

"Questions from a Skeptic" (And how to answer them)

By Fred Butler

A few opening remarks:

All Christians at one time or another have come under the scrutiny of a skeptic - an individual who is opposed to belief in God in general, or Christianity specifically. The skeptic could be anyone from a curmudgeonly uncle at a family gathering to a sharp-witted professor teaching political science at the local college. Whatever the case, Christians will eventually encounter skeptics and more times than naught, the Christian believer is unprepared to answer their mental jabs. This is unfortunate, because Christianity is the only faith that can offer the skeptics a reasoned and satisfactory answer to their questions.

Since my foray onto the internet, I have personally encountered many skeptics on a variety of posting boards and on my [own blog](#). Some of them that I have interacted with ask simple questions like, "How do you know the Bible is true?" or "What evidence do you have that God exists?" while others I have come across ask outright stupid questions like the classic, "Can an all powerful God make a rock too big for him to lift?"

It is important that a Christian provide an answer to those questions (even the stupid ones) and offer a defense for the reasonableness of his faith. However, there are a handful of factors that need to be considered and will prove helpful when engaging these skeptics if the believer keeps them in the forefront of his thinking.

First, the believer needs to always be aware that *all men know God*, regardless of how much they claim to be an unbeliever and have "no proof" God exists. The unbelieving skeptic will swear, curse, spit and pitch a fit toward the assertion that there are really no true "atheists" and all men in the entire world know God exists in their heart of hearts. But, this is what the apostle Paul affirms in Romans 1:18ff. Men know God exists because of two realities:

The direct and compelling testimony of the creative order displays God's glory, power, and dominion. Men need merely to gaze into the vastness of space, or look over the complex and diverse, yet organized world, to see the hand of God at work. The creation is a clear and visible witness of the true and living God. That is why Paul declares the unbeliever as "without excuse" in Romans 1:20.

The fact that all men are created in the image of God. All men bear the stamp of God's image upon their souls. That is the reason why men are rational in their thinking, behave within principles of moral absolutes of right and wrong, and have a general awareness of being different from the rest of the creative order of animals. Men know they are unique, and that is due to being created in the image and likeness of God.

These are two facts a Christian believer must always keep in mind when engaging skeptics.

Second, even though all men know God, *they suppress that knowledge about God*. In other words, men will take all the information and evidence they have that reveals and testifies to the one, true creator and twist it, change it, reinterpret it, and outright deny it, in order to justify their unbelief.

The reason for such an absurd way of thinking is because man is a sinner. The Bible tells us in Genesis 3 that when Adam disobeyed God in the garden, he not only plunged himself into a state of separation from fellowship with God, but he consequently plunged all of humanity as well. One of the primary affects of being in this state of separation from God is a spiritual blindness to the truths of God that manifests itself in rebellion against God. Men

are, due to this sin nature, anti-theists¹. They do not want God to exist at all, and even though they really know he does exist, they will weary themselves to the point of fatigue to deny his existence. This is seen by the way unbelievers come up with clever philosophies to explain away God and his revelation. Evolution, for instance, is the most well know philosophy that tries to prove man's origins came from some means other than being directly created by God. When a Christian believer recognizes this essential, anti-theistic attitude in unbelievers, he should not be dismayed by their vehement, smart aleck protests when confronting them with the truth of the gospel.

With these two thoughts in mind, when the believer engages the unbelieving skeptic/atheist/agnostic, he will note an unusual fact about his opponent. He will begin to notice that the skeptic/atheist/agnostic lives contrary to his supposed belief systems. In other words, the unbeliever's lifestyle is perpetually inconsistent with his core values and overall worldview.

For example, there are skeptics who will claim no absolute truth exists, so it is inappropriate, according to their philosophy of life, to place value judgments upon other people groups who do not conduct themselves according to our particular morals. However, at the same time, these skeptics do not live consistently with their beliefs about absolutes, because if any one of them had, say for instance, a stereo stolen by an individual from one of these other "people groups," the skeptic who was robbed will all of the sudden have a high sense of personal property rights and protest against such an injustice caused by this person.

Another example is an atheist I once encountered who was an avid environmentalist. She spent much of her spare time involved in environmental causes. But, if she were consistent with her philosophy of evolutionary naturalism, the environmental causes she advocated are really a waste of time. According to evolutionary biology, species are only a product of environment, time, chance, and survival of the fittest. If survival turns only to the fittest, then why help lesser species that cannot improve the survival of their population without any outside intervention? Are not the forces driving evolution only weeding out those lesser species? An evolutionary atheist who is an environmentalist working to prevent the extinction of a species is truly a contradiction of the worldview to which he subscribes.

