight of our past mistakes. We feel the burden of needing to clean up our life so that God will accept us. We believe that we must make ourselves pretty so that God will love us. This thinking is utterly false. It is as far from the truth as possible. It is a lie that must be killed. It must be crucified.

Jesus was crucified for our sins. It was sufficient. You need not add anything to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It was enough. It *is* enough to save you. God sent His Son to die for you before you loved Him, while you were an ugly sinner. God loves ugly people. God loves you. Believe it.

All that is required of men to receive the forgiveness of Jesus is for them to ask. God gives the gift of forgiveness and salvation freely and without discrimination. Do not devalue how great He is by thinking that you must add something to this deal. What is it that you think you can offer to the creator of all things? Why is it that you think your offenses are greater than His love? Who has told you this and tricked you into thinking that you and your offenses are powerful enough to drive away God and rob Him of His love for you? There is nothing more powerful than God, not even you.

God is not like us. He is not petty. He does not withhold Himself from people who ask to be reunited with Him. He gives Himself to us freely and willingly and abundantly when we seek Him. The only ones that do not get to know His goodness are those who run from it. Stop running.

Christian clichés often rob great truth of its power, but I want to tell you that God *is* love and He *will* forgive you. You *can* be saved and delivered from your sin. You need not be separated from God. All you need to do is ask Him to forgive you. God has taught us through His word that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Roman 10:13). He is not far away either (Acts 17:27). He is just one prayer away. If in your heart you believe that Jesus was raised from the grave, and you believe that Jesus can forgive you of your sins, all you need to do is ask Him and He will forgive you (Romans 10:8-10). If this is your desire, you will be forgiven, and your life will be forever changed.

My Christian brothers and sisters, remember that this is how you have been saved. Be encouraged that nothing can separate you from the love of God (Romans 8:39), for as even while we were God's enemies, He sent Jesus to die for us. And if His death has saved us, how much more will His life (Romans 5:6-10)! Tell others this. Believe it yourself.

It is so foolish to be swept away by empty philosophy and powerful emotions into thinking that God has rejected us. It is we who are the rejecters. So run to Christ and bring others with you. Love others, lay your life down for others, preach the gospel to the world, and let your hope been seen by all.

I want to be clear to end this book. You can know God. All you need to do is cry out to Him. Please believe this and

tell others. And if you doubt me, with an honest and sincere heart cry out to God. Ask Him to forgive you, and ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Now I am not asking you to treat God like a magician for your entertainment. In your heart, you cannot mock God and demand He move a mountain to show almighty *you* that He exists. You do not get to command the Almighty. Do not be surprised when in your arrogance and mockery God does not move the tree you point at. But if you are honest and sincere, and you allow God to show Himself to you in the way He chooses, you will find Him. What have you got to lose?

Christians, you can offer this hope to skeptics. You can invite them to know our God. We have good evidence for our faith, but we can also just invite people to meet God for themselves. Do this. Practice this. Tell people that they can experience God. Tell them that you have experienced God. Now, I don't agree that you cannot argue with a changed life, as some say. I argue with the good and changed Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses when they come to my door. Your conversion is not the end all to a debate about God. But there is value in the fact that God can be known and experienced. There is value in your experience and personal knowledge of God. So tell people your stories and invite them to enter into one for themselves.

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It is quite difficult to acknowledge all the people that contributed to the writing of this book. There are many people that have invested in my life. Below are the people, though, that have had a direct influence in the writing of this book.

I am forever indebted to my parents Mike and Susan Sherrard. I can't explain the value of the home you provided for me and Brian and Laura. The riches we have because of your faithfulness to us are immeasurable. Thank you. Above all people, you are the reason this book was able to be written.

I am indebted to the students at Skipstone Academy for inspiring me to write this book. Your passion for sharing your faith is what moved me to write.

I am indebted to Jonathan Cooper for helping me actually write. I both hate and love your honesty. "Get it down and then get it good." Those words freed me to write.

I am indebted to Dylan Higgins who never was too busy to listen to what I wrote. Your friendship is priceless.

I am indebted to Joanna Jury who read this book over and over again, and took a mess and made it neat.

And lastly, I am indebted to my wife. I am indebted for much more than this book, but the way you love me and our kids gives me the foundation to serve others. Thank you.

TOPICAL RESOURCE LIST



I have encouraged you throughout this book to study further. Here is a list of books arranged thematically to help you. This is not an exclusive list, meaning that I do not intend to say that the books I list are the only books that are worth reading. The ones that I have listed are some of the books that have helped me. I hope they help you. The titles in bold are the ones I suggest you read if you read only one from each section. Oh, and I suggest you read *Mere Christianity* before you read any of the others. Sorry, I am an unashamed Lewis fan.

ABORTION

Beckwith, Francis J. *Defending life: a moral and legal case against abortion choice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Francis J. Beckwith has written an in-depth and thorough book on abortion. It is very comprehensive and at times can

be a hard read. However, it is rich in insight and practical applications for the abortion discussion.

