



**General Topics :: The debunking Christianity challenge**

**The debunking Christianity challenge - posted by int3grity (), on: 2009/1/24 5:53**

I was troubled to see there is a challenge out there which simply asks Christians to be balanced and fair and instead of only ever reading Christian apologetical books, to read ten of the top skeptical books as well. Two of those skeptical books include writings by Bart Ehrman who James White just debated on textual variants affecting the meaning of Scripture.

My question to the SI community is do you think that it is wrong for a believer to look at the arguments the skeptics are presenting? Should we take the risk of having our faith possibly shaken or should we keep our heads in the sand?

The reason I ask is I have read testimonies of "Christian" apologists who were highly educated and felt their calling was to defend Christianity but in their studies have come to reject the faith based on the arguments the prominent skeptics are presenting. It is these testimonies which really trouble me. The problem with these apostates is they know how we think and seem to know how we will answer anything they say etc. since they were once defenders of the faith.

So what's your take? Should we study to know the arguments of skeptics or should we pretend they don't exist? I am considering reading some of these works but I am not sure I really \*want\* to.

**Re: The debunking Christianity challenge - posted by intrcssr83 (), on: 2009/1/24 7:51**

Currently reading Cornelius Van Til's "Defense of the Faith"; I have to say that it's not an easy read. However, books that deal with presuppositional apologetics are rare compared to the more "thomistic" books (e.g., Lee Strobel, Josh McDowal) that build a case from evidences, so I had to make do with what was in stock at the local Christian bookstore.

Apologetics is by no means my ministry specialty, but what I am starting to observe is that advocates of the Thomistic approach at times betray an autonomous view of man in the sense that they do expect a degree of ability on the part of the non-believer to grasp spiritual things as though intellectual understanding and spiritual illumination are one and the same (see 1Cor2:15). I.e., there is little to no regard of the fact that in our unconverted state, our sinful nature prohibits us from fully grasping the truth about the nature and character of God. Even if you were to provide a systematic defence of the gospel that abounded with as many evidences as you could muster, the sinful mind will still be at enmity against God. Rather than jump to the evidences to support Christianity, Van Til in the aforementioned book tries to establish a working model for the nature of god, man, salvation and the Christian worldview as a whole in relation to how much it should be expected of a non-believer when it comes to understanding.

For example, in the recent debate between WOTM and Rational Response Squad, Ray Comfort claimed that he could prove the existence of God without the use of faith or scripture. To be honest, I thought the evidences he and Kirk Cameron put forward were not very strong as a result.

Quote:  
-----by int3grity on 2009/1/24 17:53:00

The reason I ask is I have read testimonies of "Christian" apologists who were highly educated and felt their calling was to defend Christianity but in their studies have come to reject the faith based on the arguments the prominent skeptics are presenting. It is these testimonies which really trouble me. The problem with these apostates is they know how we think and seem to know how we will answer anything they say etc. since they were once defenders of the faith.  
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Sadly, I've seen such people fall upfront, and it is a painful thing to watch, especially when they defect to the other side. These are people you broke bread with, sang hymns together, confessed sins to, encouraged, and bore burdens with.

The modern church has enough problems with hypocrisies and false converts. As much as there is a need in this age to raise up people who can give a strong defence of the faith, I feel that the way we do so should be carefully examined so that in the process, we do not end up creating a generation of educated apostates who know too much for their own good.

**Re: - posted by TaylorOtwell (), on: 2009/1/24 8:50**

Good question and good response! I've been reading through Calvin's Institutes, and he seems to take the presuppositional approach as well. From what I have read so far, he seems to view attempting to convince complete scoffers by historical evidence, etc. as a waste of time. He says they must be called to faith and repentance.

With care in Christ,  
Taylor

**Re: The debunking Christianity challenge - posted by crsschk (), on: 2009/1/24 10:27**

Hello int3grity,

Depends, depends on a great deal I would suppose.

Quote:  
-----My question to the SI community is do you think that it is wrong for a believer to look at the arguments the skeptics are presenting?  
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Maybe a different way to answer this is from a bit of past personal experience. The irony is that at one point my faith was more shaken from within the 'camp' if that could be used in the broadest sense by coming to terms with the whole quasi-WOF, prosperity elements that I found myself somewhat attached to early on. There was always something underneath it all that, a latent suspicion - but it was largely choked down as a 'new' believer. When I began to hear the criticisms at first, the reaction was that knee-jerk defense mechanism that wanted to defend and overlook those things brought to bear and leap to ...'*But, they are doing God's work, doing great things ... look how many are being saved ...*' etc.

