

What Can You Say About Jesus to Your Non-Christian Friends? —Part 1

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If you are a Christian, would you like to know how to answer the tough questions your friends are asking about God? Do you know what to say if someone asks you to show them who Jesus really is? Do you know what Jesus claimed about Himself? Do you know where and how Jesus says He can change a person's life? The Scripture instructs all Christians to be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is within you (1 Pet. 3:15).

“I’m an Atheist!”

When you’re talking to friends and you want to introduce Jesus to them, especially on campuses to straight pagan crowds, the first thing that people would say is, “I don’t need to listen to your stuff about religion because I’m an atheist.” If a friend says to you, “Hey, I don’t care about your Jesus! I’m an atheist,” what do you say to that person? What’s your answer?

Here’s how I would advise you. What you want to do is just get them to be open to listening to your evidence. And I usually say something like this: “Well, if you’re an atheist, prove it to me.”

And the guy says, “Well, let’s see. What information would I need to prove to you that there is no God?”

Do you know what you would need? You would need to have all knowledge. You would have had to search every corner of the universe to make sure that God was not there. And you know right now that we’re very limited. You don’t even know what the person behind you is thinking or what they’re talking about. They might be looking at your hairdo or whatever, but the fact is, you don’t know what they’re saying. And if we don’t know what’s going on in the back of this room, what about London or Hong Kong right now, or in Chicago? We don’t have that information. We’re not there. We’re limited in time and space to right here.

What if God’s not just bound to this planet? What if He’s out there someplace else? Our space guys showed us that even traveling 22,000 miles per second, you can’t get out of our galaxy in a lifetime. That is, if you were around the sun, starting point, and you were born and you got into a space ship that was going 22,000 miles per second, by the time you were 75 years of age, you wouldn’t be outside of our galaxy. And then scientists say that out there beyond our galaxy, there are billions and billions of other galaxies in this thing called the universe.

So, if we don’t know what’s going on in this room; and we don’t know if God’s in Hong Kong; and if we don’t know if God’s hiding behind some planet in our own galaxy; how in the world can you say that God might not be out there in the universe?

You cannot say, as a fact, that there is no God. Most of the intellectuals will never say that. It's your village atheists that say that. Your village atheists do not know enough to realize that they cannot say that there is no God. What I would say to your friend, "Look, would you admit that you don't have all knowledge? That there's the possibility that God's out there?" He'd have to say that if he's honest.

"I'm an Agnostic!"

So then on campus, after you get past that point, the next person that comes along says, "But listen, I still don't need to listen to you because I'm an agnostic. I'm an agnostic." Now, I have found that there are two kinds of agnostics. By the way, what is an agnostic? An agnostic is a fellow that is brilliant in the area of not knowing anything. Thomas Huxley coined the term and it basically means you don't know! That's what you're saying. I love it. We're on university campus and here's this guy that's got a poster up and says, "Turn out and hear this agnostic!" You turn out and hear this guy talk about what he doesn't know.

Now, as I said, there are two kinds of agnostics that I've met every place that I've traveled. First of all, there is the **ordinary agnostic**. The ordinary agnostic is the fellow that says, "Listen, John. I don't know if there is a God, but I'll tell you what. If you've got some evidence, I'm open. I'm willing to listen." I love that kind of a person. If you're an agnostic here today and you're open to listening to the evidence, you have come to the right place.

But then there's the second kind of agnostic who is what I call the **"ornery" agnostic**. The ornery agnostic is the fellow that says, "I don't know if there's a God or not, but I know that you don't know."

I say, "How do you know I don't know?"

And he says, "I know!"

Now, that is what I call a real ornery agnostic.

Now, I've gotten a little story up for these fellows that have usually said that no matter what, Ankerberg, you show me, my mind is already made up. I love that, you know? You could put all the evidence right on the table. The guy says, "I'm not going to look at that." For those kind of people I said, "You know what you remind me of? You remind me of the guy who thought he was dead."