Rae, Scott B. *Moral choices: an introduction to ethics*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000.

Scott Rae's *Moral Choices: an introduction to ethics* is a great book on a host of ethical issues. Included is a very good chapter on abortion. It is perhaps the best treatment of the abortion issue consolidated into a single chapter.

DOUBT

Habermas, Gary R., and Ronald T. Habermas. *Dealing with doubt*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990.

Habermas, Gary R., *The Thomas factor: using your doubts to draw closer to God*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999.

It is good to know how to handle doubt as it is common to all men. Gary Habermas has done perhaps the best work on the subject. He has also done the world a favor by making *Dealing with doubt* and *The Thomas factor: using your doubts to draw closer to God* available for free at http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/books.htm.

Lewis, C.S. *A grief observed.* San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001.

C.S. Lewis also addresses the issue of doubt in *A Grief Observed,* which is about the loss of his wife. This is a very personal book, and you get to see very intimately how Lewis handled the loss of his wife and the doubts that he faced.

ETHICS / MORALITY

Rae, Scott B. *Moral choices: an introduction to ethics.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000.

Rae's book *Moral Choices* is a must read. It is a comprehensive study on ethics and ethical issues faced by the modern Christian. It is very readable and can easily be used as a textbook. High school students and adults alike will benefit from this book.

EVIL / PAIN

Lewis, C.S. *A grief observed* and *The problem of pain. Each:* San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001.

A Grief Observed and *The Problem of Pain* are each treatments of the problem that the existence of evil presents to Christianity. *A Grief Observed* addresses the issue of pain in a very intimate and personal way as it is a book about the loss of Lewis' wife and his struggles. *The Problem of Pain* is a more philosophical look at the

issue of evil and pain. I would recommend you read them both. If you are hurting, read *A Grief Observed* first; if not, read *The Problem of Pain* first.

Plantinga, Alvin. *God, freedom, and evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977.

Plantinga is one whom you will find quoted and referenced at some point in your reading life. He is well respected, and in this book he takes a philosophical and logical approach to the problem of evil. This book is for the person who likes logic and needs to explain the problem of pain to a friend who is a student of logic. That is not to say that you should not read it, I am just letting you know what to expect.

GENERAL

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable faith: Christian truth and apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2008.

It is said that Craig has never lost a debate. He is a brilliant man. *Reasonable Faith* is a brilliant book, but it is one that you will need to spend time with. It is not for the novice apologetic reader. But if you are committed to studying apologetics, this is a book that you should read. It presents arguments for God's existence (offensive apologetics) and it utilizes much science, history and philosophy in doing so.

Dembski, William A., and Mike Licona. *Evidence for God: 50 arguments for faith from the Bible, history, philosophy, and science*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010.

This book is a collection of 50 essays from various writers that provide arguments for the Christian faith. Each essay is direct and to the point. The chapters can be read in less than five minutes each, and it is a great resource to get a general view of virtually every argument for God and Christianity.

Flew, Antony. *There is a god: how the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind*. New York: Harper One, 2008.

At one time Antony Flew was regarded as the world's most influential philosophical atheist. He changed his position before he died. To my knowledge he did not become a Christian, nor did hold to any other religion, but this book is an interesting read to see how the world's most famous atheist changed his mind about God's existence.

Geisler, Norman L. *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.

This book is exactly what it says it is, an encyclopedia of apologetics. It is a good resource for quick reference and hard-to-find facts. It is a good book to add to your

library as it covers virtually every apologetic topic.

Geisler, Norman L., and Frank Turek. *I don't have enough faith to be an atheist*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.

Turek and Geisler team up to write this fantastic book on the evidence for the Christian faith. It is written with you in mind. It is not wordy, but it does go in-depth. It teaches more than it philosophizes, and it is not written over your head. It is a must read as it presents a very good comprehensive argument for the Christian faith.

Geisler, Norman L., and Ronald M. Brooks. *When skeptics ask: a handbook on Christian evidences*. New pbk. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.

This book is a good resource for quick reference on common questions skeptics ask. It is written in a way that makes the content easily understood. It is suitable for most people.

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 2001.

Mere Christianity is perhaps my favorite book of all time. It covers much in apologetics and is written in a way that is understood and enjoyed by all. Lewis' wit and wisdom have changed many people. *Mere*

Christianity is a collection of most of his wisdom regarding the validity of Christianity. Spend time with it and you will be rewarded.

IMPLEMENTING APOLOGETICS

Baucham, Voddie. *The ever-loving truth: can faith thrive in a post-Christian culture?* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004.

Baucham shows how modern day Christians face similar problems to that of first century Christians. He argues that we live in a post-Christian culture similar to the pre-Christian culture that first century Christians experienced. Upon this foundation he shows how we can engage our culture in ways similar to that of the first century church.