This perpetual inconsistency between the beliefs of the unbeliever and the way he actually lives out his life needs to be exploited by the Christian in a witnessing encounter. It is important that the Christian press the unbeliever living in contradiction to his worldview to give an account for such an inconsistency; to make him justify the presuppositions that under gird his beliefs. And, in addition to forcing him to justify his core presuppositions, the Christian must also drive the skeptic to the throne of his creator. The Christian must show the skeptic what he truly knows about God; that He exists and holds His creatures accountable. Then, the Christian must show from

¹ I have a reason to use the word "anti-theist" rather than atheist. The person who would hold to traditional atheism as a belief system is insistent that no compelling proof exists for him to believe in God. The atheist claims to be neutral when considering the evidence for the existence of God, but his "neutrality" is disingenuous, because he absolutely has no intention of abandoning his atheism and submit himself to God if and when that undeniable proof for God is discovered. Thus, in reality, the supposed atheist is against any and all evidence that would point to God. His attitude is one that is opposed to God as an anti-theist, rather than a neutral observer waiting around to see if God shows up.

I have a personal example of this attitude when I had an atheist challenge me to take his "god detector" test. This fellow had built a small box with a free-floating needle set in the center. The needle pointed toward the left side, and on the right side the atheist had written, "I exist." The atheist's challenge was that if I could ask God to move the needle so as to point to the words he had written, he would then believe God existed. I rolled my eyes and laughed, and then asked the atheist, "If the needle does move, will you abandon all of your atheistic beliefs and embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord?" He thought a moment and replied, "I don't know, it depends on if the box wasn't rigged and if God could do it once, then you could ask him to do it again, and when I determine there is no fakery and that the moves were genuine, then maybe I would think about it." His response demonstrates clearly the true heart of the atheist: It is one that is opposed to God, rather than one honestly looking for God. He offered a simple test, but if the criteria of his test were actually met, then he would change the criteria until it was no longer a valid test in his mind and he would have a further excuse to justify his unbelief and rebellion toward God. Such is the heart of the anti-theist.

scripture how trying to earn God's favor and pardon for sin is impossible and bring the skeptic to the foot of the cross; the only means by which man can be made right before God.

Now, it may be that the dialogue between the Christian believer and the skeptic will not move past the point of the skeptic providing a reasoned answer for his beliefs. That is fine. A Christian may have to have a handful of discussions with this skeptic before moving to the gospel presentation. That is why it is vitally important to keep this person and the discussion bathed in prayer. Whatever the case, the prudent believer must not be discouraged by the hardheadedness of the skeptic. The Christian must remain faithful to the Word of God as his final authority and live in such a way that his defense (and offense) for the faith of Jesus Christ glorifies and honors the Lord whom he serves.

With that being stated, I wish to present a question and answer session that I once had with a skeptic I encountered on the internet. This individual made some remarks against the Christian faith, and when I answered those remarks, and rebutted his assertions with some questions of my own that forced him to give a justification for what he believes; he then responded with a volley of questions that were meant to either overwhelm me on one hand, but on the other, demonstrate the folly of religion and Christianity.

Undeterred, I responded to those series of questions employing the principles I highlighted above. What follows has only been slightly edited and reformatted for presentation sake. The skeptic's questions are in bold, and my answers follow underneath each question.

Explain to me, the true evidence of the God of Christianity and I shall lean towards your words. Maybe you can solidify my mind?

Allow me to start by stating that I believe you have plenty of evidence for God; yet I do not expect you to be persuaded by any evidence I present.² Your disagreement with me is not centered on a lack of evidence. Rather, it has to do with your heart not being submitted to God as your sovereign creator. In other words, you exist in a state of sin that expresses itself in unbelief and you will do everything in your power to remain in that state, refusing to be convinced of the arguments I would offer up. Any evidence I present would either be rejected or explained away.