For a little while, when I recognized what was evident enough, what I had suppressed for so long had now come up and out and into the open ... I was taken back, felt both duped and betrayed and that no one could be trusted. It developed in to a range of anger *at them* and in the midst of it all I began to have serious doubts that just maybe the whole thing was but a fantasy, an imagination - a product of wishful thinking.

To this day, these recollections tend to almost inevitably draw up some indignation at just how close to shipwreck I came due to their antics and manipulations, the false promises and abuse of the scriptures- There are ramifications and I could only wonder if in that gullible state, that frame of mind just where a dose of the skeptics might have pushed it all to crashing on the rocks.

But, there was at this same time something else going on that I could never put properly to words because the expression itself is more profound than to simply say it was the Holy Spirit, though it was indeed.

*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: Job 13:15*

This was more than a fear of an alternative, this verse - It was more penetrating, it was something I *knew* deep down inside the marrow of my being. That lone word and its derivatives is what all these things hinge on, your question, these debates and challenges, arguments of the skeptics, I want to come back to it and apologize I cannot make this all a bit more condescend.

After shaking off the doubts and disappointments the recognition dawned on me that my new found critics had just done me a tremendous favor and that I just might want to delve deeper into what they believed was the right course, the orthodox way. Eventually it did lead me somewhat to the opposite extreme but I am getting ahead of myself.

If I could insert just here something a bit askew - Recollection is a good thing. Going back through the times and seasons and taking stock of 'How did I get here?' - To the point any of us are now at. For myself, it is the aforementioned matters and a recent glance at the bookshelf is a progression of authors and titles ... much that I would be more likely than not to consider 'light' especially after being so spoiled by the likes of this place and all these old dead saints that drew off so much of that interior, heart religion that I believe is where and what *knowledge of in Spirit and in truth* amounts to. But my notice and disclaimer is just that it is a progression, milk and strong meat at their appropriate times and when the body is able to digest them and moreover, not to despise these lighter things just because we have matured and lost our relis

h for them.

Coming back to where I left off, my zeal began to turn to towards much debunking of all that I had formerly embraced, even with those nagging suspicions that were dormant. I began to delve heavily into apologetics, into theology on that more intellectual level. There was much angst and the range of anger was both perplexing and paradoxical. I was passionate in that I cared deeply and grieved much over others being led astray but at the same time there was a bitterness and unhealthy internal ... overdose that was all consuming. I was now on the opposite upswing of the pendulum, *extreme*.

This is where things get difficult to express. This very forum is an evidence of much debate, just within our 'fold' - Some of it is very productive and helpful - Some of it is its own revealing of just how far short we fall in our oft biting and devouring of one another. Head knowledge vs. Heart knowledge - What theology is and what it means. Defending the faith. Intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. Most of us would agree that the separations should not be so distinct, that the 'both' of it all is the right balance.

Just my observations and experience so far but to cut to the chase here ... The skeptics of the sort you are referring to, their challenges to read their own works, the possible minutiae grinding arguments of their rejecting the faith due to these things, that I would categorize as being the wars of their fleshly minds bereft of the Spirit ... Easy to dismiss I would suppose, *prove it* it might be said by them, an easy 'out' for us believers to state;

*for I know whom I have believed*

And the emphasis is on both "Whom" and *know*.

Somewhere, buried in the recesses of this vast resource is a mention and one that I have to go from what I recall of it, so pardon the errors - But I believe it was of a friend of Billy Graham's who 'left' the faith along these similar lines of argument and persuasion. Toward the end of his life being asked of all of this he broke down in tears and stated something very profound and heart wrenching but also very telling; "*I miss Jesus*" - Or something to that effect. What did he mean? And moreover, just what exactly did he *miss*? There is something in that admission that gives me hope for his soul, something I wouldn't really want to touch or go into ...

