
Street Epistemologists 'On Guard'

By

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Introduction

An interesting thing happened to us at FaithandSelfDefense.com recently. Well-known atheist professor Peter Boghossian tweeted this message to his followers:

These attempts to discourage people from being honest, less dogmatic, & more humble, will fail.

[http:// faithandselfdefense.com/2015/01/18/breaking-down-street-epistemology/](http://faithandselfdefense.com/2015/01/18/breaking-down-street-epistemology/)

What followed that tweet by Dr. Boghossian was hundreds of atheists clicking on the link to our article about Street Epistemology and many of them leaving comments and asking questions. Some of the people who commented described themselves as 'street epistemologists,' so it was a great opportunity to dialog with them about 'faith' and 'reason.'

The purpose of this article is to both follow up on our previous post, 'Breaking Down Street Epistemology,' and share insights from our recent discussions with street epistemologists. As the post title suggests, ***be on guard***.

The Purpose of Street Epistemology

Peter Boghossian is author of 'A Manual for Creating Atheists' and chief promoter of what he calls 'Street Epistemology.'

"This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith. You'll learn how to engage the faithful in conversations that help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their beliefs, and mistrust their faith. I call this activist approach to helping people overcome their faith, 'Street Epistemology.' The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason." (A Manual For Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Chapter I, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013)

Boghossian gives credit to both 'ancient philosophers' and the more recent 'Four Horsemen' of atheism: Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. However, Boghossian says he is taking what they started to the next level.

"The Four Horsemen identified the problems and raised our awareness, but they offered few solutions. No roadmap. Not even guideposts. Now the onus is upon the next generation of

thinkers and activists to take direct and immediate action to fix the problems Harris, Dawkins, Dennett, and Hitchens identified.” A Manual For Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Chapter I, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013

Dr. Boghossian’s determination to create a generation of street epistemologists has gained national and international response. The website, *street epistemology.com*, is intent on building an initial group of ten-thousand people ‘who will be active and engage others and teach others better ways to come to knowledge.’ The names and locations of some of the street epistemologists ‘who have committed to educating the world’ are listed on the website’s ‘Join’ page.

Boghossian invites street epistemologists to ‘be one of these Horsemen.’ He goes on to write, ‘you will transform a broken world long ruled by unquestioned faith into a society built on reason, evidence, and thought-out positions.’ Boghossian tells street epistemologists that their work will pay off ‘by potentially helping millions—even billions—of people to live in a better world.’ (Chapter 1)

How Street Epistemology 'Works'

Street epistemology is, according to Peter Boghossian, 'talking people out of their faith.' Notice the key terms: 'talking' .. 'people' .. 'out of' .. 'their faith.' The following definitions and directives concerning those terms are taken from streetepistemology.com and *A Manual for Creating Atheists*.

'Talking' for a street epistemologist begins by *asking questions, listening actively, manifesting empathy, and establishing a rapport.* That includes *meeting the person at their window, speaking softly, in a non-threatening fashion, and making them talk about the reasons why they believe 'faith is the pathway to truth.'* Once street epistemologists have 'earned the right to proceed with the next steps,' they are encouraged to *preach by example, mirror the speech of the person they're talking to, and use the socratic method.*

'People' for a street epistemologist are those persons with 'closed minds.' People with the 'closed minds' are people 'of faith.' Street epistemologists believe that faith as a method to derive conclusions is 'unreliable.' Peter Boghossian believes that people who believe in the existence of God are either 'pretending to know something they don't know,' 'ignorant,' 'delusional' or 'victims of a wholesale lack of exposure to alternative ideas and different epistemologies.' (Chapters 2 & 3) One other reason Boghossian lists is 'damage to the brain.' His advice to street epistemologists: 'if someone is suffering from a brain-

based faith delusion your work will be futile.' (Chapter 3)

'Out of' for a street epistemologist means arguing people 'away from religion,' 'separating them from their faith,' change their beliefs and/or behavior.' Boghossian speaks about leading believers to 'doxastic openness,' which is described as 'a willingness and ability to revise beliefs.' (**I'll share examples of street epistemologists proposing that very thing to me and others in the next part of this series of articles.) Boghossian calls that doxastic openness the 'awareness of ignorance.' He says that by helping believers become aware of their 'ignorance,' it becomes possible for them to 'look at different alternatives, arguments, ways of viewing the world, and ideas, precisely because one understands that one does not know what one thought one previously knew.' (Chapter 3)

As Peter Boghossian says, 'Change minds and hearts will follow.' Boghossian believes the job of the street epistemologist is 'to help others reclaim their curiosity and their sense of wonder—both of which were robbed by faith' ... 'You'll help people destroy foundational beliefs, flimsy assumptions, faulty epistemologies, and ultimately faith' ... 'Helping rid people of illusion is a core part of the Street Epistemologist's project and an ancient and honorable goal. Disabusing others of warrantless certainty, and reinstalling their sense of wonder and their desire to know, is a profound contribution to a life worth living.' (Chapter 3)

Peter Boghossian, who is a primary mentor to street epistemologists through his book, videos and personal appearances, speaks of talking people out of their faith as ‘interventions.’ He presents street epistemologists with what he calls – ‘Your new role: interventionist, liberator’ – along with strategies for conducting those interventions. In fact, Boghossian says he views almost every interaction with a believer as ‘an intervention.’

Boghossian tells street epistemologists that their ‘target is faith’ and their ‘pro bono clients are individuals who’ve been infected by faith.’ (**We’ll look at some of the strategies street epistemologists employ in future parts of this series.) He wrote that when street epistemologists view their interactions as interventions as opposed to confrontations or debates, they gain the following:

1. More objectivity
2. View believers as people who need help
3. Less likely to be perceived as an ‘angry atheist’
4. Learn from each intervention
5. People who observe the intervention will see ‘the proper treatment modality in action’
6. Find deeper satisfaction in helping people than in winning a debate

'Their faith' for a street epistemologist is what people believe 'without sufficient evidence.' Boghossian calls it 'believing the preposterous.' In chapter 3 of *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, Boghossian wrote, 'in matter relating to religion, God, and faith, believers are often told ignorance is a mark of closeness to God, spiritual enlightenment, and true faith.' (**I've been a Christian for 44 years and personally met thousands of other Christians and never once heard any Christian say that ignorance is a mark of closeness to God. In fact, I've heard and said just the opposite. More on that later.) In chapter 4 of his book, Boghossian views faith as 'a virus' that needs to be treated.

The perspective of street epistemology is that 'we are mistaken about something all the time.' In the training process, street epistemologists are told that they and others 'believe in a lot of different things concurrently, all of them being potentially false.' The idea of 'being mistaken' is an important part of a street epistemologist's 'intervention' as they 'help' believers become aware of their 'ignorance.'

"The tools and allies of faith—certainty, prejudice, pretending, confirmation bias, irrationality, and superstition—all come into question through the self-awareness of ignorance." (A Manual for Creating Atheists, Chapter 3)

Boghossian wrote that street epistemologists would meet people who would attempt to evade their help by asserting that 'every definition

faith offered is incorrect' and that they (the street epistemologist) didn't understand what faith really is. Boghossian said that when pressed, 'the faithful will offer vague definitions that are merely transparent attempts to evade criticism, or simplistic definitions that intentionally muddy the meaning of 'faith.'" (Chapter 2)

One of the keys to 'how street epistemology works' is the process of 'interventions,' which street epistemologists view as 'liberating people of faith from their ignorance.'

I recently experienced an 'intervention' of sorts and would like to share it with you as an example of how it works.

As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Boghossian's tweet about my first article about street epistemologists led hundreds of atheists to my article and many of them participated in an 'intervention' for me. First, let's look at the published techniques for a 'faith intervention,' then see how street epistemologists used those techniques in communicating with me.

This first list is from the website streetepistemology.com. The subject is 'Opening Windows: How to Aerate Closed Minds.' The author(s) state the mission of street epistemology:

- Meet him (person of 'faith') at his window
- Speak softly, in a non-threatening fashion
- Make him talk about the reasons why he believes faith is the

pathway to truth

Street epistemologists are taught that if the 'person of faith' has not opened his or her heart to them, they should do these three specific things:

1. Active Listening: Listen to his side and make him aware you're listening
2. Manifest Empathy: Get an understanding of where he's coming from and how feels. Tell him you know he wants to be decent person, as everybody else, you included.
3. Establish a Rapport: Empathy is what you feel. Rapport is when he feels it back. He starts to trust you.

Street epistemologists are told that 'Only then you've earned the right to proceed with the next steps of the invention. Don't hurry him. Don't skip any steps. Be confident that the time will come when he will feel the need to not have that piece of glass between him and you.'

That leads to the next steps in the street epistemology system:

1. Preach by example
2. Mirror his (person of faith) speech
3. Use the Socratic method

With those points in mind, here are some examples from comments street epistemologists shared with me immediately after Peter Boghossian tweeted about my first article. Look for how they use some of these techniques. Keep in mind that what we're doing now is looking at 'method,' not 'content.' We will look at content later, but first we want to grasp the street epistemologist's 'methodology.'

“This article seems to miss the point that street epistemology isn't about debating, arguments, or facts. It is simply trying to get to the root of what originally caused the individual believer to believe. If it really was evidence that led them there or if there was some faith involved, and to get the believer themselves after they go away and think about it, to realise that having faith that something is true does not make it so, and that faith can be an unreliable way to come to the truth.

Street epistemology is just about having a chat about how you come to know something is true. Some people are better at conversation than others. What makes faith a reliable way to know something is true? If you do not believe in God by faith, but through evidence then your belief in God will stay intact. It is a matter of being honest with yourself.”

“Good article, but I have a question. Your last paragraph states we need to “teach our children what to believe”. I have read and studied both the quaran and the bible. Both make competing, contradictory claims. Which of these documents do I teach my child to believe is correct?”

“ISIS followers have a very very strong faith. Do you encourage them to guard there faith against atheists as well?”

“1. It’s actually ‘disabuse themselves of their faith’ and not ‘disabuse their faith’. 2. How are the SE questions ‘unreasonable’? That’s kind of the point of critical thinking, to explain how you come to conclusions, not just spew ‘because I (or my minister) say so’ dogma! 3. Yes, “atheists don’t believe there is a reliable method to believe in God” because they have concluded through reason and evidence that such a proposition is untenable. So they’re not going to offer answers in this regard. One would think that a theist should easily be able to explain just what method they used but not one has so far in the videos I have seen. 4. As for “swarming” with “unreasonable

questions” (there they are again!), and unwillingness to engage in a true “conversation”, it seems to me that the SE person is usually quite willing to listen & respond to most of his interlocutor’s comments, even waiting patiently for the person to find thoughts that are often emerging after being coaxed out for the the first time.

If asking someone to use the same reasoning about their god belief that they would use to assess other processes, conditions & situations in life is “unreasonable” then please tell me what is “reasonable”.

“Street epistemology is about teaching someone to figure out how they believe ANYTHING, not just in god. The same critical thinking skills can be applied to anything; politics, biology, economics, and god. The point of Street epistemology is to get a person to question how they come to know things. If you read up on the Socratic method, or Socratic pedagogy, you’ll see the same skills can be applied to figuring out.

The fact of the matter is that most Christians have never really inspected their beliefs, but instead take much of what they believe for granted, never having really, REALLY thought through the claims made by their spiritual leaders. This makes the discussion of faith-based beliefs fertile ground for teaching

the method to someone, with a topic they THINK they understand, but very often have only a cursory understanding of.

If you believe in God, and in the tenets of your specific faith/religion, then it should be easy to inspect the basis for those beliefs. In a country that's 78% Christian (<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>), the discussion of faith in the Christian God just happens to be a statistically consistent topic for discussion that a Street Epistemologist can strike up with almost anyone on the street.