² There is a school of philosophy among some Christian believers who insist that evidence is needed when witnessing to an unbeliever. This idea maintains that though all men are fallen in sin, separated from God, all men still have the ability to reason. So that when presented with historical facts that support Christianity, i.e., classic arguments for the existence of God, facts surrounding the reliability of scripture, and the historical reality of Christ's resurrection; the unbeliever will be capable of considering these facts objectively and make a rational decision concerning the truthfulness of the claims of Christianity. As I pointed out in my open remarks, however, the Bible is clear that sin affects all of man, including his reasoning abilities. Though it is true to say that men can rationalize and reason on human terms, say for example, make scientific inquires, study the world he lives in, use logic and math, and make discoveries; the testimony of scripture is that such reasoning is not used to glorify their creator, and in point of fact, is skewed and twisted so as to deny the existence of the very God who created men with the ability to use logic and reason in the first place.

Thus, even though a believer can present an unbeliever with a set of facts that supposedly support Christianity, the unbeliever, because he desires to suppress the knowledge of God that is in him, will find an excuse to explain away such facts. In my opinion, it is naïve of Christians to think unbelievers are unbiased, neutral observers only in need of compelling evidence to bring them to a decision about God and Jesus Christ. Does that mean a Christian can never use evidence in a witnessing encounter? No, it does not. If an unbeliever genuinely asks a question about the trustworthiness of scripture for example, a Christian should respond by pointing out the key textual and historical evidence that supports the veracity of scripture. However, that evidence should not be looked to as the solution to the person's unbelief. The issue is that the person is not submitted to God and the Bible as his authority, and evidence is only meaningful when a person has surrendered his rebellion against the Lord and comes to Christ as his savior.

For instance, you contend that there is no solid proof of Christ's Resurrection; however, many reputable scholars have shown such solid proof exists, primarily in the trustworthy testimony of the New Testament. Now, why is it not convincing enough for you to believe? You do believe George Washington was the first president, even though there is little he left personally to verify his historical reality? What we know about him comes from eyewitnesses and other sources of historical documentation. The same documentation exists for the establishment of the reality of Jesus Christ and his Resurrection. There should not be any debate here if we readily accept the evidence for Washington as being trustworthy. Both figures, and their lives, are established historically in the same manner: by the credible testimony and historical record of those individuals who were eyewitnesses to the events.

You state that I misinterpret evidence that is presented to me, and relate it to other things I should know about God. What exactly do you mean by this? I don't deny anything; I simply question it. I'm not calling Christianity untrue. I'm saying that it is unclear, perhaps corrupted over the years.

What I mean when I tell you that you misinterpret evidence is that God has revealed himself clearly in his creation, with undeniable proof, and you will find a way to suppress this proof so as to reject it. Your last statement is evident of how you suppress the proof of Christianity. You claim that Christianity has been corrupted and so forth, but you do not attempt to prove it. You only offer an excuse to not believe what you have been presented, and never deal with what evidence you have at hand.

Again, the issue is not the evidence, for it is readily available to consider. The true issue is your interpretative method. You think with a mind darkened by sin³, thus you interpret the evidence according to your self-conceived reality. Because sinners want to have nothing to do with God, any evidence that clearly reveals his power and glory is denied, or re-interpreted, even to the point of being irrational.

Why is it wrong to need, or desire evidence, about something that is so easily questionable?

There is nothing wrong with that desire. The evidence is right there in front of you. What is wrong is your interpretation of that evidence. You have a heart/values problem, not one of lacking evidence. No evidence would ever compel you to be a believer unless God changes your heart to believe it⁴. Think about it, why isn't the evidence you have examined so far not compelling enough for you to abandon your skepticism and believe who God is? You must relinquish your self-centered autonomy and submit yourself to God's authoritative revelation.

Please explain to me how God's revelation is verifiable and tangible?

I am sure you have looked at many things in your course of study, if study it can be called. The Bible tells me that God is the creator; the world – the entire universe – displays this fact. It is undeniable. The design of all living things screams a designer and a creator. Yet you choose to think, "Perhaps this" or "Perhaps that." This is not freethinking, but stupidity. Moreover, the Bible records prophetic messages that came to pass to the historical detail. Only an omniscient, omnipresent God could reveal such accuracy. Furthermore, God has promised to redeem a people called out by His name in salvation. God is currently doing that all over the world. Anyone who turns to Him with faith and repentance will be saved, and be a part of that redeemed community of believers. My question to you is why isn't this evidence compelling enough for you? What more do you need to be convinced?

