

Part 5: Answering Questions

ROB VAUGHN

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I wonder what would happen if we treated our Bibles like we treat our cell phone?

What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?

What if we flipped through it several times a day?

What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?

What if we used it to receive messages from the text?

What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?

What if we gave it to kids as gifts?

What if we used it when we traveled?

What if we used it in case of emergency?

Oh, and one more thing.

Unlike our cell phone, we don't have to worry about our Bible being disconnected because, Jesus already paid the bill.

And no dropped calls!

This illustration is a good reminder that we need to be reading the Word and becoming increasingly familiar with it. Then you'll have one unbeatable tool at your disposal.

1. What about all those contradictions and historical inaccuracies in the Bible?

Say:

“What particular contradictions or errors are you thinking of?”

“Oh, where is that in the Bible?”

“Can you show me?” Or...

“I can grab a Bible real quick and we can look at some passages on that.”

“If you tell me about a particular passage you're thinking of, I'll be glad to look it up and do a little research on it and get back to you.”

If you're not familiar with the problem passage, or alleged contradiction your friend is talking about, don't make stuff up about it; tell 'em you honestly don't know what the answer is, and you'll check it out and get back them.

“Some things are APPARENT contradictions; they look like contradictions on the surface, but they are just different PERSPECTIVES. The Bible is a whole library of individual books, by different authors, each with his own vantage point. Take the Gospels, for example: four different authors, writing biographies of Jesus. If four different authors wrote a biography of you, they'd use some different quotes, different stories, omit details that the others use. Their perspectives would be different, but it wouldn't mean the four biographies contradict each other.”

And say: Usually, when discrepancies are found, they are easily explained by comparing texts. And this is important: You can say: “Scholars who know much more about the ancient

manuscripts than I do...have studied these things for centuries, and scholarship supports the texts. Scholarship supports the Bible texts as true and accurate.” That’s a fair statement to make.

Quickie facts to use:

- for over 99 percent of the words in the Bible, we know precisely what the original manuscripts said
- there are more intact ancient manuscripts of the NT than over any ancient book, so we know the texts are reliable
- the Dead Sea Scrolls, found right after WW 2, and other archeological finds support the Bible texts
- the person most people would say is the most important person in history...Jesus Christ...said the Bible was the word of God

2. How do you know the Bible is true? Lots can be said, but here are just a few nuggets that you may be able to use:

- >> Jesus believed in it; he said it was true. Was Jesus wrong about that?
- >> The Bible’s manuscripts were carefully preserved, and there are tens of thousands of them, so the text we have is what the original writers wrote
- >> Unlike other sacred books, the Bible is mainly about historical events, and research has shown the Bible’s historical accounts to be accurate
- >> God set up a system of verifying his word, i.e., fulfilled prophecies. Very specific prophecies are fulfilled hundreds of years after they were written. Hundreds of specific prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus, including the exact little town where he’d be born, and nature of his death by crucifixion. Say, “mathematicians have worked with this, and they say the probability of one man coming along in history and fulfilling even a FEW of these specific prophecies is remote, let alone dozens, or even hundreds of prophecies.)

3. Do you really take the Bible literally?

It’s good to say that we take the Bible “at face value,” or “in its plain sense.” Not all of it is meant to be taken literally; some of it is poetry, it contains figures of speech, just as we commonly use figures of speech.

Examples: Jesus said he was a door; he obviously didn’t mean he was a slab of wood with a door knob on it; it was a metaphor. So...I say to people, I take the Bible in its plain, ordinary sense... the poetry as poetry, the history as history, etc.

Now what some people mean is: surely you don’t think the Bible is trustworthy! Because, they’ll say, some parts of scientifically impossible, or culturally offensive.

How about culturally offensive? Someone may say, the Bible says homosexuals should be punished by death, or adulterers should be punished by death; even Sabbath-breakers and disobedient children should be punished by death! Do you advocate that? And if not, how is the Bible useful for today?