The impact of this can't be minimized. Poor thinking skills affect a person's ability to make their way through life. It affects the way you vote, the way you process what your doctor tells you, the manner in which you complete your work, and the methods you use to raise your children. If your worldview is flawed, and your thinking skills are incomplete/ineffective, then you aren't living the life you could be.

A discussion of faith between a believer and a Street Epistemologist doesn't have to be an argument. In fact, most of the SEs I know don't take a confrontational approach to their conversations with others. They are respectful, courteous, and always willing to listen. After all, the goal of SE is to find truth, wherever it may reveal itself. This benefits both participants.

A person has nothing to lose in a conversation with an SE, and possibly may learn new ways of thinking that lead to actual knowledge, not just uncritical acceptance of information handed down from others.

Now, with all that said, I don't actually know which books/videos you've seen, so for all I know, the ones you've reviewed were actually of SEs who took a predatory approach I'm unfamiliar with. I don't dismiss the possibility that you've seen/spoken with SEs who aren't actually interested in hearing what you have to say, but I'm not that type of SE. If you are in possession of information that can increase my understanding of how the world works, then I'd love to hear it and consider it. I'd also be interested in sharing my own opinions, if you wanted to make it a two-way conversation. But in lieu of such an exchange, I would only request that you tell me which videos you've seen and books you've read, so I can reach out to them and help them better understand the true goal/nature of SE. After all, I'd hate to see a good skillset go to waste."

"This article seems to miss the point that street epistemology isn't about debating, arguments, or facts. It is simply trying to get to the root of what originally caused the individual believer to believe. If it really was evidence that led them there or if there was some faith involved, and to get the believer

themselves after they go away and think about it, to realise that having faith that something is true does not make it so, and that faith can be an unreliable way to come to the truth.

Street epistemology is just about having a chat about how you come to know something is true. Some people are better at conversation than others. What makes faith a reliable way to know something is true? If you do not believe in God by faith, but through evidence then your belief in God will stay intact. It is a matter of being honest with yourself.”

These were some of the first comments to reach my article. What do you see here? What about method and technique? Based on what street epistemology trainers are trying to do in preparing thousands of street epistemologists to talk theists ‘out of their faith,’ how do you think they did? How would you respond to similar comments about what you believe about God and Christianity?

The Paradigm Shift

Avoid Facts. That's the heading under 'Part II: Strategies' in atheist Peter Boghossian's 2013 book titled *A Manual For Creating Atheists*. I find that both interesting and insightful to the methodology of what Boghossian calls 'street epistemology.'

That statement, 'Avoid Facts,' is counterintuitive to my training and experience as an investigative journalist. 'Fact' is defined by a variety of dictionaries as 'something that actually exists; reality; truth; something known to exist or to have happened; information used as evidence or as part of a report or news article.'

People like journalists, detectives, educators, scientists and scholars use 'facts' and 'evidence' as vital and necessary to their profession. The idea of 'avoiding facts,' it seems to me, is opposed to the search for truth.

Here's how Peter Boghossian explains his reasons for training street epistemologists to 'avoid facts.'

"When I teach beginning Street Epistemologists how to help rid the faithful of their affliction and anchor their beliefs in reality, one of the most difficult strategies to get across is: do not bring particular pieces of evidence (facts, data points) into the discussion when attempting to disabuse people of specific faith

propositions. Many rational, thoughtful people think that somehow, magically, the faithful don't realize they are not basing their beliefs on reliable evidence—that if they were only shown solid evidence then voila, they'd be cured! This is false. Remember: the core of the intervention is not changing beliefs, but changing the way people form beliefs—hence the term 'epistemologist.' Bringing facts into the discussion is the wrong way to conceptualize the problem: the problem is with epistemologies people use, not with conclusions people hold.” (A Manual For Creating Atheists, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013, chapter 4, Interventions and Strategies)

This is a *paradigm shift* (fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions) for atheists. Our approach in the 1960s and early 70s (when I was an atheist) was to attack the 'fact lack' in theism and Christianity in particular. (We mockingly called Christianity a 'lack-o-fact' religion.) Christians and other theists were not very good with 'facts' in those days and usually fell back on their 'faith' (the blind kind) to respond to atheist attacks using facts. It was pretty easy as an atheist to defeat Christian arguments back then.

However, that changed dramatically during the 1970s and 80s and exploded in the 90s and the new millennium. Christian apologists armed with 'facts' took on atheism and demonstrated the power of 'evidence' when discussing theism and Christianity with non-believers. I became a Christian in 1971 through the process of

investigating facts (evidence) for theism and the Christian worldview, which gave me a front-row seat to the paradigm shift in Christianity and the growing impact of Christian apologists.

If I had been an atheist instead of a Christian during that fundamental change in Christian apologetics during the last 40+ years, I would probably have been heavily involved in searching for and promoting a paradigm shift in the way atheists responded to the heavily fact-based evidential apologetics we see in Christianity today. What Peter Boghossian and other atheists are doing through 'street epistemology' makes perfect sense to me. What atheists were doing wasn't working, so they fundamentally changed the way they talked with people of 'faith.' **Avoid Facts.** Makes perfect sense.

Boghossian points out in his book that introducing facts into discussions with theists may also prove unproductive 'because this usually leads to a discussion about what constitutes reliable evidence.' Boghossian believes that almost all theists suffer from an acute form of confirmation bias. 'They start with a core belief first and work their way backward to specific beliefs.' Boghossian believes that 'every religious apologist is epistemically debilitated by an extreme form of confirmation bias.'

Boghossian sees 'avoiding facts' as an important part of their 'treatment.' Here's how he explains that to street epistemologists.

“Doxastic closure almost always results from pressures independent of evidence. Therefore you should avoid facts, evidence, metaphysics, and data points in discussions with those suffering from faith-based forms of doxastic closure. It won’t advance their treatment. It won’t help subjects to abandon their faith. What will help is maintaining your focus on epistemology and using the techniques discussed here and in the next chapter on Socratic questioning.” (Chapter 4, Interventions and Strategies)

I saw this in some of the comments street epistemologists shared with me in this series about street epistemology. Watch how they raise the issue keeping in mind that *A Manual For Creating Atheists* is a primary training manual for street epistemologists.

“The tools and allies of faith—certainty, prejudice, pretending, confirmation bias, irrationality, and superstition—all come into question through the self-awareness of ignorance.” (A Manual for Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Chapter 3)

“To be clear, I didn’t just find your blog. I only just stumbled on the SE article and found it interesting. I haven’t read every word of your work, but I have looked at every article, skimmed the content and looked for evidence. Again, without a basic “start

with God's existence" and then work backward, I don't see anything new. Also, that is a biased approach I think we can all agree on."

"I suspect that your statement "I'm open to new reliable evidence" is at the heart of the discussion here. I cannot honestly say I know the truth of any faith-based claim. What I can say is that I am in search of the truth. What raises a "red flag" for me is someone who claims they know the truth and are more than willing to demonstrate why their particular brand of truth is the "right" truth. This is probably nothing more than confirmation bias. Again, I am open to reliable evidence to change my mind."

"Your beliefs hold back society when society tries to progress beyond bronze age biases (slavery, geo-centrism, marriage equality, gender equality, stem cell research, ad infinitum). It's time to start asking yourself the difficult questions and remove the cognitive dissonance in your mind."

“You said that you “became a theist through the process of investigating evidence presented to me by Christians and evidence I found on my own during the investigatory process.”

Did you do the same investigation in other religions? Did you have to believe first, as I have heard multiple times, ‘open your heart to Jesus first, before you can know him?’ How did you elevate confirmation bias in this endeavor?

Words like ‘investigative,’ and ‘professional skills,’ are important to me in my career too and help guide me to a conclusion. The problem I see is that you use dubious claims like 1 Corinthians 15 as evidence of the resurrection. Over 500 people saw him, but is that a very good investigation? The passage doesn’t contain any names of the witnesses, and there is no information of any investigation by the Corinthians having investigated the claim...as I remember, they were hundreds of miles from Palestine. Is that a bias free and truth determining method?

To be clear, I would really like to see more information from your investigation and see how you built in a reliable method to remove bias and test falsifiability. That would be awesome.”

Christian Epistemology – The Facts

Here are some examples of how I replied to street epistemologists questioning me about ‘confirmation bias.’ Think about how you might respond to similar charges.

“I was skeptical during my investigation into the evidence for theism and Christianity because I didn’t believe in the supernatural. I looked at all the evidence I could find and asked every question I could think of to get to the truth, but I didn’t let go of my disbelief in the supernatural. That was my presupposition and as an investigative reporter I knew that presuppositions were dangerous to discovering the truth. I had to be open to the possibility that the supernatural existed. I didn’t believe it existed, so that was something I had to struggle with during the investigation.

The journey I’m writing about in ‘Convince Me There’s A God’ is a look at the investigative process that led me to believe in God’s existence. Because of my presupposition that the supernatural didn’t exist, I looked at the evidence from a skeptical perspective. What I found through the study of archaeology and history was that the Bible was a credible compilation of ancient documents. That brought me to the life of

Jesus Christ. Even though the ancient records indicated that a man named Jesus lived in Israel during the 1st century AD, I didn't believe He did anything supernatural. It was after following the various biblical and extra-biblical historical evidences concerning Jesus' life, death and resurrection that the real possibility of the supernatural began to take shape. If Jesus rose from the dead, the other miracles attributed to Him were not out of the realm of possibility. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then, as Paul wrote, the Christian worldview fails."

"I studied Hinduism, Shintoism, Buddhism, and Taoism prior to becoming an atheist. I conducted an investigation into the claims of theism, the Bible and Christianity for several months and was skeptical during most of that time. I did not 'believe first,' 'open my heart to Jesus first.' As for confirmation bias, my preconceived belief going into the investigation was there was no God and the Bible was mythological and fanciful. My confirmation bias was 'against' believing in God, so I had to use investigative skills to be open to wherever the evidence might take me.

Paul did list the names of several people in 1 Corinthians 15. In addition to himself, Paul said that Jesus was seen by Cephas, the twelve apostles (known by name to the Corinthian

Christians), James (half brother of Jesus), and more than 500 people at the same time, 'of whom the greater part remain to the present.' This was an open invitation to anyone to talk with the people Paul mentioned and ask them what they saw. Even though Corinth was a long distance from Jerusalem, people in the 1st century made trips of that length and longer with some regularity.

Paul lived in Jerusalem for many years and was well aware of the claims about Jesus' resurrection. He didn't believe it and worked with Jewish leaders to bring an end to the claims until Jesus revealed Himself to Paul. Paul later met with the apostles he mentioned in his letter to the Corinthians to verify many things personally. Paul did his own investigation, then reported what he knew to be true to people in many countries.

Your request is one of hundreds of similar requests I've received through the years from atheists and is the primary reason I'm writing a detailed explanation about my investigation. It's called 'Convince Me There's a God' and can be found on this blog site.

"I would recommend the careful process of investigating truth claims from each of the worldviews to determine which view has the best arguments from evidence. One of the difficult parts

of doing that is confirmation bias and presuppositions. My bias and presupposition as an atheist investigating theism and Christianity was my strong atheism. I had to use the disciplines of investigative journalism to counter my bias toward theism in order to honestly approach truth claims of the theistic worldview and Christianity.”

What are your thoughts about ‘confirmation bias?’ Do you believe your belief in God is based on confirmation bias or facts? How would you answer someone who accused you of confirmation bias? How would you bring evidence for theism and Christianity into a conversation where a street epistemologist wanted to avoid facts?

Street epistemologists are trained in what their trainers believe are the best methods to ‘talk people out of their faith.’

