

ANSWERING COMMON QUESTIONS

Preparing for the

JESUS IS_____.

jesus-is.org.au

event

St Faith's Anglican Church

ANSWERING COMMON QUESTIONS

A. Introduction: A Natural Hesitation

One of the reasons many of us are hesitant to engage in conversation with non-christians about Jesus, is a fear that we will not be able to answer their questions. We might be left embarrassed, as a result. And feel we have failed to serve our Lord Jesus adequately.

In fact, most non-christians today seem to ask one of ten or so common questions. Below are some suggested ways of responding to these common questions. (Taken from the Matthias Media @2Ways 2 Live course)

To equip ourselves to answer questions well, there are three key principles to keep in mind.

- i) Try to answer in a way that leads people to “check out” the evidence for Jesus. We want people to come to know him, ultimately. So, where possible, try to lead people to, say, reading a gospel account, (eg Matthews Gospel)
- ii) Make sure your response is given in a godly way, with ‘gentleness’ and “respect”(2Peter 3:15)
- iii) If possible, be sensitive to whether there is a “question behind the question”. For example, if someone asks “why does God allow suffering?” there may be the question “Why is God making my mum suffer with cancer”, behind the question asked. Be gentle and sensitive to this.

B. Preparing

Now, choose one or two of the following examples, (ones that group members have been asked perhaps) from the 5 “questions” below.

Discuss the suitability of the answers suggested, and improve on them – make up your own. Also, try to consider what Bible verses might be relevant, for your own reference.

C. Pray

Pray that God will help us to respond to challenges, in a godly way.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you know that God exists?

- Because he came to earth in Jesus.
- We accept that Winston Churchill was Prime Minister of England during the Second World War because of the various historical records that exist. We mightn't have seen or heard him in person, but we trust the records. "Have you ever seen God?" "No, but I might have if I'd been born at the right time."
- Jesus claimed to be God (eg. [John 5:18](#), [20:28-29](#)) and his actions bore out that claim. If you'd been there you would have seen and heard him.
- Read a Gospel for yourself and check out his claims.
- If he is God then you should serve him as God.

Further reading:

John Chapman, *A Fresh Start*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 1997, chapters 6-8.

Kel Richards, *Defending the Gospel*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2006, chapter 2.

2. Can you trust the New Testament documents?

Author and historian, Paul Barnett, gives five reasons for the integrity of the New Testament:

- Historical evidence in the New Testament is confirmed at a number of points by the non-Christian writers Tacitus and Josephus.
- The New Testament documents are close in time to the figure of Jesus.
- This documentation is extensive, coming from as many as ten authors, eight of whom wrote independently of each other.
- The documents are historical in character as well as theological.
- The text of these documents has come down to us intact from the era in which it was written.

Further reading:

Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament History?*, Aquila Press, Sydney, 2003.

Andrew Errington, *Can we trust what the Gospels say about Jesus?*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2009.

3. Why does God allow suffering?

- In the end we don't know why God allowed evil into the world.
- Much suffering is a direct result of our own sinfulness (eg. the suffering caused by drunkenness, or greed, or lust, or...).
- But some is not (see [John 9:1-3](#)).
- All suffering results from the fallen nature of our world(see [Rom 8:18-25](#)).
- God uses suffering to discipline and strengthen his children ([Heb 12:7-11](#); [Rom 5:3-5](#)).
- God does something about our suffering. Jesus suffered and died so that we could be forgiven and participate in the 'new creation' where there will be no suffering.

Further reading:

Don Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 2nd edn, Baker, Grand Rapids, 2006.

John Dickson, *If I were God, I'd end all the pain*, rev. edn, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2002.

Paul E Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, rev. edn, IVP, Downers Grove, 2006, chapter 6.

Kel Richards, *Defending the Gospel*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2006, chapter 8.

4. What happens to those who have never heard the gospel?

- We can trust God to be just; he will judge people according to their response to what they know.
- Everyone has received some revelation, even if only from the created order (see [Rom 1:18ff](#)).
- Those who have had more revealed to them will be held responsible ([Matt 11:20-24](#)).
- You have heard—so do something about it and leave the others to God.

Further reading:

Paul E Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, rev. edn, IVP, Downers Grove, 2006, chapter 6.

5. What about other religions?

- Sincerity does not equal truth. One can be sincerely wrong.
- If the different religions contradict each other (which they do at several major points) they cannot all be right.
- The question really is: Has God revealed himself, and if so, how? Jesus claimed to be the unique revelation of God. He claimed to be God in the flesh. Are

his claims valid? Investigate the New Testament. If he is God, the other religions are wrong.

- The New Testament is clear that Jesus is the only way ([Acts 4:12](#); [John 14:6](#)).

Further reading:

John Dickson, *If I were God, I'd make myself clearer*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2002.

Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, Regal Books, Ventura, 2001.