Greg Koukl has a great ministry called Stand to Reason; on the internet, it’s www.str.org. Lots of great answers to questions. Koukl says, “**Just because God intends for a biblical command to be taken literally, doesn’t mean he intends for it to be applied universally.**” Consider

this: Jesus told Peter to cast his net into the deep water. And Peter took Jesus' command literally, and he cast his net. But just because Jesus' command was literal doesn't mean that it applies to us. We are not commanded to cast nets into deep water.

Or Koukl says: another way to think of it like this: No matter what state you live in, the laws of the state of California are meant to be taken literally; but they don't APPLY to you unless you live in California. In the same way, all those specific laws of Moses in the OT were meant to be taken at face value by ancient Israel, back then, and over there, but only those people under the jurisdiction of those laws were the ones under those laws. We aren't. Those civil and ceremonial laws were to establish the Jewish nation's government.

So, to sum up that thought: Not all of the Bible applies to us today; a big chunk of the Bible is a legal code book for the government of ancient Israel, 3,000 years ago.

So, if someone says: Oh, I guess you think homosexuals and adulterers and people who work on the Sabbath should be stoned to death? You say: nope. And say, "You don't seem to know a lot about the Bible... if you don't know that the civil laws for ancient Israel were for the governing of ancient Israel." And say: "Maybe I can show you the different divisions of the Bible, which parts were for ancient Israel, which parts are for today, etc." If someone's really interested in learning something, maybe they'll work with you.

4. Everybody's got his own interpretation of the Bible. How could we ever settle on what it means?

Say this: I've heard that before, that people can't agree on an interpretation of it. But that hasn't been my experience. I seem to be able to see the meaning of it as I read. Why don't you read it, and see if it makes plain sense to you? When it says Moses led the people out of Egypt, what does that mean? Probably, that Moses led the people out of Egypt. When it says Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and wise men came, doesn't it just mean what the narrative says?

It's simply not true that any interpretation is as good as any other, any more than you could say that any interpretation of the Phila. Inquirer is as good as the other. If the Inquirer says the Phillies lost to the Chicago Cubs, are all interpretations of that correct? The one that says, the Phillies lost the game, AND the one that says: the city of Philadelphia is inferior to the city of Chicago? Well, no, there are commonly accepted rules of finding the meaning of words in newspapers; and those rules would lead us to believe that the meaning of that report was that the Phillies lost the game; that no special philosophical meaning about cities was intended.

With the Bible, there are commonly accepted rules for understanding it; poetry as poetry, narrative history as narrative history, etc., taking words in their context, etc. Just as with the newspaper, or an encyclopedia, or a cookbook, you can't say that any interpretation of what you read is as good as the other! That's stupid. The aim is to find the RIGHT meaning, based on what the context is and what the authors intended. Compare it to other writings like that. When the cookbook says, break three eggs, it's not OK to say the meaning of that is, there are three towns in the Upper Perkiomen Valley and they're going to pot. No; we'd never let anyone get away with saying, hey, you can interpret it any way you want to! And you can't interpret the Bible any way you want to.

5. Real quick, take the subject of slavery.

People may say, the Bible supports slavery, and we all know that's wrong. We say: you have to do a little homework and you'll see what's really going on in Bible passages about slavery. Number one: the culture difference. The Bible wasn't speaking of slavery like the 18th- and 19th century

African slaves in America. Southerners were WRONG to interpret the Bible as saying it was okay to have African slaves on their plantations. As Tim Keller says: in the first-century Roman empire, when the NT was written, slaves were not that different than the average free person; they looked the same, they weren't of a different race; they weren't segregated from the rest of society. They often made the same money as free people, so they weren't necessarily poor; they were often people who became financially over their heads in debts they couldn't pay, or otherwise impoverished, so they sold themselves into the service of someone else. And it wasn't for life; it was indentured servitude; it was a necessary social arrangement for many people.