Koukl, Gregory. *Tactics: a game plan for discussing your Christian convictions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

This book changed the way I talk with skeptics. Recently, I was at a conference where Koukl spoke. After he was finished, my friend turned to me and said, "I see where you learned what you learned." This book is very practical and will equip you to engage skeptics in meaningful, respectful, and fruitful conversations.

Kreeft, Peter. *Socrates meets Jesus: history's great questioner confronts the claims of Christ*. Downers

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002, and *Between heaven and hell: a dialog somewhere beyond death with John F. Kennedy, C.S. Lewis and Aldous Huxley*. Expanded, 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.

Both of these books are fictional and contain mostly conversations about apologetic and philosophical issues. But they are each great and very entertaining. They are good at teaching how to implement what you know because you see through Kreefts characters different ways to talk about apologetic issues. These books are a different way to learn about apologetics and to see how to use what you know.

Zacharias, Ravi K., and Norman L. Geisler. *Is your church ready?: motivating leaders to live an apologetic life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

This book is a collection of essays about implementing apologetics in your church. As I think apologetics is a necessary part of evangelism in our culture, this book is a must read for church leaders who desire to equip their people to spread the gospel.

MIRACLES

Geivett, R. Douglas., Habermas, Gary. *In defense of miracles*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Geivett and Habermas serve as general editors in this

collection of essays that argue for the possibility and identification of miracles. The various essays create a comprehensive defense against skeptical objections to miracles as well as set forth a positive case for God's action in history. This is good read and virtually all people could benefit from reading it.

RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Craig, William Lane, Gerd LuÌˆdemann, Paul Copan, and Ronald K. Tacelli. *Jesus' resurrection: fact or figment?: a debate between William Lane Craig & Gerd LuÌˆdemann*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

This book is a debate between Craig and LuÌˆdemann. Watching and reading debates are great ways to learn how to talk to skeptics and how to answer their questions. This book also includes follow up essays that offer additional information on the resurrection as well as a critique on the arguments of both Craig and LuÌˆdemann.

Flew, Antony. *There is a god: how the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

This book is not about the resurrection, it is about Flew's abandonment of atheism for deism. However, at the end of the book there is an appendix written by N.T. Wright, per Flew's request, on the resurrection. Though Flew

did not hold to any particular religion, he recognized that Christianity is the one religion that should be honored and respected. Furthermore, he thought that the claims of the resurrection were more impressive than any other religious competition.

Habermas, Gary R., and Mike Licona. *The case for the resurrection of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004.

Gary Habermas and Mike Licona teamed up to write perhaps the best book available of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Together, using only evidence that is agreed upon by secular and religious historians alike, Habermas and Licona show that the best interpretation of the historical data is that Jesus rose from the dead. This book is well written, intended for all people, and is well worth your time. It even comes with an interactive computer game to help you retain what you read.

SCIENCE

Rana, Fazale. *The cell's design: how chemistry reveals the Creator's artistry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.

Biochemists have made startling discoveries in recent years about the complexity of the cell. In this book, Rana explores the scientific and theological impact of these discoveries, and shows how the cell is evidence

of an intelligent designer. Intelligent design is one of the strongest arguments for God's existence and this book will help you, particularly when sharing your faith with a "science" person.

Wells, Jonathan. *Icons of evolution: science or myth? : why much of what we teach about evolution is wrong*. Washington, DC: Regnery Pub., 2002.

Wells, who has received two Ph.D.s, one in Molecular and Cellular Biology from the University of California at Berkeley, and one in Religious Studies from Yale University, explains how much of what is being taught about evolution is wrong. He gives examples of blatant misrepresentations and factual errors in textbooks. This book is good if you are dealing with a person who is hardened against God because of his strong belief in evolution.

TRUTH

Kreeft, Peter. *A refutation of moral relativism: interviews with an absolutist*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999.

Kreeft writes many fictitious conversations that serve well to show how to use apologetics. In this book, Kreeft address moral relativism by way of a conversation between two fictional characters. It is an enjoyable way to read about the absurdity of moral relativism as well as to gain tips for speaking with relativists yourself.

WORLD RELIGION / WORLD VIEWS

Corduan, Winfried. *Neighboring faiths: a Christian introduction to world religions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

As we live in a diverse culture, it is good to know about the religions of the people we live with. Evangelism is more profitable when we know the people with whom we are speaking. Corduan's book is a good resource for those who need a general introduction to the major world religions.

Geisler, Norman L., and William D. Watkins. *Worlds apart: a handbook on world views*. 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.

World views are like colored glasses; they affect the way we see the world. It is very helpful to understand how a person's set of beliefs causes them to think in a particular way, and it makes witnessing to them more effective by enabling you to communicate the gospel more clearly.

Rhodes, Ron. *The challenge of the cults and new religions: the essential guide to their history, their doctrine, and our response*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

In our diverse culture, you may at some point meet someone who has been involved in or influenced by a

cult and its teachings. Rhodes' book does a very good job at explaining the nature of cults, the different teaching of particular cults, and appropriate ways to respond to them.