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DISCUSSION 1

Isn't the Bible a Myth? Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you have any comments about the DVD discussion? Did anyone say anything that you especially agreed with or disagreed with?

2. We heard at the start of the DVD that,

“Everyone who considers Christianity brings heartfelt questions and intellectual objections, born out of real life experiences.”

What questions or objections do you have and why?

3. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“The Bible is a wonderful text, it's complex, a lot of things going on, some people believe it to be the truth, I myself do not.”

Have you ever read the Bible? When and why?

4. Are people you know more troubled by the ethical aspects of the Bible or its historical accuracy? Why?

5. People say that there are many good things in the Bible, but you should not take it literally; you must not insist that it is entirely trustworthy and completely authoritative because some parts of the Bible are wrong, historically unreliable, and culturally regressive. Would you agree? Why or why not?

6. One of the participants asked another,

“Do you believe in something larger than yourself or larger than our immediate material world?”

How would you respond to this question?

7. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“There are a lot of miracles that happen in the Bible, but...I’ve never seen a miracle along [the lines of] what happens in the New Testament.”

How do you and people you know react to the idea of the miraculous?

8. One of the participants said on the DVD,

“Evolution is very crucial for me—it being able to mesh into the Bible properly. Because I definitely believe in evolution. So, if the Bible says evolution does not exist, then I feel it loses credibility.”

What do you think of this statement? Do you or people you know feel this way?

9. In John 7:17 Jesus proposes this challenge to people who doubted his words,

“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

Jesus is saying that if you want to know in your own experience whether or not the Bible really is true, then put its teachings into practice. What would it take for you to take up this challenge?

DISCUSSION 2

How Can You Say There Is Only One Way to God? What About Other Religions?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you have any comments about the DVD discussion? Did anyone say anything that you especially agreed with or disagreed with?
2. People say that since there are so many ways to find God, Christianity is only one among many valid ones. The other religions of the world have millions of adherents, producing much wisdom, character and happiness, so Christians should not claim to have the best faith or the only true faith. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. In the DVD discussion Dr. Keller pointed out that Christianity differs from other religions in “how you are saved—that means the process by which you can know that your relationship with God is the way it should be.” Does it matter to you if your relationship with God is the way it should be? Why or why not?
4. One of the participants asked,
“How do you pick your fundamental, your home? Is it the way you were raised? Is it your own research?”
How do most people you know “pick” their religion or their home? How do you?
5. One of the participants said on the DVD,
“I think problems arise whenever one group believes it has the exclusive domain on truth or the exclusive hold on truth. I think when you believe that you have the firm hold on truth it leads to extreme behaviors at the detriment of others who may not believe what you do—it leads to intolerance.”
Have you found this to be true in your experience or in that of people you know?

6. During the DVD discussion Dr. Keller asked the participants what they thought should be done about the divisiveness of religion. One participant responded,

“Has there been a time on the earth where there wasn’t religion, and what would it look like if religion were absent? Would it necessarily be a better place, would it be a less divisive place? I don’t know.”

Another said,

“All the negative aspects of religion are usually tied to extremists, people who take it more...and more literally.”

What would you have said in response?

7. Stephen Carter (who was mentioned on the DVD) writes this,

Efforts to craft a public square from which religious conversation is absent, no matter how thoughtfully worked out, will always, in the end, say to those of organized religion that they alone, unlike everyone else, must enter public dialogue only after leaving behind that part of themselves that they may consider the most vital.¹

Do you think it is possible to keep all religious views private—away from the public square?

8. On the DVD, Dr. Keller referred to Deuteronomy 29:29 –

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Assuming for a moment that Christianity is true what are the implications of this statement?

9. Dr. Keller concluded the discussion by saying,

“Christians are actually in this position where if we believe what Jesus said then we have to believe it is a superior way to go. These are claims that the other religions don’t make, that the founders don’t make... we can’t just sit there and say this is one nice way along with the others—it is impossible by the nature of the claims. And actually I am not kidding when I say please be sympathetic, because we live in a pluralistic society where the idea that ‘Jesus is the only way’ looks very intolerant. But from inside when you actually look at him and if you get convinced by what he said—it is a position we have to go to. We don’t go there because we just like to be right, we go there because we are trying to be true to the one that impresses us so much as being who he said he was.”