We saw in the previous chapter that atheists are taught to **‘avoid facts’** when talking with theists. It’s part of what they call ‘intervention strategies.’ Street epistemologists believe that ‘faith,’ belief in God, is a ‘virus’ that must be removed from the ‘faithful.’ Street epistemologists are taught that theists experience ‘severe doxastic pathologies’ and need a cure. That cure, they believe, will come through an ‘intervention’ cloaked

as a 'discussion.'

I say 'cloaked' because street epistemologists are advised not to reveal their atheism during the intervention with a theist. They are also told that what they will be doing through the 'intervention' will be a great 'help' to the 'delusional' theist.

'Your discussions with the faithful are a genuine opportunity for you to help people reason more reliably and feel less comfortable pretending to know things they don't know. They also present an opportunity for you to further develop a disposition conducive to anchoring beliefs in reality.' (A Manual For Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Pichstone Publishing, 2013, Chapter 4)

Let's take a closer look at how street epistemologists are using their techniques for talking people out of their faith and read some examples.

Target Faith, Not Religion

Street epistemologists are taught to target the 'foundation' of theism – 'faith.' Boghossian believes while other atheist leaders have done a good job 'exposing the fraudulent nature and dangers of religion,' it's now time to move the conversation forward by 'refocusing our attacks primarily on faith.' He advocates and trains street epistemologists to 'target faith, not religion' during their interventions.

Boghossian also trains street epistemologists not to target 'God.' That may sound a bit strange coming from an atheist, but here's his reasoning.

'Trying to disabuse people of a belief in God (a metaphysical conclusion that comes about as a result of a faulty epistemology) may be an interesting, fun, feel-good pastime, but ultimately it's unlikely to be as productive as disabusing people of their faith ... The faulty reasoning process—the problem—is faith.' (Chapter 4)

Real Examples

In our recent posts about street epistemology and epistemologists, I mentioned God many times. That's understandable since I'm a Christian apologist. Here are some of the comments and replies from street epistemologists to my posts. Watch for how they might attack my 'faith' or 'way of knowing' rather than my 'religion' or 'God.'

“Hello Mark, I must admit I'm having trouble deciphering what you're saying here. On the one hand you say that you are continually searching for truth, yet on the other you claim to have found it in Jesus. I may be mistaken, but have never met someone who says that they've found something who is continuing to look for it. Please explain.

Also, I'm not asking that you pretend not to know something you feel you know, only that you agree that it's possible to be mistaken about something one thinks one knows.

In the absence of a response to my previous question about the fallible nature of human beings, I'll assume your answer to be sunshine and proceed accordingly.

Assuming that humans are by their very nature fallible and imperfect, how might you go about determining if you were mistaken?

It has been said that the most potent truths are vulnerable to disproof, yet not disproven. How is your belief in God vulnerable to disproof?"

"This is an interesting question Mark. How does a person determine that their faith is not another part of their inherent fallibility? You have stated that we need systems to help us overcome fallibility, how effective might faith be at performing this function? Are not millions of people using it to reach very different conclusions?

If you were mistaken in believing in God as a result of the human fallibility that you and I have agreed is inherent, how would you go about discovering this?

How are you and I to check our math and eliminate mistakes using faith?"

“‘Strong confidence based on evidence,’ is not faith. If you had evidence to increase a confidence level of anything, you can believe in it. I will say, however, that it also depends on the significance of the matter. For example, I have confidence that evolution is a fact. I don’t claim to be 100%, because that would be difficult to prove, but every additional piece of evidence increases my understanding of how evolution works. Science also makes predictions of what should be next, but most importantly, how new data could falsify the theory. Can the existence of God do that? If so, please show me.”

“Imagine if your assertion in confidence in evidence being the bases for faith. I don’t call that faith,

I call that justified belief...I can’t justify throwing evidence in there because it weakens the argument. So, if you did have evidence that would prove the existence of God, to everyone on earth, without having to believe first, that would be AMAZING. Don’t you think so? If not, you don’t think God is as important as I do. His existence would change the world. You couldn’t keep it to yourself.

Now, lets also assume, God was Jesus. Everyone else that doesn't believe in him is wrong, and you need to have the most powerful nation on earth come together to show the world that we are correct. "Here is the evidence" we would all say. They might not come willingly, but through the scripture and evidence based epistemology, they really wouldn't have a choice in what is true. We would know true things, and just try to show them. Also, WE WOULDN'T NEED FAITH. You might scream "HALLELUJAH" and I might too.

Again, let us see the evidence, pretty please."

"I have another comment to add. I do not argue that there might be a God that is both spaceless and timeless. If there is this God, what is the evidence that you claim to know that the God of the bible is true and not one of the thousands of other gods throughout history. Secondly, how is consistent accounts in the bible different from historical accounts in any other sacred text. Christianity claims to be the one true religion, but so does every other religion. Homer's Iliad and Odyssey supports historical facts, but we aren't searching for a petrified Medusa, mermaids, or praying to Zeus. I would venture that the belief in Christianity comes from the claim that Jesus existed, did miracles and was resurrected. The problem I have is that it has as much

believability as the accounts of Muhammad and the winged horse, or Joseph Smith's golden tablets. each of these examples are INTERNALLY coherent, in that they can explain themselves within the belief system, however, their foundation rests on faith (belief without evidence).

How do we jump from confidence to truth? I can be highly confident in something that is completely untrue. How do you know you are not mistaken? If I am mistaken, I would like to revise my beliefs. I don't claim to know there isn't a god, I don't have sufficient evidence to support the claim for any god."

"Imagine being ready to start from" I don't know" at any given time.

This is what is required by the scientific method. At any given time something we consider fact could be disproved and we would have to start over from square one.

Would you be willing to explore this state of being with me?

I have a proposition for you that I wonder if you might find interest in. Could we both start from the same place in the search of truth? Might we both start by saying "I don't know" and see what we discover?

I will say “I don’t know that God doesn’t exist” and you say “I don’t know that God exists” and we’ll go where the evidence leads us.

How does this sound to you? Thanks.”

“What if I told you that one moment of reason makes me happier than ten years of prayer, bible study, mission work and seeking God’s will ever could?

I’m curious to know how you’ve determined faith to be so reliable, aren’t you curious to know why not believing makes me so happy?”

Answers to Objections

Every Christian should be prepared to answer the objections of non-believers (Acts 22:1; Philippians 1:17; 1 Peter 3:15). Our responses will come from personal knowledge, understanding and experience acquired through study and practice, as well as our relationship with God through worship, prayer and obedience. Because our knowledge, understanding and experience are unique to each one of us, our answers will also be unique. Please keep that in mind as I share some of my answers to atheist objections. Think about how you might respond to similar objections in your own unique way.

“Discovering truth in Jesus Christ doesn’t mean the ‘truth’ journey is finished. In fact, it’s just begun.

Example: as children we learn the ‘truth’ about the number 1. 1 apple, 1 mother, 1 father, 1 sister, 1 house, 1 car, etc. We learn that adding two 1’s together ($1+1$) gives us 2 things ($1+1=2$). We learn another truth that if you have 2 things and remove 1 of the things ($2-1$), you are left with 1 thing. The number 1 is foundational to adding and subtracting. Denial of the number 1 will not help us better understand numbers since it is the foundation of the numerical system.

Believing that Jesus Christ is 'truth' is the foundation of spiritual knowledge. Denial of Jesus Christ will not help us better understand the spiritual world since He is the foundation of the spiritual world.

Yes, human beings are fallible. Thus, the need for disciplines and systems that help us overcome fallibility to grasp infallibility. Searching for 'infallibility' (the inability to be wrong) in the physical world doesn't lead to a 'find' of anything infallible. If nothing in the physical world is infallible, then everything and anyone can be wrong. If we are surrounded by nothing but 'fallibility,' then how do we know when something is right? If anything could be wrong, then how do we recognize 'right?'

Even as I would not deny the number 1 being necessary to an understanding of numbers, I would not deny Jesus Christ as being necessary to an understanding of truth. Having been an atheist, I understand how that sounds to atheists and why we often have difficulty finding common ground to discuss what is true.

Who said that 'the most potent truths are vulnerable to disproof' and what was the context? It's interesting that you believe a 'truth' could be disproved. Truth is what is true, so how can what is true be proved to be untrue? By what criteria? Do you have an absolute measure for what is true? Can what is true

become 'untrue?' If so, how? Thanks!"

"I used the math example as a demonstration of how we build on truth discovered. Once I know about the number 1 being part of the foundational structure of addition and subtraction, I don't need to regularly return to that truth to determine whether it is still true. Once we know that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we don't need to regularly return to that truth to determine whether it is still true.

"Let's say for instance that two different people are using the same method of adding one plus one and are coming up with two different answers, how could we go about determining which one of them is using the correct method?"

If two different people are using the 'same' method of adding one plus one, how would they come up with two different answers? I would think that one of them was using a 'different' method or had 'redefined' the terminology.

"Many different people are using the same method of faith and coming up with very different results."

Please give me examples of different people using the 'same' method of 'faith' who are coming up with 'very different' results?

I think what we'll find is that the people used 'different' methods or 'redefined' terminology, but I'd like to see your examples to know for sure.

“Also, if I'm reading the Bible correctly Jesus says, “I am THE way, THE truth, and THE life. If a person claims to have found THE truth, how could they then be still searching for it? Is truth a fixed place that can be arrived at?”

You are reading the Bible correctly. That is what Jesus said. People who believe what Jesus claimed about Himself, that He is THE truth, are not searching for 'another' truth or a 'different' truth. Jesus is THE truth. Just like the math example of building numerical knowledge based on the foundation of the 'number 1,' people who believe Jesus Christ is THE truth build on that foundation to discover more about truth. If I want to know the answer to $50+50$, I'm not turning my back on the foundation of the number 1. In fact, I'm using that foundation to help answer my question about $50+50$.

I believe 'truth' is a fixed place at which people can arrive. The number 1 is a foundational truth of mathematics. Jesus Christ is foundational truth of life. Both are truths in a 'fixed' place. We build on those foundations to learn more truth.

“How does a person determine that their faith is not another

part of their inherent fallibility? You have stated that we need systems to help us overcome fallibility, how effective might faith be at performing this function? Are not millions of people using it to reach very different conclusions?”

People first must know that their system for discovering truth works (e.g. truth is discovered). If their system does not work, then they are wasting their time trying to discover truth. They need to analyze their system (systems analysis) to make sure their system works as intended. That means taking their system apart and putting it back together. It's a basic principle of investigative journalism and many other disciplines.

Based on the way you have postulated your questions concerning 'faith,' it appears you think that everyone who believes in 'God' used the same method to come to that conclusion. Is that correct?”

“I remember sitting at the large RCA console in the radio studio and telling my audience that I was going to challenge God to prove Himself to be real by sitting in a chair across from me and answer my questions. I waited several seconds (dead air on radio feels like forever), then told the audience that God had not shown up and that He must be on vacation or under the weather. I laughed and opened the phone lines to a mob of

people who wanted to tell me I was going to burn in hell for what I had just done. What I didn't expect was for God to send someone to be a guest on my show a year later who would begin the process of presenting evidence that would lead to my quest for the truth about the existence of God. I wish I still had a tape of that show and others I did as an atheist.

I was skeptical during my investigation into the evidence for theism and Christianity because I didn't believe in the supernatural. I looked at all the evidence I could find and asked every question I could think of to get to the truth, but I didn't let go of my disbelief in the supernatural. That was my presupposition and as an investigative reporter I knew that presuppositions were dangerous to discovering the truth. I had to be open to the possibility that the supernatural existed. I didn't believe it existed, so that was something I had to struggle with during the investigation.