I don't want to take any more time on what slavery was like, but it was far different than the brutal, old American kind. And the slavery mentioned in the Bible was just a fact of life in society. The priority of Jesus and the apostles was not mainly to change the structures of society, but to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. But we should tell our friends that the Bible's teachings are what helped to un-do modern slavery. Reformers like William Wilberforce realized the Bible was teaching that all are equal in God's sight, there's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, in Christ. These insights from the Bible are what led to the abolition of slavery in England and here. Evangelical, Bible-believers led that effort.

6. How can there be only one true religion? How can Jesus be the only way to God? I believe all religions are equally true or valid.

There are marvelously good answers to these questions. And I'd go so far as to say that the people who bring these things up may not be aware of the trouble they're getting themselves into!

This is one of the most common objections to Xty...that it's an exclusive faith. First of all, be assured that it is exactly that. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to Father except by me." That's one thing to be sure about -- Jesus did say that. And Peter says in

Acts chapter 4, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." I say it's good for us to know the Scripture does say this...because a recent survey found that 70 percent of Americans who claim to be affiliated with a religious group -- including Christians -- said that "many religions can lead to eternal life." So....many church-going people either aren't aware of what the Bible says -- they're not getting good teaching -- or they dismiss what it says. And that's a problem. The Bible is clear: there is one God, and as John chapter 1 says, Jesus, the God-man, is the one who was sent to make the one true God known; the fullness of the godhead dwells bodily in Jesus (Col. chapter 1); 1 Tim 2: there is one God and one mediator between God and man, and that is, the man Christ Jesus. Some people take Barack Obama's attitude. He has reportedly said, "Jesus is the only way for me. I'm not in a position to judge other people." Hmm. There's another objection, built into this one: who are you to judge other people for what they believe?

What can we say when people say to us: How can there be only one true religion?

First of all, we can say, ALL religions make exclusive truth claims, not just Christianity. People don't seem to know that. It's just a fact. Buddhism rejects some of what Hinduism teaches. Hinduism has exclusivist teachings. Ravi Zacharias says, "try criticizing Hinduism in India [which is where he's from] and you'll find out in a hurry how exclusive and 'superior' the Hindu feels his religion is."

Why should only Christianity be accused of being narrow? The other religions are, too. And, think about this: even atheists and pluralists are narrow! They say THEIR views are the only correct views, right? So how can they escape the charge of being narrow? How many people ever challenge atheists in that way: "Hey...isn't your no-God view sort of narrow and intolerant of other views?"

All the major religions make TRUTH claims, and truth – as we all know – is exclusive by definition. Two plus two does not equal five.

So, the idea that all religions are essentially the same at the core, or that "all religions lead to God" is impossible, since the religions of the world make conflicting truth claims. All religions could theoretically be false...but they can't all be true. This violates logic: it violates the law of non-contradiction.

Another thing we can say: the view that all religions lead to God, or all are equally true, or that all have aspects of the truth – that view has a huge problem that emerges if you really think about it. In fact, this view is not only untrue -- since all religions make conflicting truth claims -- but it's also amazingly arrogant! At first glance, this view, that all religions are equal, SOUNDS good to the ear; it sounds very tolerant, very open-minded and kind, very magnanimous and noble. But it just sounds that way. If you get a chance to talk with someone about this, be sure to learn the elephant illustration.

Here's how Tim Keller tells it. There's the story of the blind men and the elephant. Several blind men come upon an elephant; they feel it; one says, feeling the trunk, "the elephant is long and flexible like a snake;" the other says, feeling a leg, "no, it's thick and round like a tree."

Another touches the elephant's side and says, "No, it's large and flat." Each blind can only feel part of the elephant. And in the same way, many people will say, the religions of the world are like this; each one has a grasp on a PART of the truth about spiritual reality, but none can see the whole elephant or claim to have a comprehensive picture of the truth.

OK, sounds nice. But do you see the problem? The story is told from the point of view of someone who is not blind and can see the whole elephant. It's the point of view of someone who has some superior knowledge of the whole truth...that nobody else has.

So, the person who has this view, is making a grander, more exclusive claim than all the rest! This view has an appearance of humility, since it's saying the truth is greater than any one of us can grasp, and really shouldn't we be tolerant and non-judgmental and not make exclusive claims...but this guy alone sees the REAL truth...the big picture from above, that no one else can see! This guy claims to know a truth no one else knows, above everyone else's truth. So, that's the most exclusive claim of all.