The guy says, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Didn't you ever hear the story about the fellow that thought he was dead?"

"No. No. Tell me about it."

I said, "Glad you asked. There was this fellow that went around telling people, he said, 'My name is.... By the way, I'm dead.'"

And, of course, that was a little embarrassing to his parents. And so they thought, "We need to take him to a psychiatrist." So they finally got him to go to the psychiatrist. Before the boy went in, they said, "Doc, look. We've got a problem. Our boy, he's alive, but he thinks he's dead. He's going around telling everybody he's dead."

The doctor says, "Well, let's bring him in."

So they brought the kid in. Kid says, "Hey, doc. Glad to meet you. My name is.... And by the way, did you know I'm dead?"

The doctor said, "I see what the problem is."

This fellow had the belief that he was dead. It was a false belief.

Now, he thought, “I need to show him some fact from the real world that will burst this belief that he’s dead. What could I show him?”

He thought, “I know. I’ll show him the fact that dead men do not bleed.”

So he gave him all kinds of textbooks and all kinds of reports and all kinds of things. Took him down to the morgue. Cut dead bodies. Showed him they do not bleed.

After months and months of research, this fellow finally came to the conclusion and said, “Doctor, you have persuaded me! Dead men do not bleed.”

The doctor thought, “I’ve got him. I’ve got him.”

He says, “Give me your hand.”

The kid put out the hand. The doctor pricked a finger, and blood spurted out! The doctor thought, “I’ve got him. This will burst his belief.”

But, no! The kid said, “Doctor, doctor! Dead men bleed after all.”

Now that reminds me of the ornery agnostic. Whatever you show them, they’re going to jam it into their worldview. They’re really not going to look at the evidence. Their minds are closed. They’re silly. Hopefully, you’re not an ornery agnostic, you’re an ordinary agnostic who would say, “I’m open to the evidence.”

What is Christianity?

What is our case? What are we presenting? What is Christianity? Well, let’s start off with a quick definition. Christianity is not a system of ethics, although it encompasses that. It is not a philosophy and a worldview, although it certainly encompasses that. Christianity is totally based on a person, a real person that lived in history. He did certain things. He said certain things. And if He didn’t do those things, if He didn’t say those things, then Christianity is a fake.

The one person that Christianity is based on is Jesus Christ—a real historical person. And actually, Christianity is not only based on Him, but it’s actually a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, when you say that it’s based on a person in history that lived, this gets us out of this fairy tale realm and gets us into the world of factual data. For example, we have evidence about Jesus Christ that is similar to evidence about other people.

Real Evidence about Real People

Let me ask you a question and see if I can get this across to you. Do you believe that Abraham Lincoln was the President of the United States at one time? Well, great. Have you met Lincoln personally? Well, most of us would say we have not met Lincoln personally, but you still believe that he was the President of the United States.

Well, how in the world did you know that he was the President of the United States if you have never met him personally? One day you were awake in history class, and you can remember, vaguely, that the teacher was saying there was somebody that saw what Lincoln did. There were other guys that wrote down some of his speeches. And this which was seen and that which was heard, both pro and con, came down to us as historical record that tells us that Abraham Lincoln was the President of the United States. He was shot in Ford’s Theater. He didn’t slip on a banana peel in Peoria and die. We know these things from historical information.

And going on back, you find other people, such as Charlemagne. Do you remember Charlemagne? And before him, you go back and there was Julius Caesar.

And right about the time of Julius Caesar, there was somebody else that actually lived in real history by the name of Jesus Christ. If you go to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, you will find 20,000 words listed to the person of Jesus Christ without a hint that He didn't exist. Why? Because those guys at the University of Chicago are such warmhearted Christians that they just wanted to load up the encyclopedia on Jesus Christ? They wanted to give Him more space than anybody else in the *Encyclopedia of World History*? Come on.