Study 9 (for week Commencing March30th)

ANSWERING COMMON QUESTIONS Continued

A. Review the three principles from the previous study.

Are there other key attitudes" we should have, when answering questions about our faith?

B. Preparing

As per last week, choose one or two of the following questions as before and discuss etc.

C. Pray

Pray for your non-christian friends.

QUESTIONS

6. Aren't all good people Christians?

- What is 'good'? How 'good' is good enough?
- Some of us are better than others but no-one meets God's standards (see [Rom 3:23](#)).
- God says that there is only one way and it is not 'being good' ([John 14:6](#)).
- God is after friends, not 'good' rebels. It's a matter of whose side you are on.
-

Further reading:

John Chapman, *A Fresh Start*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 1997, chapter 11.

Kel Richards, *Defending the Gospel*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2006, chapter 3.

7. Do you have to go to church to be a Christian?

- This is similar in some ways to the ‘good people’ question. God is not after church-goers but friends.
- You become God’s friend by being forgiven and submitting to him, not by doing your duty at church.
- Once you are in his family (by forgiveness) you will of course want to meet with other members of the family—one way to do this is to go to church. Church is just God’s family getting together.

Further reading:

Kel Richards, *Defending the Gospel*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2006, chapter 8.

8. Isn’t faith only psychological?

- If our faith was based purely on experience (“Christianity works for me”) then there is no way of arguing this objection. It might work for me because it’s ‘true’ or because of my particular psychological upbringing or conditioning.
- However, if Christianity is based on objective historical events (the death and resurrection of Jesus), the truth (or otherwise) of Christianity has nothing to do with our psychological state. (Further reading: *How to give away your faith*, Paul E. Little, Ch 5)

Further reading:

Paul E Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, rev. edn, IVP, Downers Grove, 2006, chapter 6.

9. Hasn’t science disproved Christianity?

- Most people mean ‘Hasn’t the theory of evolution replaced creation and so disproved Christianity?’ (People usually aren’t talking about archaeology which, incidentally, backs up the Bible at almost every point.)
- Avoid a technical discussion about evolution, carbon dating etc. This gets nowhere.
- Ask what conclusion they are drawing from their evolutionary stance: Did the world come into being by chance? Or did God make the world using certain evolutionary processes? The answer to that will reveal the person’s presuppositions about God’s existence. How God made the universe is not

as important a point as that he made it.

- Steer the conversation towards talking about God's existence (see the first question above) and finally towards Jesus. If Jesus is God it puts the creation/evolution debate in a new perspective. Encourage the person that they need to find out if God exists before tackling creation/evolution. Read a Gospel etc.

Further reading:

Kel Richards, *Defending the Gospel*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2006, chapter 2.

Kirsten Birkett, *Unnatural Enemies*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 1997.

10. Homosexuality

An increasingly common question these days concerns Christian attitudes to sexuality, and to homosexuality in particular. Aren't Christians just outdated bigots for opposing homosexuality? An answer could go like this:

- Do you think that paedophilia is a natural and right way to behave?
- (Assuming they say no) So it is at least a reasonable question to ask: Are some sexual practices wrong?
- The question then becomes: How do we make a judgment about any particular sexual practice? By majority opinion? If that were so, then the earth was flat in the 16th century.
- In the end, only the Creator has the right (and the wisdom) to declare something right or wrong. Only he has the authority and only he has the complete picture.
- If we accept who Jesus is, and therefore God's authority over the world, then we must listen to him — and he quite clearly says that homosexuality is not the way he created us to behave. It goes against the created order.
- Even so, Christians don't hate homosexuals. We want to be kind and accepting of them, and help them to work through their struggles.

Further reading:

Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2002, chapters 9 and 11.

Christopher Keane (ed.), *What Some of You Were: Stories about Christians and homosexuality*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2001.

Tomas E Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1995.

11. Aren't Christians hypocrites?

This question often relates to certain practices of Christians in history, such as the abuse of children by priests, alleged mistreatment of indigenous people by Christian missionaries, and so on.

- Point out that Christians claim to be sinful. It is not hypocritical for us to err, for it is part of the fabric of our belief that we are rebels at heart and will continue to make mistakes. Christianity is about forgiveness, not perfect performance.
- Also point out that Christians have done an almost incalculable amount of good in the world throughout history—that many of the things we take for granted (like health care, literacy, education, scientific endeavour, political freedom, the justice system, etc.) have all stemmed from Christianity and Christians. In fact, the good that Christians have done would far outweigh the bad. This does not make Christianity true, but it is rarely acknowledged.
- Having said that, it is also not really fair to judge the truth of Jesus (who he was, what he did) by the bad behaviour of some who claim to be his followers. Jesus himself indicated that in the future many people would claim to bear his name, but actually know nothing of him. When some of these people commit atrocities in his name, it is hardly Jesus' fault!
- Nor does it have any bearing on whether you are going to accept Jesus' claim over your life. Those who do wrong will have to give account to God for their actions. And so will you.