"We know" - Looking for that verse above, I plugged those words into the e-sword search and took notice of just how many times it comes up in 1John;

" ... because we love the brethren"

Just one of many but it is that peculiar thing that puts us together and is instinctive, is recognizable when we cross paths in any land. Those of us here whom I have had the great pleasure of meeting face to face ... I *knew* them beyond their words here and it is perfectly remarkable that so little could be actually verbalized and that sense of eternity past is already present. I have stated here before that upon meeting Greg (Who operates this site) for the first time, it was as if we had grown up together all our lives, as if he had always lived just up the street. Is it overstating it? It is on a certain practical level, all the details and life long adventures and troubles, all the circumstances and particulars, all the personal aspects that are far from any knowledge whatsoever - The few bits and pieces known from sharing here, certainly not. Yet, how is it, this *knowing*, deeper than can be expressed? How is it, for another example, that Compton and RobertW and Philologo's, Ronyia, all of whom I got to spend some time with but really had so little conversation, that to just be in their presence ... our hearts were knit together? It is impossible to adequately explain or express it. Others of you here having not seen nor ever 'known' on anything but the level of these discussions I have no doubt's of the same knowing. We could sit in abstract silence and still say "I know, brother-sister."

I am sorry to be so long-winded here, I am developing this as I go ... I certainly believe and have no qualms whatsoever with apologetics and if anything in this hour we are in great need of them with so many angles and avenues, with so much extremism and 'anything goes', seemingly 'whatever pops into our head is prophetic' religion. The skeptics have fuel for the burning and maybe that is what grieves most of all, that the Son of Man is trampled underfoot, that shame and disgrace has been brought to a Holy God even without the first instance of what textual criticism or 'intellectual' head wars are fought over.

We have to *have* something, namely Someone. There is just no getting around it;

*Ye must be born again*

They can argue until the cows come home. They can slice and dice the scriptures to their hearts content and we can err on that side of things to the point of breaking our intellectual minds and don't get me wrong, we ought to be *intellectual* but I think that from our stand point our intellect is more profound, more wise, more truthful and exacting than merely being adept at explaining the nuances of the scriptures because we also have that measure of the Spirit -

*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:14*

That natural man cannot know because he has no measure and no discernment of spiritual matters. It is fact and it is the way things are.

To come back to your questions of whether or not to entertain them I would only say as others have elsewhere - Best be sure you are grounded in the faith. It's not the 'fear' of being challenged but just where both your head and more so your heart is. I recognize now that I can harbor far much more than I used to- That is an admission that some of these arguments can be very convincing and place many doubts but they almost always are those things wrangled about in the mind. Where I alluded earlier to that real sense of *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*, that it had in it a never give up quality about it, it was still not without a great deal of internal struggle and development, that it was that seed planted but still taking root ...

My angle on all of this, if I was to be pressed into service of such a debate would be to thwart it at this level of argument and go for the jugular. What about *death*? Answer this all consuming question. What does all your intellectual taking apart of matters amount to if you are to but leave it behind you? Every emotion you have ever had, every gut wrenching thing you have seen, felt and been through. All to waste, all to nothing at all. Why, according to your logic and if you were more true to yourself you should be highly suicidal, what ultimately is the point of it all, after all? 30-60-90 some odd years wasted for nothing. Some forlorn hope of being 'remembered' while you yourself are completely incognizant of it all? As Tozer put it, (and I will butcher it a little) just where is the organ of emotions, the bladder of love, the intangibles of thought, are they but data bits stored on a fleshly chip in your cranium? Something you can take out and put in some library somewhere, exchange them with another human brain? What about your *heart*, not the blood pumping vessel, that thing that arrests your ... conscience, indeed, where is *it's* location? The conscience?

I usually regret these long, early morning rambles later in the day, better to stop here though I feel as if I have hardly begun. Just be careful, don't be deceived and swayed by all these rhetorical things, remember who and what angle they generally take, more often than not, they have an agenda more than an earnest inquiry to them, they are painted and slanted by a premise and almost never get down to things that ultimately matter.

**Re: - posted by int3grity (), on: 2009/1/24 10:58**

Brother crsschk, your post has so blessed my soul. Thank you. I can relate to so much you have said. Last night I was a little discouraged because I was doing a bit too much "research" checking out skeptics sights.

What you said about love for the brethren so resonated with me. I love my brothers and sisters in CHRIST so much and recall the great joy I had two nights ago in dear fellowship.