Anybody that has ever written a history of the first hundred years A.D., whether they be a Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, believer, has put Jesus Christ in there. Why? Because He was a real historical person.

Historical Eyewitness Reports About Jesus

How do we know that? We have real eyewitness historical reports about Jesus. Did you know that there were eight people that either said that they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life or claimed to have contact with the eyewitnesses of Jesus? Did you know that? Who were they, by the way? Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, possibly the writer of Hebrews if it wasn't Paul, and finally you have Jude saying some things. All of these people either claimed to be eyewitnesses of Jesus' life or had contact with the eyewitnesses.

But many parents tell me, "John, we raised our daughter, our son, in our home. Took them to church every Sunday all through grade school, all through high school, and then we sent them away to college and we lost them to some ungodly professor."

Now, I want you to know why you lost them. And I want you to know what to say. But let me read to you a quote that is the standard fare at 99.9% of the universities in this country, the standard line that is given to your son, to your daughter, when the professor talks to them about Jesus Christ and the historical material that we're going to talk about today.

This is an actual quote taken from Professor Dr. Avrum Stroll at the University of British Columbia. This quote was picked up by such magazines as *US News & World Report*. About twice a year *Time* and *US News & World Report* come out with stuff like this. Right? Who's on the cover? Our Lord. What's the title that's on *US News & World Report*? "Who was Jesus?" You read the article to get the answer: They don't know. Now, why is it they don't know? Avrum Stroll, British Columbia University, said this:

Jesus probably did exist. But so many legends have grown up about him that it's impossible for scholars to find out anything about the real man. The gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John were written long after Jesus was crucified. They provide no reliable historical information about him. It is almost impossible to derive historical facts from the legends and descriptions of miracles performed by Jesus.

That is what your son and your daughter will hear at 99.9% of the universities of this country. That is the standard line.

Has the Historical Record of Jesus' Life Been Distorted?

Now, let me see if I could be a secular professor and trip you up here. You're a Christian. Right? You're telling me about Jesus. Answer this question: Look, you've all been to a party where you have this little game where you whisper something into the person's ear. A sentence, maybe a paragraph, or even a word. It goes from this gentleman to the lady next to him and then all the way around. Now, if we did this, then we asked the last person, "Okay, tell us what that sentence was," what has happened to the sentence? It's been completely distorted. It's not even close to what it was when it started!

All right. I am a secularist. I'm coming to you. You're the Christian now. You're supposed to give me the answer. Here's my question. Jesus lived, taught, did His thing over here. I've got no problem with that. Jesus really did live. Okay? He lived. But then, what He said was seen and heard by people that were standing around Him that they passed it on orally, word of mouth. They just said, "Hey, this is what Jesus did." It went down through the years, and as Rudolph Bultmann has already said, two hundred years later, that which had been circulating through the church orally, which was sincere—we have no problem with that; you really believe in Jesus—but by the time it got back there, some of you had deleted some things about the story and some things had been added.

Our problem, they say, is that we have no way of finding out if what happened then matches with what we are told today. What we have is the faith of the church, that which people sincerely believe. But we have no way of tracking it down. These people were removed from Jesus by the time it was written down. And just like at your party, the fact is, we have no way of finding out if that really happened. Therefore, we have the Jesus Seminar taking votes: Did this really happen? No, I don't think so.

Now, what would you say to those people? That's what Avrum Stroll is saying. That's what the critics and that's what the professors are saying in this case to all of your kids when you send them to school. What do you say?

Well, if in fact, that's how it happened, then we're in big, deep trouble. I agree. Big deep trouble.

What about if we change that story one little bit, though? What if I went to you and I whispered one sentence into your ear, and then said, "Would you stand up and say it, please?" Do you think we'd have a shot at getting it right? Yes. They've actually done tests that showed 99.9% of the time those people have it absolutely word-for-word in paragraph form just the way it was given to them.