I contend that your dilemma with unbelief is not one of evidence as I mentioned above, but one of values and heart issues. You are in need of radical, spiritual heart surgery. Only God can do that. I exhort you to turn from this unbelief and embrace Christ in faith. You are separated from your creator and only a restored relationship will set your mind to thinking correctly.

³ Romans 1:21-23; Ephesians 4:17-19

⁴ John 3:3; Romans 6:16-20; 1 Corinthians 2:14

How can you possibly fathom a concept of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and timeless being?

What I know about God, I know from the Bible. That is the key. The Bible is a revealed authority outside of myself. The word "fathom" is a tad inappropriate because no created being can fully fathom the eternal, infinite creator. However, I can know about God and his omnipotence and omnipresence, because this is what He has revealed to me in His word.⁵ What I know about God, His character, nature, and salvation comes from His Scripture, not from my imagination. His revealed word tells me about the God Who saved me.

You say you are Christian because God saved you. What did He save you from and how? Did He save you from your 'sinful' thoughts and actions? Did He remove your guilt? Did He remove your fear of dying?

First of all, like I stated above, my answer will be based upon what is revealed to me in Scripture. I readily admit that I depend upon the Holy Bible. It is revealed from God and is proven to be a trustworthy and verifiable source of revelation. Furthermore, God's spirit has changed my heart and illumined my mind to understand the truth of scripture.⁶ Without God's illuminating Spirit, the Bible is just another book with interesting stories and facts. However, when God was pleased to save me, he gave me the faith to believe His Gospel and the ability to trust in Christ alone as my Savior from the penalty of sin. God saved me first and foremost from His just wrath against me as a rebellious, treasonous sinner.⁷ Because of what Christ did on the cross, I can now have peace with God, and He in turn can have a relationship with me.

He also saved me from the tyranny of my sinful thoughts and actions, and I now have the ability to overcome those sinful thoughts and habits that once enslaved me, and I would argue, currently enslave you. He did remove the guilt of my sin, along with my fear of dying. What was once a fear of dying has been turned into a blessed hope; an expectation of a future resurrection.

I say I was as much of a Christian as you are. Do you find that odd that it is so simple, and so common in fact, to switch from one or the other?

I do not believe it is possible for a genuinely saved person to "switch off" his salvation, any more than it was possible for that same person to switch it on. Salvation is due to God's grace; He gives the sinner the ability to believe the gospel and trust Christ as his savior. I do not believe a person has a free, autonomous will that allows him to merely tip his hat to God and be spiritually "okay" on the one hand, or to thumb his nose at God later and walk away from that previous spirituality.

I believe that sinners are in bondage to sin, and rebel against the ways of God. Unless God changes the sinner's heart and applies the merits of Christ's death to that sinner, that person will remain in blindness and hatred against God. The Bible tells us that there will be those who claim they know God, who will hang around the church for a while, but they eventually go out from among the Christians, because they were never really Christians to begin with (1 John 2:19). I believe such was your case if you claim to have once been a practicing Christian.

You say God opened your eyes to see the truth. What is this truth God has opened your eyes to? I hear every Christian say God showed them the truth, but when I really start prying, they all seem to have different truths. Is yours the truth or is theirs?

In some ways I agree with what you are saying. Christians are sadly ignorant of what they believe. When I say God opened my eyes to see the truth, I mean that He showed me my need for salvation. That I was in rebellion against

⁵ Psalm 90:2; Psalm 139; Isaiah 46:9,10

⁶ See those scriptures listed under footnote 4, as well as Ephesians 2:1-10; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 1:22-25

⁷ Romans 3:24-26; 5:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7

Him and no amount of human effort or good works would make me right with Him, or assuage the penalty for my rebellion.

It is as Paul describes in Colossians 1:13: God transferred me, or delivered me, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His dear Son. So that now, I follow His principles for my life. He is my king, and His laws are what I subject myself to. I recognize Jesus Christ as more than just an interesting religious leader, but God in the flesh who has redeemed a people from every tribe, nation and tongue. His truth is defined by the worldview He has established through the revelation He has given to His prophets and apostles, and in which He has placed me. The principles to live according to that worldview are contained in God's revealed word, the Holy Bible. Now, instead of seeing and understanding the world in irrational unbelief, I see the world with rational belief, because I am in a proper relationship with my creator.

Why do you say that your mind was corrupted and your thinking was not rational? What is your explanation for your statement?