The journey I'm writing about in ['Convince Me There's A God'](#) is a look at the investigative process that led me to believe in God's existence. Because of my presupposition that the supernatural didn't exist, I looked at the evidence from a skeptical perspective. What I found through the study of archaeology and history was that the Bible was a credible compilation of ancient documents. That brought me to the life of Jesus Christ. Even though the ancient records indicated that a

man named Jesus lived in Israel during the 1st century AD, I didn't believe He did anything supernatural. It was after following the various biblical and extra-biblical historical evidences concerning Jesus' life, death and resurrection that the real possibility of the supernatural began to take shape. If Jesus rose from the dead, the other miracles attributed to Him were not out of the realm of possibility. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then, as Paul wrote, the Christian worldview fails."

"The starting point for my belief was when all my questions were answered. I started months earlier from the position of 'I don't believe.' It later became 'I don't know' or 'I'm not sure' as my investigation continued.

One of the people to whom I asked many questions about evidence asked me if there was any 'reason' why I shouldn't believe in Jesus Christ. I thought about that for a bit and realized I could not think of any 'reason' not to do just that. The answers I had received to my investigative questions were reasonable and that started my trust in the evidence I had seen.

The process I use to determine that the person standing in front of me exists is to believe my eyes. The process I use to determine that a man who lived two thousand years ago walked on water is to believe the evidence. If a man who lived two

thousand years ago and claimed to be the Son of God was raised from the dead and was seen by hundreds of witnesses before ascending into the sky, then something like walking on water would certainly be in the realm of possibilities.”

“I also have found happiness in the continual search for truth. However, my search is based on the Truth of Jesus Christ and not on something that is not known. Basing one’s life on truth creates an exciting foundation for discovering more truth at a deeper level. As Jesus said, ‘you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’ I have found great freedom in knowing the truth. It has opened a vast gold mine of knowledge and wisdom to investigate. As the Bible says, ‘Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.’ The combination of ‘deep diving’ the well of God’s Word and investigating the life we are living is a wonderful classroom and laboratory.

You asked me to meet you at the crossroads of uncertainty in order to proceed. I am very interested in continuing our conversation. However, I cannot pretend not to know something I know. I cannot be uncertain about what I am certain. I can move forward with you from my certainty to explore evidence, but not uncertainty. Is that acceptable to you? Thanks!”

What are your thoughts about the methods and techniques of street epistemologists? Are you and your children prepared to counter their 'intervention?' If not, then let's keep training.

Talking College Students 'Out of Faith'

Recognizing when a 'discussion' is really an 'intervention' is very helpful in Faith Defense, but that's the beginning of being 'on guard.' In addition to knowing 'why' street epistemologists want to talk with Christians (to talk them out of their faith), we also need to know 'what' they will do and say and 'how' they will do it.

We know that street epistemologists are targeting young people on college campuses because many of the street epistemology videos are shot on college campuses and they are trying to talk college students out of their faith. Here's a quick review of how they do it.

- Active listening
- Manifest empathy
- Establish a rapport
- Preach by example
- Mirror his speech
- Use the Socratic method

The examples of street epistemology shared above are based on an atheist responding to a theistic blog post. The theist presents a case for God and the atheist responds using some of the basic methods of

street epistemology. Things change when atheists start the conversation (aka 'intervention') on a college campus. They will often ask questions similar to – 'Tell me about your 'god' belief.' That's the beginning of the attack on a younger person's 'faith' in God. The street epistemologist won't voluntarily reveal their atheism and may not answer the question if asked. It's important to their method to hide their identity from the theist.

Some of the techniques street epistemologists use to talk young Christians 'out of their faith' are: (from streetepistemology.com)

Conceptual Clarification Questions — Why are you saying that? What does this mean? How does this relate to what we've been talking about? Can you give me an example?

Probing Assumptions — What else could we assume? How did you choose those assumptions? How can you verify or disprove that assumption? What would happen if ... ?

Probing Rationale, Reasons and Evidence — Why is that happening? How do you know this? Can you give me an example of that? Are these reasons good enough? How might it be refuted? How can I be sure of what you're saying? On what authority are you basing your argument?

Questioning Viewpoints and Perspectives — Another way of looking at this is ..., does this seem reasonable? What alternative

ways of looking at this are there? Who benefits from this? Why is it better than ... ? What if you compared ... and ... ? How could you look another way at this?

Probe Implications and Consequences — Then what would happen? What are the consequences of that assumption? What are the implications of ... ? Why is ... important? How does ... affect ... ?

Questions About the Question — What was the point of asking that question? Why do you think I asked this question? Am I making sense? Why not? What does that mean?

It's important to remember that street epistemologists are not trying to become your friend. They are trying to 'talk you out of your faith.' Here's how street epistemologists explain their purpose in talking with young Christians on college campuses:

"If you remain focused on faith and never succumb to the temptation of hurrying the process by trying to win the argument in an adversarial fashion, you will see him suddenly struck by doubt. The window will be wide open for a microsecond. Say nothing. Allow his brain take in a breath of fresh air. Your job is (almost) done. The seed of doubt and reason has been sown in his brain.

Now, it is up to him to decide how he wants to react to the embarrassment of being wrong. If he asks for help, help him. Otherwise, share an anecdote where you surmounted the awkward feeling of realizing a mistake.

Whatever happens, successful or not, always end the intervention on a positive note. Thank him for allowing you to revise your belief system and/or learn something new.”

Divorce Belief From Reality

The training manual for street epistemology includes trying to ‘uncouple the idea that the act of belief, the tenacity with which one holds a belief, and the epistemological system with which one holds a belief, and the epistemological system to which one subscribes, are moral virtues.’ (*A Manual for Creating Atheists*, Chapter 4)

Street epistemologists are taught that ‘faith is bundled with a moral foundation.’ They believe that many people ‘buy into the mistaken notion that faith is a virtue.’ As Peter Boghossian has stated many times – ‘the perceived association between faith and morality must be terminated.’

The ‘discussions’ that street epistemologists have with Christians and other theists are in reality ‘interventions,’ and as such have a goal in mind. The goal of street epistemology is not just to ‘talk people out of

their faith,' they want to replace faith with something else. It's part of the 'treatment.'

'As a Street Epistemologist, one of your treatment goals is to change the perception from faith being a moral virtue (similarly, the idea that belief in a proposition makes one a good person) to faith being an unreliable process of reasoning—that is, from faith being something to which one should morally aspire, to faith being a failed epistemology.' (Chapter 4)

Street epistemologists are taught a couple of basic methods of beginning the disassociation between faith and virtue:

- Redefine faith as 'pretending to know things you don't know'
- Stating explicitly that having faith doesn't make one moral, and lacking faith doesn't make one immoral

Motivational Interviewing

Street epistemologists use an interview technique known as 'motivational interviewing.' This is a technique that is also practiced by medical and psychological professionals and has been shown to be successful in dealing with alcoholics, substance abusers, and people with both health and psychological challenges.

Some of the methods of 'motivational interviewing' that street epistemologists are trained to use during 'interventions' with theists include: (from Chapter 4)

- Develop non adversarial relationships
- Help people think differently and understand what could be gained through change
- Meet people where they are and don't force a change
- Express empathy
- Go with resistance
- Tap into internal change behavior

We've already seen from streetepistemology.com these recommendations for 'motivational interviewing' during an 'intervention.'

- Listen actively
- Manifest empathy
- Establish a rapport
- Preach by example
- Mirror their speech
- Use the Socratic method
- Clarify conceptual questions
- Probe assumptions
- Probe rationale, reasons and evidence
- Question viewpoints and perspectives

- Probe implications and consequences
- Question them about the question

Diagnosing Christianity

Street epistemologists are taught how to 'make a diagnosis' to determine which 'change stage' a Christian or other theist fits. Here are the stages according to Peter Boghossian:

- Not ready to change
- Getting ready to change
- Ready to change
- Changing
- Sustaining Change
- Change completed

Street epistemologists are taught to 'meet the patient where they are' and that with experience they'll be able to make 'more accurate diagnoses' and then tailor their 'treatments to the subject's stage of change.' Interestingly, Boghossian calls the 'Change completed' stage as 'Termination.' He also says that 'fundamentalists' have given considerable thought to their beliefs, so this change model 'does not directly apply to them. He goes to say that they (fundamentalists) are 'often suffering from an as yet unclassified cognitive disorder.' (Chapter 5)

Street epistemologists look at 'apologists' as the most troubled of theists. Boghossian wrote – 'The more intelligent and articulate the

apologist, the more conspicuous and epistemologically enfeebling the confirmation bias.' He goes on to write that everyone suffers from some form of confirmation bias (Bogossian includes himself) and admits that when he reads the work of apologists he finds himself 'incredulous and in a state of perpetual marvel that intelligent, thoughtful people could seriously entertain such hokum.'

It's important when talking with a 'street epistemologist' to remember that they view belief in God as a 'virus' and theists as 'hosts' for the virus. The goal of street epistemology is to 'separate the virus from the host.' In other words, 'talk people out of their faith.'

Think about how you might respond to a street epistemologist who attempted to talk you or a friend or family member 'out of faith.'

What's a Parent (or Grandparent) to Do?

You've seen the reports ...

About 70% of Christian youth leave the church after high school and 80% of those teens said they had no plans during high school to leave their church (LifeWay Research, 2007). Research showed that most of the dropout took place between the ages of 17 and 19. The majority of teens in the study said they stopped going to church because they no longer saw it as important to their life. Some eventually return to church attendance when they have children of their own, but many do not.

Less than 0.5% of the young adult population in the United States has a biblical worldview. (Barna Group Research, 2009)

I started questioning Christianity at the age of 12 and left the 'faith' of my parents at the age of 17 (I say my 'parent's faith' because it was never my faith). Within one year of leaving the church I was an atheist. Unfortunately, that is the story of hundreds of thousands of Christian families in North America and Europe.

That fact makes the disguised 'interventions' of street epistemologists even more dangerous because the Church has not equipped children and young adults to know *why* they believe *what* they believe.

In this final section of our special series, *Street Epistemologists – On Guard*, we will share the **5 Steps to Faith Defense** that will help prepare your children and the children in your church to face the enemy head on.

Step 1 – Be Aware

“And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there.” Acts 14:5-7

Paul and Barnabas were bold in traveling from city to city preaching the Gospel, but they were also ‘aware’ of their surroundings. Because they were aware of the potential for violence against them, they ‘became aware’ of a specific threat and fled Iconium for Lystra and Derbe.

Some Christians today live in parts of the world where violent attempts against them are a constant danger (e.g. Africa, Asia, Middle East) and tens of thousands have had to flee for their safety. Though we don’t face that overwhelming threat of physical violence in North America yet, the potential is there. However, the kind of ‘violence’ that our children do face every day is ‘spiritual.’ As Paul wrote to the Ephesians –

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:11-12

How does this work in a Christian family and church? Who is responsible for putting on the ‘armor’ of God on children and teens and training them how to use it?

If we read Ephesians 6:11-18 in the context of the last half of the ‘letter’ Paul wrote to Christians, we will find the answer is clear and easy to understand:

- Christians should walk respectfully and honorably toward each other in light of the respectful and honorable way in which God called us.
- Christians should demonstrate their respect for each other in a spirit of humility and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with each other in love, working hard to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- Jesus gave special leaders to the Church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the primary purpose of training Christians for their ministries, for the building up of the Body of Christ until everyone comes to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God; until every Christian is spiritually mature and no longer immature because of the

- effective working by which every part of the Body does its share, causing the Body for the building up of itself in love.
- Christians should no longer live like non-Christians, but should put away anything that resembles their previous life as an unsaved person, including deceitful lusts, and become what God called them to be in true righteousness and holiness.
 - Christians should stop lying to each other and speak the truth in a loving way.
 - Christians should not sin when they're angry because that gives Satan a hold on their emotions and actions.
 - Christians should not steal, but work with their hands and give to people in need.
 - Christians should not speak words that tear down people, but say those things that build up people.
 - Christians should not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
 - Christians should put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, loud and confusing speech and words that have an evil intent.
 - Christians should be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave them.
 - Be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ has love us and gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God.
 - Walk as children of light because we are light in the Lord (even though we were once darkness).
 - We need to walk carefully and wisely, buying up every opportunity that comes our way, because the days are evil.