What did you feel about this conclusion to the discussion?

¹ Stephen L. Carter, *The Dissent of the Governed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 90.

DISCUSSION 3

What Gives You the Right to Tell Me How to Live My Life? Why Are There So Many Rules?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you have any comments about the DVD discussion? Did anyone say anything that you especially agreed with or disagreed with?
2. The title question is, "What Gives You the Right to Tell Me How to Live My Life?" Does anyone tell you how to live your life?
3. People say that the Christian belief in an absolute, one size fits all truth that is objectively true for everyone is subversive to our individual and communal freedom. Christianity is an enemy of authentic personhood, social cohesion, and even freedom. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. One of the participants on the DVD said, "I'm not exactly sure what freedom means." How do people you know define freedom? What is your definition of freedom?
5. During the discussion Dr. Keller summarized one of the participant's points as,
"You, I think, are saying that it is not just Christians, and it is not even just religious people, but actually everybody...is working off rules."
Do you agree? How do you feel about rules?

6. The French philosopher Foucault writes:

“Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.”¹

Foucault is saying that truth claims are power plays. What is your reaction to this statement? Is it true?

7. Aldous Huxley says,

“The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do.”²

What are the implications of his line of reasoning?

8. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“I don’t have to experience some form of genocide to form an opinion about it. I have this overwhelmingly passionate feeling that any life should be protected if I can step in. Where does that come from? I don’t know where that comes from.”

Do you feel the same way? Where do you think the feeling comes from?

9. Dr. Keller said on the DVD,

“It is a little hard to understand how rules actually function inside the Christian faith. They actually don’t operate the same way that rules operate in other philosophical systems or religious systems. Traditional religion says if I obey the rules, then God accepts me. Whereas Christianity says that because I believe in Christ who has done everything for me, he has died in my place, I am accepted—and therefore I obey the rules... For Christians the rules are not at the center.”

What did you think of this statement? Is this how you had understood the place of rules in Christianity?

10. Jesus says,

“If you hold to my teaching... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32); “Whoever finds his life, will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39); “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30).”

What is Jesus saying? What are the implications if this is true?

1 Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 131.

2 Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (New York: Harper, 1937), 269–73.

DISCUSSION 4

Why Does God Allow Suffering? Why Is There So Much Evil in the World?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you have any comments about the DVD discussion? Did anyone say anything that you especially agreed with or disagreed with?

2. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“I grew up in a very Christian family... If my parents see that I am struggling with something or there are challenges in my life, they explain it by saying, ‘There is a greater purpose.’ And there might be, but I find that to be a very limited explanation. It doesn’t really comfort me, especially because what you want at that moment is alleviation. You don’t want some grand explanation of why this is happening to you.”

Do you agree? How do you comfort people who are suffering?

3. David Hume in his famous discourses concerning natural religion writes:

Epicurus’ old questions are yet unanswered. Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?¹

The idea is that, given the presence of evil—if God is good, he’s not powerful; if he’s powerful, he’s not good. He couldn’t be both powerful and good if evil is allowed to continue in the world, but if he’s only one and not the other, then he’s not the God of traditional Christianity. Do you feel that the existence of suffering means that God cannot exist?

4. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“When the question is asked, ‘Why does God allow suffering?’—my first thought is—why not?... Suffering is life, that is a given, so there is no reason to question why it’s there or even to extricate it from your life.”

Do people you know feel this way? Do you think this is a satisfactory answer to the problem of suffering? Discuss.

¹ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1980), 63.

5. One of the participants of the DVD said,

“As a skeptic I do not explain the existence of evil and suffering. I think it’s something that we have to deal with in our daily lives. The best thing is to actually try and do something about it; and the worst possible thing is to simply be indifferent.

How do you explain the existence of evil and suffering?

6. Dr. Keller used an illustration on the DVD and concluded with,

“If there was a God, why couldn’t we all be six years old spiritually... I wonder whether it’s possible... to have a perspective in which everything we look at would be like the grief of a six-year-old.”

Did you find this illustration helpful? Why or why not?

