

I'll Never Become a Christian Because...

People who resist the gospel almost always use one of five generic excuses. Here's how you can respond.

☒ All of us who follow Christ are called to the task of evangelism. Sadly, witnessing to unbelievers about the Christian faith is a scary prospect for many churchgoers.

I often hear their worries expressed like this: "But what if I get into a discussion and don't know the answer?" or "What if they get angry with me?" or "What if I end up looking stupid?"

We all struggle with the fear of being rejected. We also are afraid we will "lose" the argument. But we must understand that evangelism is not arguing.

First Peter 3:15 says: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (NIV).

In Philemon we are encouraged to "be active in sharing [our] faith, so that [we] will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ" (v.6). Note that both of these verses are intended to be applied within the context of active evangelism—not passive religious discussion or arguing.

Jesus never argued with anybody. He certainly had His differences of opinion with the Pharisees, but He didn't fight with them.

The Bible says we are called to be witnesses—not debators. To be effective in evangelism we must simply learn to rely on the Holy Spirit's power—and be prepared to respond to the questions others have about our faith.

In my many witnessing experiences on college campuses, I've

learned to lean on the Holy Spirit for guidance in my conversations. I've also learned that most people have the same common excuses.

But rest assured, God is not looking for expert witnesses who have doctorates in theology. He is looking for faithful witnesses who are willing to share their faith with others. Here are five of the most common objections people will express when you share the gospel with them:

1. Don't all religions teach basically the same things but just use different names for God?

Because of my father's job with the Canadian Embassy, I have traveled to and lived in more than 40 nations. I encountered a number of world religions, philosophies and ideologies in my own search for truth.

Looking beneath the surface similarities, the world's religions are significantly different. One major difference is the contradictory view of the nature of God.

For example, some forms of Buddhism do not teach about God at all. Hinduism teaches that multiple gods exist and that even rocks, trees and animals are part of these gods. Christianity teaches that God exists but that He is separate from all creation.

Because various world religions offer mutually exclusive definitions, they cannot possibly be descriptions of the same God.

Most religions see Jesus as a prophet from God but not as who He claimed to be—the incarnation of God Himself. The Bible describes Jesus in an unprecedented fashion found in no other sacred text—as “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14).

Other religions also deny that Jesus' mission was to give His life on the cross as a payment for our sins. Jesus is unique

in that He not only claimed to be God but also proved it through His resurrection.

People who think all religions are the same usually ask, "As long as you are sincere, what difference does it make what you believe?" Consider Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson and Osama bin Laden. Were these men not sincere? Sincerity is never a measure of truth.

And sincerely believing something doesn't make it true. You can be sincere and wrong at the same time.

2. Isn't it narrow-minded for Christians to think they're the only ones who are right?

I hear the "Christians are narrow-minded" argument all the time. Modern pluralists say they want a "tolerant" society that embraces all religions and lifestyles. They want a world where anything goes.

Yet Jesus never talked about tolerance but rather commanded His followers to demonstrate a far higher objective—to show love to all people. Though it is possible to tolerate someone without loving him, the reverse is impossible.

Jesus was not a model of tolerance. He was so intolerant of our lost condition, in fact, that He came to Earth to do something about it! He was intolerant of a number of things, including sin, hypocrisy and selfishness.

The issue is not really with us. It was Jesus Himself who said: "'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6, NKJV).

Jesus claimed to be the unique pathway to God and to eternal life. The important question is whether or not we have good reason to accept His position over all the other options.

I say this to people who think Christianity is narrow-minded: "Do you believe that 1+1=2? Do you believe that water boils at

212 F at sea level? If so, should you be considered narrow-minded, or do you have good reason for believing these are the only acceptable answers?"

3. I don't believe the Bible. It is a book of myths and legends put together by pre-scientific men marked by superstitions and fears.

When people bring up this objection, I usually ask them, "Have you ever read the Bible?" Unfortunately, most haven't. If they respond positively, I ask them, "How much of the Bible have you read?" Typically they have read very little.

If they claim to have read the entire Bible I ask them, "What do you believe the central message of the Bible is?" At this point most get it wrong. The vast majority of people who have a negative opinion of the Bible have formulated it before reading the text.

We must remember, however, to be gentle when reminding people of their inconsistencies so that we don't discourage them from further dialogue as we direct them toward the cross.