- We need to understand what the will of the Lord is and be controlled by God's Spirit.
- We need to God for all things all the time.
- We need to submit to one another in the fear of God.
- Wives should submit to their own husbands in the same way they submit to the Lord and husbands should love their wives in the same way Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. Husbands should love their own wives as they love themselves.
- Children should obey their parents in the Lord because that's the right thing to do
- Fathers should not provoke their children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

It's obvious from the context of Paul's letter that the responsibility for training children and teens belongs to parents and the responsibility for training parents belongs to gifted church leaders. That training begins with helping children and teens understand the dangers they face as Christians (e.g. the world, the flesh, the devil – Ephesians 2:1-3) and the importance of being 'on guard' against the 'wiles of the devil' (Ephesians 6:11).

Be Aware of The Power of God

A vital part of the early lessons of training children how to 'be aware' of spiritual dangers is to teach them to **be aware of the Power of God**. Paul wrote this to Christian parents and church leaders:

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Ephesians 6:10

Our saved children are also 'children of God.' Just as they have a human father and mother, they have a Divine Father, Savior and Comforter. Just as Christians parents 'provide for and protect' their children, our Heavenly Father 'provides for and protects' His children, and that includes our children.

I find that promise incredibly comforting because God is All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Everywhere-Present at the Same Time, and Never Changing. Not only is God everywhere at all times, He also sees everything, knows everything and can do anything He wants to do. God is with our children when we can't be with them. He can provide and protect them in ways we cannot because of His Perfect Character and Unlimited Power. That's why Paul wisely wrote, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Instead of just teaching our children Bible 'stories,' we need to teach them the overarching STORY of the Bible: that God is Sovereign in

the Universe. Rather than our children just knowing the stories in the Bible, they need to understand why God tells us those stories. The Bible is God's Story about Himself. The individual stories in the Bible reveal the Character and Will of Almighty God. That's what our children need to know before they leave home to face the world.

Step 1 of Faith Defense is to 'Be Aware.' It reminds me of how Jesus answered the verbal attacks of the Sadducees – "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Matthew 22:29-30) Our children need to understand those two things to effectively face the attacks of the world on their Faith in Christ: the Scriptures and the Power of God. It begins with 'awareness' of the importance of God's Word and the knowledge of His Power to provide and protect our children.

"I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies." Psalm 18:1-3

Step 2 – Beware

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”
Colossians 2:6-8

God knows exactly what His children are going to face during their lifetime on earth, so His Spirit inspired a select group of men to write God’s Word in documents that would be preserved for centuries. Each document (known as Scripture) represents a different historical, geographical, sociological and spiritual situation facing God’s people.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Christians in the ancient city of Colossae, located in Asia Minor, during one of his imprisonments (e.g. Rome, Caesarea). Though Paul had never visited Colossae, he knew a lot about the challenges Christians faced there from his friend Epaphras.

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to

you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.”
Colossians 1:4-8

Paul quickly addressed attacks on Christianity by reminding the Colossians about the *preeminence* of Christ and *reconciliation* in Christ. Paul also stated clearly that ‘warning’ Christians was a primary purpose of his service to God and them.

“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Colossians 1:28

The word ‘warning’ in the Greek is *nouthetountes*, which means ‘to put in mind, admonish, exhort, warn.’ The words *nouthetountes* (warn, admonish, exhort) and *didaskontes* (teaching) describe the activity of *kataggellomen* (preaching, announcing). ‘Preaching’ the Gospel of Jesus Christ includes both ‘warning’ and ‘teaching.’ They complement each other and are necessary to complete the whole duty of preaching.

Unfortunately, and to the severe detriment of the health of tens of millions of Christians and hundreds of thousands of churches, modern preaching often excludes *nouthetountes* (warning, exhorting,

admonishing) and *nouthesia* (admonition, warning). What many preachers and teachers do not understand, apparently, is that they cannot cut biblical 'preaching' in half and throw away the less popular 'warning' half. True 'preaching' cannot just be about teaching without 'warning, nor can it be just about warning without 'teaching.' The Gospel message comes as a 'whole' and cannot be presented as Truth without warning 'and' teaching. Anything less than the Truth is .. not the truth. Anything less than the Gospel is .. not the Gospel.

I'm reminded of Paul's admonition to Timothy almost 2,000 years ago – words that should continue to ring in the ears of everyone who calls themselves a 'minister' of the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

2 Timothy 4:2-4

The words *noutheteo* and *nouthesia* belong to Pauline writings in Scripture. Here are the 11 occurrences in the Greek New Testament. Look at how important 'warning' is in Christian preaching, and please

be sure to read them in context so you can see how they fit into Paul's overarching purpose for each.

"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." Acts 20:31

"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Romans 15:14

"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you." 1 Corinthians 4:14

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." 1 Corinthians 10:11

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4

"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Colossians 1:28

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns

and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:12

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” 1 Thessalonians 5:14

“Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” 2 Thessalonians 3:15

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.” Titus 3:10

‘Warning’ Christians to *Beware* is an vital part of any ‘preaching’ ministry. If we’re not ‘warning’ God’s people, we’re not ‘serving’ God’s people – not in the complete sense that God defines as service. In fact, I would go so far as to say that any ministry that excludes or downplays ‘warning’ as part of its message is performing a ‘disservice’ to its audience. Unfortunately, that audience is massive and growing in size daily. I’m reminded of what James wrote about the teaching/preaching ministry: “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

(James 3:1) [May those words cut us to the core if we teach God's people.]

Why Christians Need To Beware

Paul first told Christians in Colossae that they should 'walk' in Christ in the same way they had 'received' Him: "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." Then, Paul warned the Colossian Christians about the danger of 'cheaters': "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

This is Paul's preaching methodology presented in just a few sentences: Teaching and Warning. I 'highly' recommend this method to all parents, teachers and preachers.

Teaching

- Walk in Christ in the same way you received Him
- Rooted and built up in Him
- Established in the faith, as you have been taught
- Abounding in it with thanksgiving

Warning

- Beware of cheaters
- Cheating through philosophy
- Cheating through empty deceit
- Cheating through the tradition of men
- Cheating through the basic principles of the world
- Cheating 'not according to Christ'

As we look at Paul's method of preaching (teaching and warning), we see that nothing has really changed from the middle of the 1st century AD to the early part of the 21st century AD. We still need to walk in Christ in the same way we received Him. We still need to be rooted and built up in Him. We still need to be established in the faith, as we were taught (or should have been taught). We still need to be abounding in our faith with thanksgiving. We need to beware of cheaters who would cheat us through philosophy, empty deceit, the tradition of men, the basic principles of the world, not according to Christ.

What do you see that we should no longer be doing? What do you see that we shouldn't be doing with our children and teens? What do you see that we shouldn't be doing with our young adults? What do you see that we shouldn't be doing in our churches? What do you see that we shouldn't be doing in our large and small Christian

gatherings? I don't see anything that has changed in the past 1,900+ years since Paul wrote the Colossian believers, other than the sad fact that many Christian parents and many Christian preachers and teachers no longer follow the biblical method for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am sadly aware that many Christians are not interested in following the biblical model for preaching. I am also happily aware that more and more Christians are realizing how the weakness of modern preaching has led us to the brink of disaster morally and spiritually. The way back will not be easy and will most likely be filled with pain and suffering, but 'warning' with 'teaching' is the only way back for the Church to 'walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.'

The purpose of this complete model of biblical preaching is that we 'may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.'

"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Colossians 1:28

The word 'warning' is a translation of the Greek word *noutheteo*, which means 'to put in mind, warn, admonish, exhort.' The word 'teaching' is a translation of the Greek word *didaskontes*, which means 'teach, direct, give instruction, admonish.' The word 'perfect' is

a translation of the Greek word *teleion*, which means 'mature, having reached its end, finished, complete in all its parts, full grown, of full age.'

Let's expand our view of Paul's warning to the Colossian Christians to see how it can help parents and church leaders deal with the many challenges our children face today.

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."
Colossians 2:6-8

The word beware is a translation of the Greek word *blepo*, which means 'to see, to look at, to perceive, to discern, to take heed against, to watch, to be careful, to consider, to be on guard against.' Greeks used the word in a similar sense to our yelling to a friend to 'look out!' because we see something bad is about to happen to them. We warn a friend because we care about them physically. We should also warn people because we care about them spiritually.

One of the reasons I've been drawn toward the ministry of 'apologetics' since I was saved is that God used apologists to reach

me with the Gospel. Many other Christians preached ‘at me,’ but none could ‘reach’ me until men skilled in Christian apologetics answered my many questions with evidence and patience. Another reason I’m drawn to apologetics is that it is a ‘complete’ method of preaching the Gospel. Apologists both ‘warn’ and ‘teach’ Christians and non-Christians. If the ‘warning’ aspect is removed from apologetics, it is no longer biblical. If the ‘warning’ aspect is removed from preaching, it is no longer biblical. If the ‘warning’ aspect is removed from teaching, it is no longer biblical. Preaching must include ‘warning’ along with ‘teaching every man in all wisdom.’

Beware of Cheaters

Christians in the city of Colossae faced the challenge of ‘cheaters.’ They were non-Christians who attempted to ‘cheat’ the Colossians through ‘philosophy and empty deceit’ that came from ‘the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.’

As we will soon see, this method of cheating Christians has not changed in the more than 1,950 years since Paul wrote his Colossian letter.

‘cheat’ – sulagogon = ‘robbing, plunder, to carry off as spoil, to make spoil of, lead captive, make a slave, make victim by fraud, seduce’

Paul did not use the word ‘cheat’ in the sense of a school boy looking

over the shoulder of another student and 'cheating' by copying their answers. This word was used for robbing someone by *plundering* what they had and taking them *captive through seduction*. [Read more about 'cheaters' in this [GraceLife blog post](#) from earlier this year.]

Paul 'warned' that these 'cheaters' carried out this plundering of Christians through the seduction of 'philosophy and empty deceit.'

'philosophy' – philosophias = love and pursuit of wisdom, friend of wisdom

On the surface, that doesn't sound bad – 'love and pursuit of wisdom.' Who wouldn't want to be known as a 'friend of wisdom?' It has a nice ring to it. However, Paul's warning has to be connected to 'according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.' The danger lies there.

'empty deceit' – kenes hapates = trick, guile, like riches. The idea here is of something that is devoid of truth. Empty deceit is futile and fruitless.

'tradition' – paradosis = that which is handed down ... traditions 'of men' are dangerous because they look to the changing ideas and interpretations of men rather than the unchanging doctrine (teaching) of Jesus Christ.

'basic principles' – stoicheia = rudimentary teachings, elementary rule, elemental spirits

'world' – kosmos = 'belonging to the sphere of material and external things, worldly affairs, earthly adornments'

I'm reminded of the Scriptures that warn us about the great deceiver, Satan, the 'god of this world.'

"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:3

"And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." 1 Timothy 2:14

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Revelation 12:9

"He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished." Revelation 20:2-4

“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Revelation 20:10

Satan is the ‘power’ behind the deception the Colossians faced and the deception our children face today. These ‘deceivers’ deceive young people with ‘words’ that are both **empty** and **persuasive**.