The question is, what do we have? Did this historical information come down from people that were right on the scene that were eyewitnesses, or like Bultmann and some of the others have said and Avrum Stroll, "Hey, this came down hundreds of years after the time of Jesus" and it's really legend and myth. We don't know what they have to say.

Luke, the Careful Historian

Turn to Luke Chapter 1. Here's where the Bible is going to come in. Let me just preface how I'm going to use this when I use it with a secular crowd. I say, "It is a book." I am not going to argue as if this book dropped out of Heaven and it's inspired and inerrant. (I believe that it is, but I'm not arguing that way.) All I want to find out is, do we have accurate information in this book about Jesus? There are a lot of other writers that write. They don't claim inerrancy. They don't claim inspiration from God and we believe what they say. We bring people into a court of law all the time. We say, "Did you see the guy pick up the gun and shoot the person?" If the guy says "Yes" and he's a credible witness, the guy goes to the chair. I would want to find out, do we have accurate information.

Now, the scholars today say, "Look, this is how it happened at the party. The fact is, it was word of mouth. It was only oral. And it was written 200 years later." Now, Aristotle says that every time you open up a historical document, you always give the benefit of the doubt to the guy that wrote it. So giving a benefit of the doubt intellectual—we've got to do that—giving the intellectually benefit of the doubt to the writer, I want to, first of all, see what they claimed. Did

they claim to be 200 years removed? Or did they claim to be eyewitnesses that saw it, stood up and told it. Well, let's take a look and see.

Take a look at Luke Chapter 1. Luke answers the question right off the bat: "**Many** have undertaken to draw up an account." The critics today say it was oral; it was only delivered by word of mouth and it wasn't written down until 200 years later. Luke says, "No. That's wrong." He says by the time he got there, "**many** had undertaken to draw up an account." What's drawing up an account? It's a historical narrative. It's a written account. Of what? "Of the things that have been fulfilled among us," namely, Jesus' life.

In other words, Luke is saying right off the bat, "Look, when I came along, there were other people that were eyewitnesses that had seen Jesus, and even before I had gotten a chance to write, they had written an account of what had transpired when they had been with Jesus." "Many," he says. I don't know how many "many" is, but it's more than one. "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses**." So he says, "The guys that wrote these accounts were just like the eyewitnesses who have given us other accounts. They are claiming they were right on the scene."

But I want you to look at something that Luke says. "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything." The King James Version says, "has had perfect understanding." "Perfect understanding" is really "carefully investigated everything." It's exactly what you do on a term paper. You get all the documents in front of you. You check them all out. You sift the evidence. Then you write your thesis.

Luke says, "Look, they claimed to be eyewitnesses. They claimed and they put it into writing that Jesus did this and that." He's saying he didn't just accept that. He says, "I carefully investigated everything from the beginning."

Now, how did he do that? He was the traveling companion of the Apostle Paul and he had access to the other apostles. I'm sure that he would have all these different written documents in front of him about Jesus' life and he would come over to Peter and say, "Hey, now Peter, all these guys were saying it was at such and such a time and you were there. Is this right?"

In other words, he's saying, "I checked it out." I checked it out. "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning." I like that word beginning. Just as an aside here. What's the only Gospel that talks about Jesus' birth? Luke. That's where the Christmas story is. When he said that he checked it out from the beginning, he wasn't kidding.

"It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,¹ so that you may **know** the certainty of the things that you have been taught." That's why Luke says he wrote his Gospel. Why? He wanted him to be certain of the facts. He says, "I had eyewitness testimony. I was basing it on that. But I just didn't accept it willy-nilly. I checked it out carefully and investigated all of it before I wrote it down." So he's saying, "I had contact with the eyewitnesses and I checked their reports. That's the kind of information I'm giving you in the Book of Luke."

Notes:

1 Theophilus means "lover of God." Nothing is known of him, although the method of address—"most excellent"—which is also used of Felix and Festus, indicates he was a person of rank, possibly a Roman officer. (Easton's Bible Dictionary)