Part of the problem is the philosophy known as relativism that has spread through society. I have my truth, you have your truth. I prefer what I prefer, and you can't insist that what you prefer applies to me. Relativism. It's what drives this idea that all religions are more or less equally true. But we have to help people see that relativism can't be true, and it doesn't work.

Relativism says: it's all relative; there's no absolute truth. But it's a self-defeating claim, right? If there's no absolute truth, then the claim the relativist makes – that there's no absolute truth – isn't true! It's only true for him! He can't say his view is an objective truth that applies to everyone. So, that's one problem with relativism; it's self-refuting. Plus, we all know from experience that there IS absolute truth. Some things are absolutely wrong – murder, stealing other people's stuff, etc. – and we all know it intuitively.

And remember, relativism says there are no firm, absolute truths that apply to everyone. But the consequences of that are absurd: you can't really say anything is definitely wrong; which means, no one has really ever been wrong about anything! And it means you can't really make moral distinctions: you can't say Hitler was any less moral than Mother Theresa. So, that's a problem. It doesn't work.

Relativism is also intolerant. Because it absolutely claims that there is no moral truth – so it won't tolerate the view that there IS objective truth. Yet relativists pride themselves on being tolerant. But they have redefined the word “tolerance,” haven't they? Tolerance traditionally means respecting the beliefs of others even if you don't agree with those beliefs. I mean, it presupposes that we don't agree; that's why there's a need for tolerance. But the new definition of tolerance is something like this: you must accept the views of others and agree that they are just as good as yours. But of course this new tolerance view wants to tolerate all ways of thinking except for one – and that is, Christianity. It's very intolerant about Christianity.

Anyway, we should be able to talk a little bit that about relativism when people say: aren't all religions leading to the same God?

Is it possible that Jesus is THE way, and the only way, that God has ordained for people to come to know him? Sure it is. Why would that be impossible? It's perfectly reasonable that God could decide to reveal himself this way; and it's great to point people to the credentials of Jesus to show that God has done exactly that. Paul says in Romans 1 that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. In other words, if Jesus did rise from the dead, everything is settled. He truly is shown to be the one who is God in human form, and all he said is established, and Christianity is established as the truth about the world.

We don't have time to go through the reasons to show that the resurrection is historically true. But the evidence is overwhelming, not the least of which that we, here, today, are Christians. Christianity became a world-wide movement, and the leading religion, on the basis of a report from many eyewitnesses that Christ was raised. His death and burial was all in public view; the tomb was guarded; there was no body to produce, which would have killed off Christianity instantly; but no... Christ appeared again, alive, and people were convinced, and the message of this “good news” spread like wild-fire, and here we are today, a world away from where it all happened.

Jesus said, I am the way to know God; and he backed it up by rising from the dead. Remember to tell people: Christianity may be narrow, because truth is narrow ...and because the most respected figure in history, Jesus, is the one who said that He is way to God; and we have to take that seriously. It was He who said it.

Some people... still bothered by Christianity's claim to be true... will say: we really ought to just be able to choose whichever religion most appeals to us; it doesn't matter which one, as long as we're sincere about it. What's a good response? Here's one from Greg Koukl: There are different kinds of choices in life. There's a difference between choosing an ice cream flavor and choosing a medicine. When choosing ice cream, you choose what you like. When choosing

medicine, you'd better choose the one that heals you. Don't treat religion like it's ice cream, and any flavor will do; it's critically important that you treat it more like life-saving medicine and take the one that'll really heal you!

For people who say Christians are narrow, or bigoted, when they say Jesus is the only way, and that they should keep it to themselves: if it's true that Jesus is the one people need to be saved, wouldn't it be un-loving and un-caring of us not to share it? My brother-in-law Dave surprised me one time; I was telling him about Christ, and everyone's need for a Savior from sin...and I told him I hoped he understood WHY I was sharing it, and he said: Sure. I'm glad you shared it with me, even though I'm not persuaded that I need it; because I know you believe it's the most loving thing you can share with me, so I'd be a little hurt if you didn't care enough about me to share it. Interesting. We need to let people know that we share it not to push some viewpoint on them, but because it's the most loving and caring thing we know to do.