What I know about humanity I get from the word of God. The Bible tells me quite clearly that men are sinners. Man's sin nature blinds their minds to the truth of the reality of who God is. Moreover, it darkens their thinking to choose irrational behavior over rational behavior, and convinces them that they are having fun, or justifies their ethics. Sin has so corrupted the thinking of people that they will turn to the opposite of what is normal and rational.

For instance, a congressman will try to pass laws allowing a pornographer to continue his exploitation of stupid women in the guise of freedom of speech, while at the same time passes legislation that permits women to maintain so-called abortion rights. Sin causes men to think what is truly good is actually evil and stifling of human freedom; and what is truly evil is actually a good thing that promotes human development. That is what I mean by irrational.

I imagine you realized this through the teachings of God and his supposed son, Jesus. Can you imagine someone who realizes this on his or her own, without being taught of God?

That would be impossible. No one can realize his separation from God, unless God reveals it to him through His word, empowered by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Mankind has deluded their selves into thinking they are all right, and God is a big grandfatherly type up in the sky who doesn't really care how people live as long as they are all nice to each other. But that fact of the matter is that God has revealed the situation against humankind and how He has remedied it.

I am a good person all around. The only thing that makes me sinful in your mind is my questioning God. Why do you judge me in such a way?

I judge you because the Bible judges you as such. I am only repeating what the Bible says about those in unbelief. It matters not how good you are and so forth. On an earthly level, you may be a sweet, kindly person. But the scriptures reveal that you are a sinner in rebellion against God, and I would add that your attitude and actions against God further evidence the reality of your rebellion. I am personally not accusing you and pronouncing judgment based upon my own autonomous convictions, but it is the Word of God that pronounces such judgment.

You claim that I am a slave. In what manner would you consider me to be a slave?

The Bible calls you a slave. Paul writes in Romans 6 that those not in Christ are slaves to sin. In Ephesians 2:1-3, unbelievers are called enslaved to the world and the devil. The grand deception of this enslavement is that you do not believe you are serving your own lusts, or the various world-views and philosophies the devil has arranged.

Thus, you live your life thinking you are an “okay” person, who loves others, and does good things to better society, so that if there is a god out there, he will be sure to welcome you into the afterlife with open arms.

It doesn't matter what a person believes, as long as he or she is nice and helpful to others. But, the true and living God, revealed in the scripture, created men to worship and serve him in holiness and righteousness. It is He who defines how people are to live and how they are to approach Him and have a relationship with Him. Your enslavement tricks you into thinking you can know God any other way but the way he has revealed. That is the danger.

Can you not see that the nonbeliever sees folly in the believer's faith and his reasons for belief? Can you not even fathom the unbeliever's view?

Yes, I can, because I was once held to the unbeliever's viewpoint. First of all, such a position assumes that a believer's faith in God is blind, that is, it is unverifiable and without any true merit. But that is not the case. The Christian's faith is given to him by God, and that faith is objective in nature. In other words, the believer rests his trust in a God who has revealed Himself clearly, who has worked in human history, and still works in human affairs even to a personal level. All of what the Bible states is objective and can be verified and tested as true.

Moreover, the unbeliever's position is an irrational one, because if the unbeliever takes the position that there is no God, or truth is determined in whatever way an individual may choose, well then, utter chaos would reign. Such is not the case in our society as a general rule. People derive a source of authority to govern their lives from outside of themselves. Our conscience for absolutes is from God, who has established His image in the heart of men, but even that conscience has been corrupted by man due to sin.

Don't you believe that we learn from each other and ourselves; what we see to be right and wrong, good and better, respectful and otherwise?

By what authority do you establish right or wrong? Good and better? What determines respect? You want to live in a world with no authoritative standard governing us as rational beings, yet you wish to maintain this notion that we will use our natural brains to figure things out and understand our reality. What governing principle or axiom do you utilize to accomplish this understanding with others?

For example, to offer forgiveness to others means that there is a standard that was breached. How was this standard established and why is that standard the way we should live? You may not realize this, but you are living by “blind faith” just like you accuse the Christian of doing. The difference is that my faith is not blinded, but verifiable. Yours is not. You are just assuming some things about humanity and the way we should live together without demonstrating the source for your belief. Rather than living this life of autonomy that will only lead to a life time of irrational inconsistency, and eventual eternal destruction, I implore you to abandon such rebellious thinking, turn from the idol of your own self importance, confess your sin to God and embrace the only savior who can rescue us from the power and penalty of sin, Jesus Christ the Lord.