7. One of the participants of the DVD said,

“How do I feel about a suffering God in Christianity? It actually made me think that it is a unique aspect of Christianity... And I actually felt it might be a useful thing to help somebody get through a tragedy. It seemed like we need that. We need to feel that there are people, or there is a force, or some being that can empathize and go through these things with us. I think that that is something I realize in my own life and it seems like if Christianity can offer that that might be a useful thing to think about.”

How do you feel about the idea of a suffering God?

8. In chapter 53 of his book Isaiah writes this prophecy,

But he [Jesus] was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

If these verses were true, what would be the implications? Why do you think Jesus died?

5. In his book *God Is Not Great*, Christopher Hitchens addresses a hypothetical question he was asked on a panel with radio host Dennis Prager: if he were alone in an unfamiliar city at night, and a group of strangers began to approach him, would he feel safer, or less safe, knowing that these men had just come from a prayer meeting? Hitchens answers,

“Just to stay within the letter ‘B’, I have actually had that experience in Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad. In each case... I would feel immediately threatened if I thought that the group of men approaching me in the dusk were coming from a religious observance.”¹

Hitchens then gives detailed descriptions of the tense social and political situations within these cities, which he attributes to religion. Many people believe that religions like Christianity inevitably lead to violence and oppression. Do you think this is true? Discuss.

6. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“I thought the point was really compelling—it actually struck me—trying to put yourself in the shoes of the person rather than interpret their actions through your own lens.”

Do people you know generally behave like this? Why or why not? Why might it be important to do this?

7. Paul writes in one of his letters,

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Dr. Keller mentioned something similar on the DVD. What do you think of the idea that salvation is a gift and not something we earn?

8. Dr. Keller said on the DVD,

“In the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament with Jesus, there are internal self-critiques by the believing community on...religious hypocrisy or in the New Testament ‘pharisaism.’ The difference between a Pharisee in the New Testament and a Christ-follower is not that the Pharisee and the Christian aren’t both trying to obey God, they actually are... but [the Pharisee] is doing it not only self-righteously and feeling superior to other people but when they do wrong they won’t admit it and so there is not this theme of humble repentance.”

Is the difference between “pharisaism” /moralism and the gospel a new idea to you? Why do you think it might be important to distinguish between the two?

¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 18.

DISCUSSION 6

How Can God Be Full of Love and Wrath at the Same Time? How Can God Send Good People to Hell?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you have any comments about the DVD discussion? Did anyone say anything that you especially agreed with or disagreed with?

2. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“I am at ease with taking the burdens of my own sins, I don’t need somebody else to relieve that for me. I don’t need to think about an afterlife, because I’m scared to live this life. There is a famous quote that says, ‘People who live a full life aren’t scared to die.’ And for me, I’m living a full life and I’m not scared to take the brunt of my sins, I’m not scared to do what I need to do to live this life.”

Do people you know feel like this? What is your reaction to this statement?

3. On the DVD Dr. Keller defined wrath as, “settled opposition and hatred of that which is destroying what we love.” What do you think of this definition? Is there anything that makes you full of wrath?

4. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“I as a parent...I’m often full of love and wrath. It’s not contradictory—being full of love and full of wrath is not at all contradictory—it happens all the time, sometimes at the same time.”

Do you think it is possible to be full of love and wrath at the same time? Explain. What do you think might make God full of wrath?

5. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“I would like to think that I’m acceptable to God if I have good intentions, if I have a will to be good, if I have a will to love, if I try hard to be a better person.”

What do *you* think makes us acceptable to God? From all that you have learned would the Bible agree with you?

6. One of the participants on the DVD said,

“Hell and heaven exist now... In any moment when your actions are negative or the influence is coming from, ‘I want to do what I want to do’, instead of from the larger picture, you are in a sort of hell, because your ego has taken over. Whereas you are in heaven more when you are really compassionate and acting with others.”

Do you or people you know feel this way? Is this true?

7. One way in which the Bible describes hell is as: “shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” – 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Assuming this description is true, why would this be hell?

8. Dr. Keller asked the participants,

“Can you imagine why it would be good to believe in judgment day?”

Can you remember some of their answers to this question? Add your own response.

9. What do you feel about the Christian belief that Jesus experienced hell so we would not have to?

10. What would it take for you to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?