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” Ephesians 5:6

“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.”

Colossians 2:1-5

“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” 2 Timothy 3:13

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” 2 John 1:7

Paul’s Response to the Deception of Philosophy

Both of these, *philosophias* and *kenes hapates*, were descriptive of the philosophical systems of the ancient world. Colossae was part of the Roman Empire and would have been impacted by the many different philosophies at work in the empire at that time. While some scholars believe the primary philosophical deception in Colossae was Gnosticism, other scholars believe it came from the Epicureans. Neo-Platonic and Jewish philosophies have also been presented as problems for the Colossians.

Three of the most important schools of philosophy active in the Roman Empire during Paul’s time were the Stoics, Skeptics, and Epicureans.

The philosophical deception at work in Colossae was a great concern for Epaphras and for Paul. Watch carefully at what Paul told the Colossian Christians. We would do well to follow Paul’s pattern when helping our children and the children in our churches deal with the philosophies of the world.

First, Paul told the Colossians how he prayed for them:

- you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding
- you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God
- strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy
- giving thanks to the Father

Second, Paul reminded the Colossians about what God had done for them:

- who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light
- He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love
- in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins

Third, Paul reminded the Colossians about the true Nature of Jesus Christ, their Savior and Lord:

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation
- by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him
- He is before all things, and in Him all things consist
- He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence
- in Him all the fullness should dwell
- by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross

Fourth, Paul reminded the Colossians who they were before God reconciled them to Himself through Christ, what the sacrifice of Christ meant to them, and the importance of continuing to do what God had called them to do.

- who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works
- yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through

death

- to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight
- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard

Paul compared both Greek philosophy and Jewish legalism with the purity of freedom in Christ .. and philosophy and legalism failed. As Paul wrote in Colossians 2, 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' are hidden in Christ. It is vital to our children's spiritual future that they have a 'high view' of Christ. That is contrary to the 'low view' of Christ preached in thousands of churches today, but the view of the New Testament is of the Supremacy of Christ. Any view lower than 'Supreme' is dangerously wrong.

As for legalism and the process of deserving or earning salvation, Paul reminded the Colossians that God nailed all of our sins and failures to the Cross, disarming Satan and his dark powers, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them. Salvation is 'by grace through faith and that not of ourselves.' Grace is getting what we don't deserve and 'not' getting what we do deserve.

Our Deception Today?

The philosophies facing our young people today are many and varied. This is a short list of some philosophies popular during the last several generations:

- Absurdism
- Actualism
- Agnosticism
- Analytic Philosophy
- Anarchism
- Animism
- Asceticism
- Atheism
- Buddhism
- Confucianism
- Cultural Relativism
- Cynicism
- Darwinism
- Deconstructionism
- Denialism
- Eastern Mysticism
- Ecocentrism
- Empiricism
- Existentialism
- Foundationalism
- Hedonism

- Hegelianism
- Hinduism
- Humanism
- Idealism
- Individualism
- Kantianism
- Logical Atomism
- Logical Positivism
- Logicism
- Marxism
- Materialism
- Modernism
- Monism
- Moral Dualism
- Moral Relativism
- Moral Skepticism
- Naturalism
- Neoplatonism
- New Age
- Nominalism
- Nihilism
- Objectivism
- Pandeism
- Panentheism
- Pantheism
- Phenomenalism

- Platonism
- Pluralism
- Possibilism
- Postmodernism
- Pragmatism
- Progressivism
- Quantumism
- Rationalism
- Relativism
- Scientism
- Secularism
- Simulism
- Skepticism
- Structuralism
- Taoism
- Transcendentalism
- Transmodernism
- Universalism
- Utilitarianism

Even though I was taught monotheism (Christianity) as a child and youth at home and church, it had little impact on what I believed about reality. Writers like Bertrand Russell, David Hume, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Thomas Huxley, René Descartes, Robert Ingersoll, Charles Darwin, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zhuang Zhou, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau influenced my thinking as a teenager in profound ways. I wandered through Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Agnosticism, and finally to Atheism.

Do you know what books your children are reading? What they like to watch on TV? What they read on the Internet? What music they enjoy? Do you know what your children's friends believe? As we engage with our children and know what they are thinking, feeling and believing, we can help address worldview concerns early in their lives.

What's a Child to Do?

So, what do we tell our children to do when friends and teachers come at them with the world's philosophies?

- **Don't** let anyone judge you
- **Don't** let anyone cheat you of your reward
- **Don't** let anyone subject you to their rules and regulations – they may have the 'appearance' of wisdom, but they are of no

eternal value

- **Do** hold fast to Jesus Christ – He will nourish you, protect you, build you up and give you a great reward

What's a Parent or Church Leader to Do?

Look for 'signs' that your children or the children in your church are 'wandering' through philosophies (ways of thinking and knowing) that are contrary to the 'teaching of Christ.' Ask children and teens questions appropriate to their age and experience and help them understand the true meaning of what they're reading, watching, and hearing. Our children need to hear the 'truth' from us because they may not hear it from anyone else.

[More great insights into true wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, Book of Job, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and the Psalms. Reading to your children and grandchildren from those Wisdom writings will help counter the 'philosophy and empty deceit' of this world.]

Our children and teenagers are in danger – spiritual and physical. As parents, grandparents and Christians involved in the lives of children and youth, we have a God-given responsibility to protect them. How do we do that and what tools does God give us for that work?

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people ... Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’” Deuteronomy 4:5-6, 9-10

How often should we teach our children God’s Word? At least once a week during church, right? God says we should teach our children every day.

“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Deuteronomy 6:7

Where do we begin? What is the first lesson our children need to learn?

“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” Psalm 34:10

The ‘fear’ of the Lord is the first lesson – “The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7a) – and an important part of the last lesson – “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

From the beginning to the end, we need to **be prepared**.

Step 3 – Be Prepared

Once we understand the importance of Being Aware and Beware (Steps 1 & 2), we can move to the *Third Step in Faith Defense* – ‘**Be Prepared.**’ The meaning of being prepared is ‘to be ready beforehand for some purpose.’ So, let’s first look at the *purpose* for preparing our children in Faith Defense.

Purpose

Ask yourself this question – “why do I want my child to believe in Jesus Christ?” Your answer reveals a great deal about your theology and methodology in ministering to children. We posed that question to some of our friends on Facebook and Google+:

“I have taught my children the truth about every other part of life; I want them to know the truth about Jesus Christ also.”

“In Jesus, there is hope. Without Him, there will be periods of hopelessness for my child. Since my goal is to raise up capable adults who will undoubtedly weather many of life’s storms, it is my duty to instill in them a firm belief in the Reason For Their Hope, to the extent that I am able. That, and I don’t want them to rot in Hell.”

“He is how we know God is real, keeps his promises over long periods of time, and died for us & rose to life again to show he loves us no matter what and wants us to live forever with him.”

“He is the only One who can give my child eternal life and a life on Earth with any purpose and true satisfaction. He alone can give my child a worldview that makes sense and makes life worth living.”

“Because Truth Matters...”

“There is no other way for them to be saved from their sin and have the hope of heaven. I want them to have their names written in the Book of Life, but I am not the one to pen them in. Only Jesus can do that.”

And of course there is the powerful purpose of bringing glory to God. Children and teens who become Christians have the great opportunity to glorify God through their love for and obedience to God.

Preparation

The idea of ‘preparation’ is to get ready for an event or undertaking before it happens. We prepare for lots of things in life: school, work, a test, meeting a goal, the weekend, a trip, marriage, funeral, etc. Preparation is simply the act of preparing, being ready. Joshua told the army of Israel to ‘be ready’ to fight the people of Ai (Joshua 8:3-4). Jesus told His disciples that they needed to ‘be ready’ because He would return ‘at an hour you do not expect’ (Matthew 24:44).

People who know something will or may happen are not ‘ready’ just because they have that information. Being ‘ready’ means taking the steps necessary to ‘prepare’ for the event. If I know that I’m going to march in parade with a band in two weeks but don’t attend band practice and don’t work on the part I will play on my own time, I won’t

be 'ready' to participate in the parade. What happens to students who don't show up for class or employees who don't show up for work? They don't get to participate in class events and don't get paid. Being 'ready' for an event means being involved in each step of the process of preparing for the event.

Christian parents may 'want' their children to believe in Jesus Christ and not deny His existence, but what are we doing on a regular basis to 'prepare' our children to believe in Jesus Christ and never deny His existence? What are we doing to make sure our children are 'ready' to face the attacks that will surely come from non-Christians?

Steps for Preparation

I may 'want' to be in Ireland right now, but if I 'really' want to be in Ireland I will have to take many 'steps' to get there. I will need a passport, airplane ticket, hotel reservations, time off from work, luggage, money, transportation to the airport, etc. 'Wanting' something and actually 'having' something are not the same thing. Getting where we want to be is a 'process' that includes 'steps.'

'Wanting' something good for our children is a good first step. We 'want' our children to believe in Jesus Christ and continue to believe in Him for the rest of their lives. But what do our children 'want?' When children are young they usually 'want' what their parents want. If parents believe in Jesus, children will usually 'believe' in Jesus.

However, when children are older they often ‘want’ what they want and that may not include believing in Jesus. Parents need to ‘prepare’ children during early childhood and through middle and older childhood and the teen years to ‘believe’ in Jesus Christ the rest of their lives. That’s not an easy task given the many deceptions of this world. No matter how closely we hold our children when they are young, there are many other people and life events that will impact their thinking and beliefs as they grow older. Plus, there is ‘the enemy’ of Faith – Satan.

Step One – Pray. Keep praying. I don’t know anything more powerful than praying for children. I will never forget my mother telling me that I would become a Christian one day and that she was praying for me. I was an atheist when she told me that and my response to her was, “Me? A Christian? Don’t count on it!” My mother did count on the power of prayer and I became a Christian within a year. Trust God with your children. Pray unceasingly for your children.

Step Two – Tell your children the truth. It’s important that parents and Christian leaders tell children the truth from early childhood. The ‘truth’ you tell your children should always be age appropriate, but be sure to stay ahead of what children are going to hear from friends, parents of friends, teachers, and other ‘influencers’ in your child’s life. That includes media they will see, hear and read. The more you are aware of ‘who’ and ‘what’ are influencing your child’s beliefs about life and reality, the better you will be able to guide them ‘into all truth.’

Step Three – *Be open to your children's questions.* Be sure to develop an atmosphere in your home and church where children are comfortable asking questions, especially the tough questions about God, the Bible and faith in Christ.

Step Four – *Keep watch over your children.* The 'enemy of the soul' often attacks without warning and when our children are most vulnerable. Christian parents and church leaders must be vigilant to see the dangers when our children don't and to both protect them and teach them how to protect themselves. One of the best lessons we can teach our children is how Satan deceives and the weapons he uses in his deception.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8

Step Five – *Teach your children how to be wise in this world.* Here is some of the best advice you can share with children. Notice the 'action' verbs that will help your children stay on the right path throughout their lives: 'keep, put away, look, ponder, establish, do not turn, remove.'

"My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; For they are life to those who find

them, And health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.” Proverbs 4:20-27

Step Six – *Help your children understand the power of relationships.* Christian parents often underestimate the power of relationships in their children’s lives – until it’s too late. This includes other children along with adults. We have a saying in martial arts that ‘ you can be attacked anywhere, at anytime, by anyone.’ That is also true when it comes to spiritual attacks. Children need to learn how powerful relationships are and will continue to be during their lives. Every new relationship is an opportunity for good or evil, so the wise person will use ‘discretion’ to protect them from the wrong kinds of relationships that can lead them to dangerous places physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Oh, and one of the primary lessons our children will need to learn that being a Christian means living life ‘differently’ than non-Christians. It’s hard for children and teens to ‘stand out’ as different their friends, so it’s important that Christian parents and church leaders to help them deal with the differences.

