

Answering Common Questions about Christianity

What would you say are the most common questions that people raise about Christianity?

What is going on when someone asks a question?

- the real issue on the table
- the boomerang effect
- why convincing answers don't convince

*“people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil”
(John 3 v 19)*

Peter's advice

“In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have, but do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3 v 15-16)

Questions about 1 Peter 3 v 15-16

1. What does Peter tell his Christian friends to do?
2. What does Peter say about how they are to do it?
3. Why is this advice so helpful?

What difference does it make if we do “set apart Christ as Lord” in our hearts?

What does it mean to “be prepared to give an answer to everyone for the hope that you have”?

Why are our lifestyle and our manner of speaking so important?

What are we actually going to say?

Take the question, “**How do you know God exists?**”

How might you answer that question?

What different approaches can you think of?

Where do you think each approach is likely to lead the conversation?

Which might be best and why?

Three principles to guide our answering

1. Take people to Jesus

(that is, answer the question from the life and lips of Jesus if you can)

2. Ask a good question

(this can help you listen carefully to what they are saying, it can also help to challenge and extend their thinking and reflect God's message to them)

3. Take people to the cross and resurrection of Jesus

(that is, look for opportunities to explain the big message of Christianity)

Rule of thumb: Head for Jesus at all times. Because he is the gospel.

So, how might we answer the question, **How do you know God exists?**

1. Take people to Jesus

Eg “There are many pointers to the existence of God, but the best evidence for the existence of God is the historical person of Jesus. Jesus claimed that anyone who had seen him had seen God (John 14 v 9).

And Jesus' life backed up his claims. Jesus did all kinds of things that only God can do. For example, Jesus was able to control nature. On one occasion he calmed a violent storm with just a few words. You can read about it in Mark chapter 4. Those who were with Jesus that day were left asking, “Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?” (Show the story in the Bible if you have one with you).

So, basically, I would say that if you want to know God exists, look at the person of Jesus and the evidence for him.”

2. Ask a good question

Eg, “Do you know why Jesus came to earth?” What views have you come across?” As you talk, you might hope to show them Jesus' own view, that he had come to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10 v 45)

3. Take people to the cross and resurrection

Eg, You might say, “ I think it would really help you understand what Jesus meant about a “ransom” if you had an overview of the big message of Christianity. Could I take a moment or two to explain that for you? It won't take more than 3 or 4 minutes.”

Possible Objection: “But my friend won’t accept evidence from the life and lips of Jesus...”

Four things you might helpfully point out.

1. The New Testament was written down within the lifetime of Jesus’ contemporaries. So other witnesses were still alive to verify the accounts. Eg, 1 Corinthians 15 v 1-8, The eyewitnesses of the resurrection, “most of whom are still living” (v 6)
2. The gospel writers were intending to write accurate history not myths or fairy stories. Eg, Luke 1 v 1-4, “eyewitnesses”, “careful investigation”, “ an orderly account”
3. Nearly all the New Testament writers died violently for their Christian faith. Is it really likely they made it all up? Eg, 2 Timothy 4, Paul writes this letter as he was facing his own imminent martyrdom.
4. The New Testaments we have today are accurate and reliable translations of the original documents. We have many copies of New Testament documents dating from very close to the originals.

Two questions you might ask someone who raises this objection

1. Why do you think the gospel accounts don’t give an accurate account of Jesus’ life? Try and find specific questions that you can then go away and research.
2. Have you personally ever read through one of the gospels as an adult? Why don’t you read one, and then you could make up your own mind?

How might you answer these questions? Think how you might answer from the life and lips of Jesus, what a good question might be, and how you might point people to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Don’t all religions lead to God?

(Try using Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, a member of Judaism, in John 3 v 1-21)

Can we trust the Bible?

(Try using Jesus’ own view of the Bible in Matthew 5 v 17-19 and Luke 24 v 25-27, Jesus’ promise about the writing of the New Testament by his apostles in John 14v25-26, and Jesus’ challenge about how, ultimately, we come to know the truth of the Bible in John 7 v 17)

Isn’t being good, good enough for God?

(Try using Jesus’ conversation with the man who thought he had kept all God’s laws in Mark 10 v 17-27)

Something to do when you get home...why not get together with a Christian friend and work out some ideas on how you might answer other common questions from the life and lips of Jesus.
“Be prepared to give an answer”

Further reading

Tim Keller, The Reason for God Dutton (2008)
Or listen to Tim Keller’s talks online at the Redeemer Church website (www.redeemer.com Go to “Sermon Ministry” then “Free sermons” then ”The Reason for God”)
Paul Williams and Barry Cooper, If you could ask God one question The Good Book Company (2007)
John Chapman, Know and Tell the gospel Hodder and Stoughton (1981)
Two ways of live gospel outlines from the Good Book Company
Paul Barnett, Is the New Testament History? Hodder (1986)
Andrew Errington, Can we trust what the gospels say about Jesus? Matthias Media (2009)
Biblical Answers to today’s tough questions The Good Book Co (2006)