7. The existence of evil and suffering doesn't disprove God; they are good evidence FOR God.

Why? Without God, nothing is absolute, so there's no way to establish categories of right and wrong. So, it's incoherent for an atheist to use moral categories for criticizing God for the existence of evil! Atheism doesn't have objective moral standards; so it can't stand on a moral principle and point the finger at God over evil.

Evil and suffering actually point in the direction of God. We know there is evil; there's horrible suffering; if we recognize there's evil and injustice, it's because we are assuming the reality of some great standard beyond the natural universe by which we make that judgment. In other words, we can only recognize evil for what it is...if there's a great and perfect standard that distinguishes good from evil, and God himself is that standard. Do you see that?

Getting rid of God doesn't make the problem of evil any easier to handle. All worldviews have to address the problem of the existence of evil, not just Christianity. Atheism offers no help or comfort; it just makes life a meaningless mess. Christianity offers an answer to evil; in fact it's all about that – it's in large part about God ultimately crushing all evil and making all things right. And there's great comfort in that.

If there is a God, and there is evil, then God has reasons for allowing evil to exist. Do we have to know what all those reasons are? Not unless we're going to be arrogant and defiantly demand that God explain himself to our satisfaction. Could suffering have some meaning or purpose?

Yes, even if we don't know fully what the purposes are. If you say that suffering is meaningless, you're assuming that your vantage point is the ULTIMATE vantage point. It may appear pointless to us, but that doesn't mean it is.

8. Believing in God, believing in Christ, is a crutch; it's a psychological crutch. It's wish-fulfillment: we feel a need to believe in a higher power to explain life, so we invent God.

But this is a strange criticism if you think about it. Why should the need to believe that many, if not most people experience, be evidence that there IS no God? Why wouldn't we expect such a need to be there...if God is real? You know, we have a need for food...we get hungry....and it just so happens that that need corresponds to the existence of food! Good thing, too. The hunger for food corresponds to the reality of food; and there's no reason to think that our hunger

for God shows there is no God; it's certainly plausible that it points to the reality of God. Food is real; we can expect to feel a need for it. God is real; we can expect to feel a need for him. If Christianity is a crutch, maybe it's because we need help. (Pastor Mike referred to Joe Taylor last week – someone said to Joe that he'd been brainwashed in becoming a Christian...and Joe said, his brain needed washing.) We have great needs: we need forgiveness, we need healing and comfort and wholeness and security and assurance that we're loved.... and many, many things. And God meets those needs. The renowned sociologist Christian Smith says, "to call religion a 'crutch' is a negative way of saying people rely on it. But people do rely on it. So what?" And somebody else said, maybe it's better to say that Jesus isn't so much a crutch as he is an iron lung – something essential for life itself.

Our greatest need is for a Savior. Have you met the Savior? Have you discovered that you are a sinner, and that God holds you responsible for failing to meet his perfect standards? We're all in deep trouble that way, and deserving of hell. But God has loved us so much that he designed a perfect way to solve our problem of not being perfect – he sent Jesus Christ into the world to die in the place of sinners...to take on himself the punishment that I deserve, and that you deserve for our sins ...so that any who believe in Him can be declared "not guilty" before God; and even better than that, they can be made perfect in God's sight because they are given the perfect righteousness of Jesus. Just believe in Jesus... put your trust in him...and you will be eternally rescued and fit for heaven. Come to him. Put your full reliance on him and not on your own goodness. Drop your defenses... throw off your pride... admit that you're a sinner...and that you need Jesus to be your Savior... and He will be. Trust in him.

Church...let's be working on these things to say to our unbelieving friends and family. Because God says, through Peter, that people will ask for reasons for the hope that we have. More good things to say next Sunday. Let's pray.