

ANSWERING THE SKEPTICS

So far we have answered some really difficult questions that are often posed by non-believers. First, how can God be just when he allows the innocent to suffer and second, is our faith blind. Today we are going to look at the third difficult question:

Question #3: How does a Christian respond to the skeptic who does not believe in God and wants to challenge our faith?

We have answered two questions that seemed almost insurmountable. Now that we are armed with the truth on our side the question is how are we to present that truth. I had a person post comments the last two sermons. I posted it on YouTube and by the very next day he had replied with a scathing review. He said the following: “The answer is yes, faith (gullibility) is blind, definitionally. This is not evidence for a deity; it is evidence that you lack some fundamentals in basic process. You also attach yourself to a conclusion and try to cram whatever you can into it, disregarding anything that fails to support, which is called **selection bias and dishonest modality.**” Basically he is stating that I gave a biased argument in favor of God but did not present contrary evidence. When I saw the comment my heart leapt for joy because an unbeliever had listened to my video! “God is good all the time, all the time God is good!”

Then I started to think about how I was to respond to his statement. I could have easily reminded him that I scrutinized the Bible with modern, historical critical analyses or that scientists often start with a hypothesis – what they believe to be true – then rigorously test its veracity or that the main four questions I started with were from an atheist’s point of view. I could have even reminded him that all arguments have presuppositions underlying them. I thought and prayed and waited. Since our modern day society believes so strongly in truth being relational to the person, they have objected all forms of absolute truth. To argue with such individuals must be done with great care. If one comes across as being dogmatic or argumentative then the objective search for the truth becomes a quick impossibility. It will become all about winning the argument! I wanted to respond to him but in a manner that might lead to planting a seed rather than engaging a vain argument in which he merely digs his feet into his position even further! How does one defend the Gospel in a manner that gives one’s words the best possibility of being considered truth?

In this sermon I am going to present five goals of presenting the truth of the Gospel to a skeptic

- 1) Have an attitude of love
- 2) Share the truth, not clever arguments
- 3) Be humble
- 4) Be enthusiastic
- 5) Intercede for them

Goal 1: Present the Gospel message with an Attitude of Love

1 Peter 3:15 states we are to give the reasons for the hope that is in us but do so with an attitude of meekness and fear. Hope is one of the distinguishing marks of being a Christian. Faced with persecution, suffering and pain of living in a fallen world, Christians have been enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to be content (Philippians 4:12) and feel inexpressible joy in all situations (1 Peter 1:8). Christians can feel this way because no matter how bad life gets their seal by the Spirit ensures they will spend an eternity with God (2 Corinthians 1:22). Meekness and fear in this verse reminds the reader that God will judge each person's walk impartially (1 Peter 1:27) so guard your words and thoughts carefully. Let's look at the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 to see how we are to treat others when presenting them with the truth.

I believe we all know this story very well but do we understand its meaning? The younger son was saying two main things when he asked for his inheritance. First, he no longer wanted to be under his father's rule as the head of the clan. His rules and regulations were not acceptable to the younger son so he sought freedom rather than staying inside as a family member. Second, it was Jewish custom that the inheritance of the father was only to be passed down upon his death, not before. In other words, the son was in essence saying that he could not wait until his father's death – all he wanted was his belongings now but not his presence. Ouch, that is harsh!

The younger son then goes out and squandered all he had in wild living and when a severe famine hits the land he finds himself in great need. Those who called the prodigal son a friend was not to be found when his money ran out. This drips with irony for like the prodigal son all they sought was wealth in life with little regard for the friendship of others. They treated the prodigal son just like he treated his father. Having run out of money the prodigal son was forced eat pigs feed to survive and as a result soon came to realize his sin was great and his father's rules were indeed wise.

The son goes home in great humility hoping that he can become a servant of his father. Verse 20 states when the son is a long distance away the father sees him and runs to him and hugs him. When the father invites him back into the family the older brother complains and refuses to accept his younger brother. Ironically the older brother who started out on moral high ground soon fell and the younger son who fell was soon restored. When faced with explaining the truth to an atheist who will you be? Will you have the attitude of the father whose love is never removed regardless of what each of his sons have done or will you have the attitude of the older brother and see the atheist as wicked and beyond redemption? What if God had written us off and decided we were not worth saving – after all we were His enemies (Romans 5:10)? We need to see the image of God in all people and love them unconditionally. **It is only by sharing the love of God with another that the blind can come to see! Being filled with the Holy Spirit it should not be too difficult to manifest His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness and self control (Galatians 5:22)!**

Goal 2: Share the Truth, not Clever Arguments

Romans 1:16 states: “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” The Gospel can stand firm as truth without the help of our intellect and foolishness. We don’t have to make up clever arguments but merely share the truth that has been already given to us in the Bible. This does not mean we should be ignorant of some of the basic facts that we reviewed in the first three sermons. We should know the basics so that the other person knows that we have not been brainwashed by a group of people but in fact have wrestled with the same doubts they are experiencing and have reasons why we have faith in the Gospel message.

