

The Difference Between a Mocker and a Seeker

Proverbs 9:8 states, “Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you” (NIV). There is a world of difference between a mocker and a seeker.

Mockers challenge you to answer, not because they want to know the truth but because they have already pronounced you guilty.

Seekers are genuinely looking for answers and are willing to do put in the work to learn and grow.

Several years ago, at the end of one of my debates in New York City with my good friend Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, a Jewish woman approached me very upset with my position. She had a lot to say to me, and I was eager to engage.

She asked her first question, and the moment I began to respond, she began to shake her head back and forth (in the “no” motion), repeating the same pattern with every question (and with vigor).

When I told her she wasn’t even listening to me and had already made up her mind, she insisted that she was listening with an open mind—even while shaking her head to say no! Needless to say, not a word I said to her seemed to register. She was a mocker, not a seeker—at least at that point in her life.

In the early days of the Internet, I began to engage in online Jewish evangelism, interacting at length with as many Jewish people as time would permit. (Back then, you used a phone line connection and had to pay by the hour for your service. Those were the days!)

Many of the discussions were complex, and I would often be

challenged for more data, which I began to address over a period of many years, ultimately compiling a five-volume series entitled *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*. It consists of more than 1,500 pages of material and is massively footnoted, providing thousands of sources for further study.

Although I don't have as much time for Internet outreach today, I will sometimes be challenged by a religious Jew or counter-missionary online, asking me to back up my position on a given point. In most cases, it's something I've written about at length—remember, this was what I was challenged to do years ago—and so I'll say, "I've addressed that at length in this particular volume."

The serious seeker—or the serious theological opponent—will thank me, get the book and work through the objection, getting back to me with their thoughts. The mocker will say, "Just tell me your answer now! Why can't you post it here?"

Common sense would tell you I don't have the time to answer every post, email or comment that comes my way—if I did, there wouldn't be enough time in the day to breathe, let alone do effective ministry to others—and common sense would also tell you that if you have a serious question, it requires a serious answer, not a 140-character tweet or short Facebook post. (Of course, when I tell people I don't have time to respond, I'm told that I'm arrogant.)

But the mocker is not guided by common sense, nor is the mocker genuinely willing to consider the evidence, nor is the mocker in the least bit considerate of your time and schedule.

The mocker's goal is to mock, and the more you reach out to a mocker, the more scorn you receive.

Right now, being stirred by the Lord and at the request of many, I'm writing a book called *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire*, and the goal is to finish it within two to three weeks and then get it out two to three

weeks after that, both in print and e-book form. (By God's grace, that means the book will be out by late November or early December, and it will also contain contributions from Craig Keener, Sam Storms and others.)

Since this assignment came quite out of the blue in the midst of a very full schedule, I've been working on the book every spare minute—joyfully, and with the favor of the Lord. Yet the mockers don't seem to get it.

One young man challenged me about *Strange Fire* issues on Facebook (which, by the way, I try to use as much as possible in order to reach out and interact with many “followers” and “friends” rather than just having staff maintain the Facebook accounts for me).

He had watched every single minute of the conference and had some pressing questions for me, but when I gently explained to him that time didn't allow me to answer him at length on Facebook, he pressed the attack all the more.

I then referred him to one of my books where I had addressed the issue at length, also sending him a link to a five-minute video clip that he would find helpful.

Rather than research what I had written or even take five minutes to watch the video—remember that he had the time to watch hours of the “Strange Fire” conference—he further scorned my offer, claiming I was being evasive.

The pity is that I really wanted to help him grow in the Lord, whatever his theological views, but it's hard to help a mocker.

It's even worse on Twitter, where everything has to be reduced to sound bites and everyone can intrude on the same conversation. (It dawned on me the other day that the new form of torture is “death by a thousand tweets”!)

I tell the persistent tweeters, "If you have a question, call my radio show. I do live talk radio two hours a day, five days a week."

"I don't need to call," they reply. "Just answer my tweet here and now!"

Recently, when I offered to meet face to face with a local young man who was challenging me, again out of love and concern for his spiritual well-being, he rejected the offer, calling it condescending.

The offshoot of all this is that while we should pray for the mockers to humble themselves and see the wrongness of their attitude, it is the seekers who deserve our time and attention. (It's really a shame that I've had to start blocking abusive believers on my Facebook and Twitter accounts, putting them in the ranks of profane gay bloggers and mocking atheists.)

As Solomon said long ago, "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance" (Prov. 1:5). It is there for the taking for the serious seeker of truth.

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