



What should I say? Learning to answer our friends' questions

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Sometimes we're nervous about witnessing for Christ because we're afraid we'll be asked questions we can't answer.

This is a problem we can help each other solve! Put a small group of intelligent Christians together, and you soon find we've got the raw material we need for the questions we get asked.

So in our church, or student group, we can set aside an evening to discuss the objections we've heard our friends raise about our faith. Break into groups of 5-8, and list the questions you've heard. Then together we can share ways we respond.

This feature is intended to back you up in this exercise. It lists a few of the approaches you could use as starting-points. Some may not be relevant to your situation. But you can sort that out!

Remember your aim is never to argue people into the Kingdom. That's not possible; only God can lead us through! Your aim is – lovingly and prayerfully – to get the problems out of the way, so that together you can share about what really matters: who Jesus was, what he has done; where we stand before God, what we each need to do about it...

? Among so many sincerely-held beliefs, how can Christ be the only way? Aren't all religions true?

- Sincerity's not the issue: we can all be sincerely mistaken. In the end, some things are either true or false. Christ either was or was not what he

claimed to be – the unique I AM, the Creator, the only way to God (John 14:6). No other major religious teacher has made this incredible claim. Was Christ right or wrong?

- Again, it's either true or false that we can't please God by our own deeds, and that God himself is so holy that our sins can only be paid for if he himself rescued us by dying for them. Jesus' gospel stands alone in daring to say this.

- If these claims are true, all other religions must ultimately be incomplete. All religions cannot be 100% true; they contradict each other. There may be many good insights, but the key issue is how we can be right with God. If salvation could be earned by human efforts or ceremonies, Christ's death was unnecessary. We cannot have Christ's cross and other religions too.

- Historical evidence: no other religious teacher has risen from the dead. (See, for example, Norman Anderson, *Jesus Christ: the Witness of History* (IVP).) If Christ's resurrection is a historical fact, then we are dealing with something unique in world history; only Jesus frees us from death.

? But what about those who have never heard your gospel?

- God is utterly just and also utterly loving. We can trust them to his care.

- There are many things we aren't sure about (as is the case in science too). And we aren't embarrassed about that! Some Bible-believing Christians say that those who haven't heard the gospel are without salvation. Others believe that Christ's death can cover them too, if they have turned to what they've been shown of God for mercy, in repentance and faith (just as Abraham was saved, though he never knew Christ by name).

- But the practical issue is, what about those who have heard, like you and me?

? The Bible is full of mistakes!

- Have you really read it as an adult? What mistakes are you thinking of?

- Of course the Bible contains things hard for us to grasp. And so does science. (Is light made up of waves or particles? You could put it either way, says science. Is that a contradiction? No, but our understanding, and our verbal pictures, are limited.)

- For centuries people have attacked the Bible. Yet

what contradiction or error is categorically proven? In so old and diverse a book, that is most remarkable.

- It's superficial to attack the Bible without reading it. Why not join an exploratory Bible study with a listening heart, and see how God can speak to you through his Word?

? Science has disproved Christianity!

- In that case it's surprising there are so many leading scientists who are Christian.
- Science continually grows and learns. If history continues, our science will seem as strange to the 23rd century as the 18th century's does to us. All we have are provisional understandings.
- Evolution is another issue over which biblical Christians feel free to differ. Some have no difficulties believing both evolution and the Bible; so it hasn't been proven that the two are irreconcilable. Others rightly observe that evolutionary theory is far from finally 'proven' (scientific theories never are). And yet others notice that some secular cosmologists have been saying that the evolutionary process is so problematic that a higher intelligence from space must have watched over it to make it work (cf Fred Hoyle, *Evolution from Space*) – ie, if there's evolution, there must be some sort of Creator!

? I don't believe in all those miracles!

- Maybe your science is out of date. In the world of quantum physics, it's impossible to rule out extraordinary events like miracles.
- If there's a God who created the scientific laws, that same God can suspend or supersede them.
- Historical fact: if the resurrection happened, then not only is the determinism of our bondage to decay and death broken, but all other determinism is likewise subject to God's control and intervention.

? How could God allow so much suffering?

- The Bible teaches no easy answers to this question. At the heart of Christianity is a man on a cross shouting, 'My God, why?' In Revelation 5 and 6 we read of the 'sealed book' of war, famine, imperialism, economic injustice, disease and religious persecution: it is something only Christ can comprehend, 'because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God' (Rev

5:9). Christ alone went to the utter heart of the darkness; he took human pain seriously, he alone sees and understands all our suffering.

- There are some other partial answers. At the start of history humankind insisted on running our own world, rather than submitting to God's reign. Our world has been wrecked as a result, and we haven't the power to put it right. Yet each of us still repeats that mistake, demanding our own autonomy.

- Christ's death was God's loving response: he got involved in our suffering, removed the guilt and power and pollution of sin, rendered powerless the demonic powers, opened the way through death.

- If God stamped out all evil in the world right now, we'd each be dead! But now he calls us to work with him, learning in suffering, building a new community marked by his love and peace and his healing and transforming power.

- One day he will come back. If we are his, he will take us to a new heaven and earth where there will be 'no more death or crying or pain' (Rev 21:4).

? Following Christ is OK for you but I'm happy without it.

- If there really is a God, to try and make our life work without him is like doing a jigsaw puzzle and throwing the central piece away. Some bits will work, but the whole won't make sense.

- This life on earth is just the tiniest fraction of our total existence. Since God is our maker, to ignore his purposes is to miss the whole point of the millions of years you will exist.

- One day you must face God, and account to him for how you used the life he gave you, how you responded to the salvation he offered you.

- Jesus told us there is a heaven (being totally with God, the source of all love, joy, and peace), and a hell (being without God, experiencing His judgment). In this life you can still know joy even while moving away from God: it's like an electric fire that's been disconnected from the power source, but hasn't yet gone dark and cold. But if you live without God now, then, logically, you'll be separated from him in eternity. To be separate from God then will mean total separation from all love, joy, and peace; drifting into the darkness forever. That is what Jesus calls hell.

? Surely if I live a good moral life, that will be enough for God?

- If it were so easy, whyever did Christ die? Watch Him go through the agony of Gethsemane, and the desolation in which He cried out on Calvary. Why, if we could so easily be acceptable to God without all that?
- Hadn't you better face up to God's infinite, majestic holiness? His purity is unimaginable; before Him 'all our good deeds are like filthy rags'. Even our best deeds are flawed by pride, by self-righteousness. Some of us may be better than others – but none are good enough to stand before the majesty of God.
- Only Jesus' gospel dares face this radical truth. Because only Jesus offers us a solution: that God himself has come down, become human, and died for our sins, and now offers to put his own nature within us when we are 'born again' in repentance and faith...