Sometimes it is hard to face people who love conflict. What do you do when you face a person who looks like this? The person in your face and is verbally abusing your beliefs in God. Faced with this kind of situation most people either have one of two responses: fight or flight. Neither of these are very effective in reaching the emotionally difficult person who only wants to win the argument that they feel God does not exist. The disciples were told by Jesus Christ to not worry when faced with overwhelming an angry person like this for He will give you the right words to say. These words of course are not to be our foolish words of argument but the very word of God. Hebrews 4:12 states: “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” So present the Gospel message because its words can penetrate the stoniest of hearts! Also do not be afraid to stand firm and speak for while our struggle is against spiritual forces of darkness (Ephesians 6:12) never forget greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). **Give them the word of God and then it is the Spirit of God who convicts the person of truth!**

Goal 3: Be Humble when Sharing the Gospel Message

In John 6:36 when Jesus says “I am the bread of life” He is saying the following: belief in God’s Son, Jesus Christ is essential to obtaining eternal life. One must always remember being asked by Jesus to be a proclaimer of the Gospel message (Matthew 28:19-20) and planters of the seed (1 Corinthians 3:7) is an absolute honor beyond words! Even though you are an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) and a royal priest (1 Peter 2:9), never forget God truly has chosen the lowly of this world, sinners saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8); to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). In the kit God’s not Dead the following quote is stated: “Remember that were are just one beggar sharing a piece of bread with another beggar.” Knowledge puffs up and God opposes the proud but love edifies and God gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5; 1 Corinthians 8:1).

An example of humbly proclaiming the Gospel message when faced with insurmountable opposition can be found in Act 7. Stephen’s speech when taken in front of the Sanhedrin was not of his own clever words but was merely the summary of Israel’s history as given in the Old Testament. He simply told the story of how Israel had persecuted the prophets and concluded that this pattern of persecuting those who spoke the truth has now been repeated in the crucifying of God’s own Son! The words of God truly are sharper than any double edged sword for the words Stephen spoke by the Holy Spirit exposed the deep sin of

Sanhedrin and inflamed them to the extent that had him stoned to death! What is critical for us to learn from this event is that we should never write anyone off as being beyond redemption for we **can only imagine the impact Stephen's witness made on Saul who watched him die!**

Goal 4: Be Enthusiastic

Matthew 28:19-20 states that we are to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ commanded you. And surely Christ is with you always, to the very end of the age. We as masterpieces of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) who have drank from the fountains of living waters (John 4:14) should be able to proclaim the Gospel message with unspeakable joy! We have received the greatest message ever given to humanity: being reconciled unto a holy God is possible through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). No longer do people have to live with the guilt and shame of their rebellion against God (Hebrews 9:14) because they have hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13) that He who heals the broken-hearted has proclaimed freedom to the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1) to all who believe!

Enthusiasm must be shown when proclaiming the Gospel message after all, who will be believe we are born again when there is no joy overflowing from our hearts? This kind of enthusiasm for what Christ has done for you should be shared with all but there does come a time I believe when one has to no longer throw the pearls before the swine (Matthew 7:6). While it is true that disciples of Christ are to love their enemies (Matthew 5:43-47) and are not to judge unbelievers (Matthew 7:1), there must be a limit to proclaiming the truth to those who hearts are already stone!

Goal 5: Intercede for Them

Let's turn to the Parable of the Sower to understand the various outcomes that are possible when we speak the truth to another.

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”
Matthew 13:18-23, NIV

When someone hears the Gospel there are four possible outcomes:

1. Do not understand it and the evil one snatches the seed away
2. Receive the word in rocky places and when afflicting and persecution comes the seed is snatched away
3. Receive the word in thorny places and the worry of the world and deceitfulness of wealth comes and the seed is snatched away
4. Receive the word and understand it, become born again and bear much fruit

Obviously when someone hears the Gospel any of these four outcomes will happen. Even though God wants all of humanity to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) that does not mean He will force them into a salvation decision. He has set a path before humanity – life or death – and each person must choose one or the other (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). This of course means that you as an ambassador cannot force others into salvation but you certainly can pray (1 Timothy 2:1-4) for to God that He gives them every possible opportunity to choose life!

Conclusion

In this sermon I gave the following five goals of presenting the truth of the Gospel to a skeptic

- 1) Have an attitude of love
- 2) Share the truth, not clever arguments
- 3) Be humble
- 4) Be enthusiastic
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So what do I say to an individual who gives the overwhelming proof of the Gospel such a scathing critique?

God is your creator and loves you with all His heart. He hopes that someday you will come to know that by rejecting Him and making your own choices you are in a prison of sin. The pardon from this prison can only be found in the belief God's only Son, Jesus Christ. I will pray to God that He might stir up belief in your heart and that you might accept His truth: He loves you!