“When wisdom enters your heart, And knowledge is pleasant to your soul, Discretion will preserve you; Understanding will keep you, To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who

speaks perverse things, From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice in doing evil, And delight in the perversity of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, And who are devious in their paths; To deliver you from the immoral woman, From the seductress who flatters with her words, Who forsakes the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God. For her house leads down to death, And her paths to the dead; None who go to her return, Nor do they regain the paths of life—So you may walk in the way of goodness, And keep to the paths of righteousness.” Proverbs 2:10-20

Step Seven – *Love your kids no matter what.* Children will test their parents. You did it with your parents. I did with mine. If you aren't there yet, believe me when I say that times of testing will come. They will come. Remember Step One – Pray and keep praying – and love your children with all the love God gives you for them. Love really is the 'greatest.'

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ... And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13

Resources for Families

There is a step that actually comes before Step One above and that's parents and church leaders preparing themselves to tell the truth and answer the tough questions. Here are some great resources designed to help you prepare yourself and your children to Defend the Faith.

(Copy and paste URL codes into your browser if clicking on the links does not work for you)

Parents, Children and Teens

[Truth Matters: Confident Faith in a Confusing World,](#)

[http://www.amazon.com/Truth-Matters-Confident-Faith-](http://www.amazon.com/Truth-Matters-Confident-Faith-Confusing/dp/1433682265/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1432914884&sr=8-1&keywords=truth+matters)

[Confusing/dp/1433682265/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1432914884&sr=8-1&keywords=truth+matters](http://www.amazon.com/Truth-Matters-Confident-Faith-Confusing/dp/1433682265/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1432914884&sr=8-1&keywords=truth+matters) Andreas J. Kostenberger, Darrell L.

Block, Dr. Josh Chatraw ... [Truth Matters – Leader Kit](#)

<http://www.lifeway.com/Product/truth-matters-leader-kit-P005647991>

[True for You, But Not for Me: Overcoming Objections to Christian](#)

[Faith](#) [http://www.amazon.com/True-You-But-Not-](http://www.amazon.com/True-You-But-Not-Overcoming/dp/0764206508/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1404070356)

[Overcoming/dp/0764206508/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1404070356](http://www.amazon.com/True-You-But-Not-Overcoming/dp/0764206508/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1404070356) Paul Copan

[Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History,](#)

Philosophy, and Science http://www.amazon.com/Evidence-God-Arguments-History-Philosophy/dp/0801072603/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=8-1&qid=1406175757 Michael Licona, William A. Dembski

The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus
http://www.amazon.com/Case-Resurrection-Jesus-Gary-Habermas/dp/0825427886/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1404070574 Gary R. Habermas , Michael Licona

Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels http://www.amazon.com/Cold-Case-Christianity-Homicide-Detective-Investigates/dp/1434704696/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1404070662 J. Warner Wallace

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Step 4 – Be Ready

Imagine coaching a high school football team. You've taught your team members the fundamentals of football. They know what a football looks like. They've thrown the football, kicked the football, run with the football. They've learned how to wear a football uniform. They know how to put on a football helmet. They know how to put on football pads. They know how to put on football socks. They know how to put on football shoes. They know the rules of the game. They've learned how to huddle, how to line up on the field, how to block, how to pass, how to run, how to play together as a team. You've divided them into practice teams so they know what it's like to play the game of football. You've done everything you can to prepare them to play the game. Now it's up to the team members to play the game of football against real opponents from another high school.

However, on the night of the first game several players show up late and some don't show up at all. The players who do come to the game are obviously not ready to play. They go to the field instead of the locker room. They aren't wearing uniforms. They're wandering around the stands talking to friends. None of them are on the field ready to play. They seem oblivious of the fact that there's a game scheduled

that night. You have to forfeit the game because your players are not ready to play.

The best training and coaching in the world won't mean much if your children and teens aren't 'ready' to defend the Christian worldview in their family, in their neighborhood, in their school and at their job.

Ready for Battle

“In the Lord I put my trust; How can you say to my soul, ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain’? For look! The wicked bend their bow, They make ready their arrow on the string, That they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart. If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?” Psalm 11:1-3

King David and the people of Israel understood that they were in a constant battle with the many enemies who surrounded them. While the real possibility of physical attacks were certainly on their minds, David knew that something even worse was close by – the attacks of wicked people against those who are upright in heart. As David wisely asked – “If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?”

What are the foundations of Christianity? The existence of God? Reliability of Scripture? The reality of Jesus Christ and His life, death, resurrection, ascension, advocacy before the Father, imminent return? The Apostle Paul went so far to say this is the ‘foundation’ of

Christianity:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:19-22

The Christian worldview is built on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles and prophets. Thinking back to what David wrote in Psalm 11 – “The wicked bend *their* bow, They make ready their arrow on the string, That they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.” The wicked of this world are aiming their attack at Christian families and churches: children, youth and adults. What is their goal? To destroy the very ‘foundations’ of the Christian worldview – “If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?”

For just a moment, let’s remember what started this series about Street Epistemology. Peter Boghossian, author of ‘A Manual for Creating Atheists’ and chief promoter of what he calls ‘Street Epistemology,’ tweeted about an article I wrote titled [‘Breaking Down Street Epistemology.’](#) Here’s what Boghossian wrote:

“These attempts to discourage people from being honest, less dogmatic, & more humble, will fail.

[http:// faithandselfdefense.com/2015/01/18/breaking-down-street-epistemology/](http://faithandselfdefense.com/2015/01/18/breaking-down-street-epistemology/)“

Within minutes of Boghossian tweeting that I began receiving comments on my post from atheists, some of them practicing street epistemologists. Their goal was to talk me out of my ‘Faith’ in Jesus Christ. Boghossian is a strong proponent of that goal and wrote a book about it.

“This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith. You’ll learn how to engage the faithful in conversations that help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their beliefs, and mistrust their faith. I call this activist approach to helping people overcome their faith, ‘Street Epistemology.’ The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason.” (A Manual For Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Chapter I, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013)

Keep in mind that Boghossian is writing and lecturing and leading atheists to talk our children and grandchildren out of their belief in

Christ. This is personal.

As you are reading this, what Christian foundations do you see under attack? God? The Bible? Jesus Christ? The family? The unborn? Marriage? The sanctity of life? Freedom of religion? Freedom of speech? Each one is a 'foundation' of the Christian worldview and each is under severe attack.

Fighting the Battle

While it is important that we understand the 'danger' of these attacks, let's not forget that God has given us great spiritual resources to deal with them effectively.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the

shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Ephesians 6:10-18

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.” 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

*“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”
1 Peter 5:5-11*

“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:17-18

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1

Notice carefully the advice of Christ’s apostles. We must help our children to ‘Be Ready’ for the attack of the ‘wicked’ on the ‘foundations’ of Christianity. Here’s what they MUST DO. Parents, I highly recommend you print these, place them around your house and read to your children and explain their meaning often.

- Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might
- Put on the whole armor of God
- Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit
- Being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints
- Younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders
- Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God
- Cast all your care upon Him
- Be sober

- Be vigilant
- Resist the devil, steadfast in the faith
- Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God
- Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Children grow up fast – too fast in my opinion. Christian parents and church leaders have limited time to help children prepare for the attacks of the wicked. We need to help our kids ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’ The wicked of this world are aiming their attack at the the Christian worldview and we must help our children ‘be ready’ for those attacks.

“If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?”

We’re getting close to the end of this series about the **5 Steps of Faith Defense**, so let’s quickly review what we’ve learned so far.

First, an understanding of why the need for ‘faith defense.’

“Street Epistemology is a vision and a strategy for the next generation of atheists, skeptics, humanists, philosophers, and activists ... Enter the Street Epistemologist: an articulate, clear, helpful voice with an unrelenting desire to help people overcome their faith and to create a better world—a world that

uses intelligence, reason, rationality, thoughtfulness, ingenuity, sincerity, science, and kindness to build the future; not a world built on faith, delusion, pretending, religion, fear, pseudoscience, superstition, or a certainty achieved by keeping people in a stupor that makes them pawns of unseen forces because they're terrified." A Manual for Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Chapter 1, pg. 22, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013

Peter Boghossian and many atheists who agree with him are part of a growing number of street epistemologists committed to talking people 'out' of their belief in God. As Boghossian told fellow atheist Sam Harris – “My primary goal was to give readers the tools to talk people out of faith and into reason.” (Sam Harris Blog)

The problem with that statement is the atheist belief that 'faith' is based on something other than 'reason.' Christianity, for example, is based on evidence and a reasonable belief in the power of that evidence. Atheists don't agree with that statement, but their disagreement doesn't make the statement less true. Any statement that is true is true no matter who doesn't believe it is true. That is the power of logic and reason.

Atheist Jerry Coyne is a big fan of Boghossian's book:

'Up to now, most atheists have simply criticized religion in

various ways, but the point is to dispel it. In A Manual For Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian fills that gap, telling the reader how to become a 'street epistemologist' with the skills to attack religion at its weakest point: its reliance on faith rather than evidence. This book is essential for nonbelievers who want to do more than just carp about religion, but want to weaken its odious grasp on the world." Sam Harris Blog

Notice what Coyne, Boghossian and other atheists believe about religion (specifically Christianity). They believe Christianity's weakest point is 'its reliance on faith rather than evidence.' I always find that a bit amusing because the Christian 'faith' is founded on evidence. Many former strong atheists, including myself, became Christians because of the strong evidence for Christianity. Belief in God and Jesus Christ is both reasonable and logical.

Step 5 – Be Quick

Students in a self-defense class learn they have less than five seconds to mount an effective defense against an aggressive attack. Knowing all of the four steps to self defense leading up to an actual attack are of no use unless the response is quick. All of the hours of training in self defense come to the ultimate test during a real attack. An effective physical response to a physical attack will usually happen in the first three seconds of an attack. Someone trained well in self defense can strike/kick an attacker multiple times while

throwing them to the ground in three seconds or less. If necessary, the defender can follow up with a devastating second and even third wave of self defense movements if the first wave doesn't complete the mission of stopping the attacker.

So, how do we teach the concept of 'quickness' in Faith Defense?

Gain control of the discussion, if possible.

Understanding the 'Hard' Attack

Street epistemologists (atheists) will use a number of techniques to control the conversation from the beginning. Atheist techniques often include 'swarming' and 'steamrolling.' That's where they throw so many accusations or objections at the Christian worldview that the Christian is not able to respond to any particular point the atheist is making.

A Christian who is aware, prepared and ready can counter 'swarming' and 'steamrolling' by simply stopping the attack and calmly requesting that they discuss one point at a time. The 'key' is to move quickly:

Street epistemologist – 'You Christians have no evidence, there's nothing true in the Bible, it's all made up, a bunch of

legends and fairy tales, god doesn't exist, Jesus never lived, you don't have one shred of evidence to prove that Christianity is true, I can't believe you would fall for that trash ...'

Christian – "Please .. I'd love to talk with you about this. Let's take one of your objections about Christianity at a time and discuss the evidence for each one.'

Street epistemologist – "Christianity doesn't have any evidence, that's what I'm trying to tell you, it's all lies, the Bible is based on corrupted texts written by people who lived hundreds of years after Jesus, and Jesus wasn't a real person any way, he's a myth based on the dying and rising gods of Greece and Rome ...'

Christian – "I'd love to talk with you about the evidence for the life of Jesus Christ. Let's pick one of your objections and talk about that, then we can move on to the next thing."