The Bible stands head and shoulders above any work of antiquity for both trustworthiness and bibliographical accuracy. The New Testament, in particular, offers a greater number of surviving manuscript copies (about 24,000) and a shorter time span between copies (about 50 years) than any other bibliographical work in the world!

Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix comment in *A General Introduction to the Bible*, "For all practical purposes the modern critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible represent, with their footnotes, exactly what the autographs (original documents) contained—line for line, word for word, and even letter for letter."

The Bible tells us that "above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own

interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21, NIV). Like most other sacred texts, Scripture claims to be divinely inspired.

The uniqueness of the Bible is that it is the only holy book in the world having substitutionary atonement as its core belief. Jesus satisfied the demands of justice from a holy God, enabling the guilty parties (you and me) to be forgiven and experience true freedom through His death and resurrection.

No other religion in the world can offer you that. As you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit makes the text come alive, giving new understanding and revelation in a personally applicable way.

Because it is divinely inspired it consequently is authoritative to all areas of life. It speaks beyond the intellect to the depths of the heart, empowering us to make positive inner choices (repentance and faith) that produce beneficial lifestyle changes (regeneration and sanctification).

4. If a loving and all-powerful God really exists, why doesn't He do something about the evil in the world?

This is a difficult question. We must come to the realization that evil is not just some vague force that hovers around somewhere; instead it is personal and lives within each of us. If God wanted to get rid of evil, He would have to get rid of us as well!

God created us with a free will because He loves us. We can each choose to love and follow Him or to reject and turn away from Him. Without free will there would be no love.

We all have chosen at various times in our lives to rebel against Him and follow our own inclinations. Realizing we are

part of the “evil” that people say God “should do something about” gives us a new and humble perspective.

With free will comes consequences for the things we choose. We live in a culture that cries out for freedom of choice but hates the responsibilities that come with it.

Consider the many lawsuits that have been initiated against fast food restaurants because people chose to eat there but then got fat. This “passing the buck” mentality is symptomatic of our fallen nature (see Gen. 3).

If God were to limit the consequences of evil, our free will would disappear, and moral consequences would become a mere game. Suffering often teaches us life’s greatest lessons. In fact, the Bible says that even Jesus learned through what He suffered (see Heb. 5:8).

The Bible does tell us that God is both “just” and “merciful.” In His mercy, He is patiently giving us time to turn to Him and receive the forgiveness and life He offers. God also promises that He will put an end to all evil and one day will execute final judgment.

Ironically, the existence of evil should lead us toward belief in God, not away from it. Without God there would be no standard of right and wrong.

The concepts of both “good” and “evil” are moral values or judgments that denote the existence of a moral governor (God). Without God, we would have come into existence by chance, and whatever we do would have no meaning or moral value, positive or negative.

Some people claim to believe this is the case, but their responses to life often reveal inconsistencies in their own convictions. As soon as they complain about some “injustice” or “unfair” situation or claim that someone has “wronged” them, they are making moral judgments about what is “right”

and “wrong.”

These judgments betray their belief in standards that are ultimately above us all—standards that come not from us but from God.

5. I don't believe in God. What kind of proof can you offer me that He exists?

Science points to the highly complex order in the universe. We also see complexity and order in the human body. Elementary logic tells us that any type of design demands a designer.

At this point another question often arises: Where did God Himself come from?

According to the Bible, God is the uncaused cause of all things. He has always existed.

In the Bible, His existence is considered an axiom (a self-evident truth). Because of the abundant evidence of Him in nature, He in no way attempts to justify that He exists.

But evidence is found in written history. Jewish, Roman, Greek and other sources all support the miraculous events of Jesus' life. Examples include His fulfilling more than 330 specific prophecies recorded hundreds of years earlier and performing numerous miracles.

The single biggest reason I know that God exists is that 23 years ago He changed my life in a way that was humanly impossible. I found that in spite of doing well both academically and athletically, there remained a distinct lack of overall purpose and direction to my life.

The ultimate fulfillment I sought was finally realized when I accepted Christ. His forgiveness and love has completely altered the course of my life. His peace and joy are now a daily reality.

Like me, most Christians have a testimony about the ways in which Jesus has changed their lives. If you learn to share your story effectively and to answer the objections unbelievers may pose, you will find evangelism easy and will bring many souls to faith in Jesus.

Darwin Dewar is associate pastor of Church on 99 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He is also a chaplain at the University of Alberta.