The following quote from your post also is great wisdom and is something I have been thinking of lately:

But my notice and disclaimer is just that it is a progression, milk and strong meat at their appropriate times and when the body is able to digest them and moreover, not to despise these lighter things just because we have matured and lost our relish for them.

Thank you so much. In the end I know that I know HIM whom I have believed and am confident that HE will keep me unto that day.

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Brothers and sisters, please forgive me for posting something that may have discouraged some or placed doubt in your minds.

**Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2009/1/24 11:43**

In this 'arena' another realization that has been helpful to me is to question the assumption that we live in a unique age of rational thought that makes it harder to believe as a Christian than in previous ages. 21st century westerners often have a hubris that they are more enlightened than all previous generations. I've had fairly heated discussions even with Christians on this topic.

When you read Roman writings contemporary with the early church, we see that those Christians faced intellectual skepticism as well. Indeed, the philosophic basis of evolution was well articulated in the ancient Roman empire. For instance, the Greek philosophy that the universe resulted from chance was well known enough to provoke apologetic defenses from Christian fathers.

I believe scripture puts forth that skepticisms against the revelations of scripture are rooted in deeper issues than 'intellectual problems' or 'scientific discoveries'. This is not a condition limited to modernity. When we backtrack through post-modern, modern, enlightenment, renaissance, medieval and ancient ages we see that there is a principle of uniformity in the heart of man at work. Skepticism is ancient, and is not a product uniquely created by new scientific discoveries.

It is interesting to add that men, even scientists and educators, are not being rational just because they reject God. I remember being fairly amazed to see Richard Dawkins in the film "Expelled" putting forth his idea that life on Earth might have been seeded by aliens.

Hearing leading atheists willfully preferring such foolish myths reminds us that they are just as "presuppositional" as the Christians they scoff at. All cosmology, including Darwinism, is presuppositional.

Blessings,

MC

**Re: The debunking Christianity challenge, on: 2009/1/24 12:42**

Dear Ryan,  
there are 24 hours in a day. And God knows I have wasted many in unprofitable exercises.

I've been musing over two terms in this thread, "skeptics" and "apologetic's".

"Skeptics's"....now why would a man or woman use many hours of writing time to be a skeptic? What force, or what will would propel a thinker to use their pen in such endeavours?

You know the answer, and you and we and me, know it in our hearts, the "why" these poor lost souls would write as such. But we who know Jesus as Saviour come to this knowledge because it's imparted, it's sovereign, it's supernatural, it's the Soft Voice of Christ onto a yielded heart, it's the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which drives out ALL DOUBT, ALL "SKEPTICISM".

"Apologetics".....an apology?

I know how the word is used in training pastors, evangelists, but "apology"?

What "apology" does Christ have to make, for the Suffering on the Cross...for you? for me? or for us?

It's fine to be an intellectual, calm and cool, writing a book, a "skeptical" book on the faith, they might be warm in their garret, well fed, their minds flowing with "ideas" on how to tear "holes" in the fishing net, their bodies healthy and confident of their human thoughts and endeavours, BUT, on the day of their death, what will be their cry?

will it be the cry of the penitent? will the reality of heaven and hell overcome this intellectual "skepticism"? How will they

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view eternity? IF they can even grasp the concept of eternity thru eyes that have been clouded and obscured by the many years of "skepticism".

Who will ascend the Hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Faith, pure childlike Faith is a gift, you know this, and Praise be to God I know this. Child-like Faith I said, not "childish".

The true test of any of these "skeptics" is this: IS Jesus your friend, who you walk with hand in hand? is Jesus your King? Is He your Saviour?

The test is their's, not ours, and Christ needs no apologies given for Him, and the only answers we need to give to those in doubt, are a practical Faith, walked out in gentle love and simple acts of kindness, which reflect the True Love of Christ.

But you know this, I know you do. Pray for me, as I pray for you, Neil

**Re: - posted by int3grity (), on: 2009/1/24 13:58**

Thank you brothers and sisters. I am seeing the folly of what I originally posted. My friend Jeremy told me it is wrong to invest sustained committed time into reading the skeptic's side. He told me it is far better to listen to debates which will encompass the best arguments on both sides.

I just got a little overwhelmed last night because I was looking at all kind of skeptic web sites and stuff.