It's at that point it will become obvious whether the street epistemologist is interested in 'discussing' evidence for the Christian worldview or just wants to 'rant.' If the atheist is agreeable to talking about one point at a time, you may be able to have a respectful and beneficial discussion.

If you are not able to gain control of the discussion, leave the door open for future discussion.

A street epistemologist who isn't interested in really 'discussing' Christianity now may be interested in the future. Leave the door open to talk at another time. That's especially important if the atheist is a family member, friend or someone at work or school. Treat them the way you'd want to be treated: with respect and consideration.

Understanding the 'Soft' Attack

Another technique of street epistemologists is called 'opening windows to aerate closed minds' (Street Epistemology.com). The basic techniques include:

- Meet him (person of 'faith') at his window
- Speak softly, in a non-threatening fashion
- Make him talk about the reasons why he believes faith is the pathway to truth

Street epistemologists are taught that if the 'person of faith' has not opened his or her heart to them, they should do these three specific things:

- Active Listening: Listen to his side and make him aware you're

listening

- Manifest Empathy: Get an understanding of where he's coming from and how he feels. Tell him you know he wants to be a decent person, as everybody else, you included.
- Establish a Rapport: Empathy is what you feel. Rapport is when he feels it back. He starts to trust you.

Street epistemologists are told that 'Only then you've earned the right to proceed with the next steps of the invention. Don't hurry him. Don't skip any steps. Be confident that the time will come when he will feel the need to not have that piece of glass between him and you.'

That leads to the next steps in the street epistemology system:

- Preach by example
- Mirror his (person of faith) speech
- Use the Socratic method

In self defense terms, we would call this a 'soft attack.' Because it is a softer method of attacking a person's Christian worldview, Christians often don't recognize it as an *attack* and don't move quickly to a 'faith defense' position.

Street epistemologists will move through several attack 'stages' on their way to leading Christians to doubt or question their beliefs. They

often include a series of questions as part of their attack. Here are some of them as taught at Street Epistemology.com.

- Why are you saying that?
- What exactly does this mean?
- How does this relate to what we have been talking about?
- What is the nature of ...?
- What do we already know about this?
- Can you give me an example?
- Are you saying ... or ... ?
- Can you rephrase that, please?

The next attack stage might be in the area of 'probing assumptions' to get the Christian to think about presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs. You might hear questions like these:

- What else could we assume?
- You seem to be assuming ... ?
- How did you choose those assumptions?
- Please explain why/how ... ?
- How can you verify or disprove that assumption?
- What would happen if ... ?
- Do you agree or disagree with ... ?

Another attack stage is to probe the 'rationale' for their beliefs. Those questions might include:

- Why is that happening?
- How do you know this?
- Show me ... ?
- Can you give me an example of that?
- What do you think causes ... ?
- What is the nature of this?
- Are these reasons good enough?
- Would it stand up in court?
- How might it be refuted?
- How can I be sure of what you are saying?
- Why is ... happening?
- Why? (keep asking it — you'll never get past a few times)
- What evidence is there to support what you are saying?
- On what authority are you basing your argument?

Another attack stage is to question a Christian's viewpoints and perspectives. Examples might include:

- Another way of looking at this is ..., does this seem reasonable?
- What alternative ways of looking at this are there?

- Why it is ... necessary?
- Who benefits from this?
- What is the difference between... and...?
- Why is it better than ...?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?
- How are ... and ... similar?
- What would ... say about it?
- What if you compared ... and ... ?
- How could you look another way at this?

Street epistemologist then might probe implications and consequences. Questions of the questions might be like these:

- Then what would happen?
- What are the consequences of that assumption?
- How could ... be used to ... ?
- What are the implications of ... ?
- How does ... affect ... ?
- How does ... fit with what we learned before?
- Why is ... important?
- What is the best ... ? Why?

You might also hear these questions about questions. It's another attack stage.

- What was the point of asking that question?
- Why do you think I asked this question?
- Am I making sense? Why not?
- What else might I ask?
- What does that mean?

Street epistemologists are trained to 'remain focused on faith and never succumb to the temptation of hurrying the process by trying to win the argument in an adversarial fashion.' (Street Epistemology.com) They are looking for that moment when a Christian is 'suddenly struck by doubt.' Street epistemologists are taught to 'say nothing' while 'the seed of doubt and reason has been sown in his brain.'

What happens next?

'Now, it is up to him to decide how he wants to react to the embarrassment of being wrong. If he asks for help, help him. Otherwise, share an anecdote where you surmounted the awkward feeling of realizing a mistake. Whatever happens, successful or not, always end the intervention on a positive

note. Thank him for allowing you to revise your belief system and/or learn something new.' Street Epistemology.com

The correct response to any attack, whether hard or soft, is to be 'quick.' Be quick to understand that you are under attack and quick to respond to the attack.

Responding to Street Epistemologists

We should be ready to respond to street epistemologists and anyone else who wants to talk with us about God, the Bible and Jesus Christ, at any time. Jesus sent His disciples into the world to preach the Gospel to everyone. The Apostle Paul said God has given Christians the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ and made us “ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us.” The Apostle Peter said Christians should “always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Every Christians have the obligation and opportunity to talk with people about ‘embracing reason and faith.’

With that as our goal, here are *7 Basic Rules for Responding to Street Epistemologists*.

#1 – Be in Prayer

Engaging atheists or any non-Christians in a discussion about the supernatural Gospel MUST include engaging in supernatural prayer.

There are at least four prayers Christians should pray as part of talking with non-Christians about the Gospel of Christ.

Prayer 1 – Pray that God will guide you to talk with non-Christians about the Gospel of Christ because He loves them and you love them

Prayer 2 – Pray as you begin talking with non-Christians that God will give you a sharp and nimble mind and the right words to share

Prayer 3 – Pray as you talk with non-Christians that the Holy Spirit does what only He can do in convicting them of sin, righteousness and judgment

Prayer 4 – Pray regularly for the non-Christians after you speak with them that God will draw them to Himself and convince them of His love for them and their need to be reconciled to the God who loves them

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” Colossians 4:2-4

#2 – Be Loving

Jesus placed every encounter between Christians and non-Christians into the proper perspective when He said – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) As ambassadors for Christ we are speaking for Christ and

communicating His message to people. Jesus said that message is about God's love for the world and how He demonstrated His love for the world 'in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

Love is not an option. If we are going to represent Jesus Christ as ambassadors, we WILL love people because Jesus loves people. What did Jesus mean when He said He loves people? He meant that He loved them so much He would 'die' for them—and die He did.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." John 10:11

#3 – Be Confident

We can be confident in the evidence for the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible and that the credibility of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Being a Christian has nothing to do with closing your eyes and taking some big 'leap' of faith. It has everything to do with looking at the substantial amount of historical evidence for Christianity and walking forward boldly in confidence.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1

#4 – Be Humble and Kind

You've heard the saying, 'there but for the grace of God go I.' We have every reason to be humbled. Salvation is by grace, not by works. Every Christian is fortunate that God gives us what we do NOT deserve and does not give us what we DO deserve. We who were 'dead' in trespasses and sins are now 'made alive' in Christ because of God's love and mercy. Keeping that in mind at all times, we have every reason to be humble and kind as we talk with non-Christians.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22

#5 – Be Clear

We need to speak with clarity to people who don't believe in God. Our speech should be logical, reasonable and rational. Our defense (*apologia*) should be the best we can present. We are ambassadors for Christ. Our answers and arguments should be clear and concise, leaving no questions unanswered.

“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt,

that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

Colossians 4:5-6

#6 – Be Patient

Patience is an important aspect of ‘faith defense’. The Apostle Paul said that some people plant and others water, but God gives the increase. The ministry of apologetics is sometimes planting, sometimes watering, but God will bring His Truth to bear on the hearts and minds of unbelievers and lead them to Himself. Trust God, speak the truth in love, and be patient.

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” 1 Timothy 6:11-12

#7 – Be Available

One of the things you’ll notice about many of the testimonies of atheists who have become Christians is that someone was ‘available’ to them. Most atheists I know who became followers of Jesus Christ were influenced by one or more people who were loving, kind, knowledgeable, patient and available. I remember with great

appreciation the availability of Christian apologists in my life as I was investigating the truth claims of the Bible and Christianity. No matter what was going on in their lives, they were always available to spend time with me and answer the hundreds of arguments and questions I threw at them. Be available to your children and teach them the importance of being available to unbelievers, even when it's not the convenient thing to do.

Communicating with Street Epistemologists

Communication occurs when all parties involved have **heard** each other, **understood** each other, and can **respond** to each other in ways that are both heard and understood. That's easy to say, but how do we know when we've arrived at true communication with another human being? Is it when I say something to someone? Is it when I say something to someone and they say something back to me that sounds like we're talking about the same thing? Or is it something else entirely?

Christians are called to do many things: love, serve, confess, forgive, pray, submit, speak, represent, preach, teach, admonish, persuade. Our goal is more than someone hearing what we're saying. Our goal is even more than being heard and understood. Our goal is to represent God and persuade people about God's message to them (2 Corinthians 5). Persuasion leads to a 'decision point' where the person with whom we are communicating makes a decision about what we are saying. Their decision may be to agree with God about their sinfulness before Him and welcome His forgiveness through Christ. Their decision may be to disagree about their sinfulness before God and walk away from His offer of forgiveness through Christ. Their decision may also be to 'think about it.'

Not everyone we talk to about the Christian worldview is going to agree with us. Jesus explained that beautifully when He explained to His disciples about the parable of the sower. Jesus said that a sower went out to sow seed and it fell in four locations: by the wayside, on stony places, among thorns, and on good ground. The Lord told His disciples that some people will hear the 'word of the kingdom' and not understand it. Some people will hear the word and immediately receive it with joy, but endure for only a while. Some people will hear the word, but become unfruitful because of the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. Some people will hear the word, understand it, and bear fruit. While Jesus is the original Sower of the Word, we are involved in a similar ministry as His representatives in this world.

In each of those four examples of 'sowing' the Gospel, only one group of people heard the 'word' and understood it, and those were the people who bore spiritual fruit. However, that's not the end of the story. Jesus told His disciples another parable.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it

have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Matthew 13:24-30

This reminds us that we have an enemy who is actively involved in opposing our ministry of preaching the Gospel and persuading people to hear, understand and bear fruit. Satan is involved in sabotaging the good work of Christ in the world and will oppose us as well. God allows both wheat and tares to grow up together until the harvest. It is at the great future harvest when God will divide the wheat from the tares: the tares burned and the wheat gathered into ‘my barn.’

Responding to street epistemologists is more than just interesting conversations with people who think differently than us. This is truly a life-and-death matter of eternal significance. We should do our best to represent God in a way that demonstrates the ‘power’ of the Gospel.

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord,

we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” 2 Corinthians 5:9-11

With these important aspects of ministry in mind, I'd like to share 4 *Basic Methods of Responding to Street Epistemologists* based on this idea of communicating with the objective of hearing, understanding and persuading.

1 – Ask Questions

When someone says something to you, or in response to something you say to them, it's natural to want to 'speak declaratively.' That's the process of making a claim or assertion. However, that's often not the best method for 'communicating for understanding.' Asking questions helps bridge the gap between 'hearing' and 'understanding.'

“I heard you say you don't believe God exists. Why not?”

“I heard you say there's no evidence for Jesus being a real historical person. Why do you say that?”

“I heard you say that the disciples of Christ were hallucinating when they claimed they all saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion. Why do you say that?”

“I heard you say that you are a Mormon. What does a Mormon believe?”

“I heard you say you believe in ‘karma.’ What is karma?”

Telling a person what you heard them say is an assurance to them that you heard them correctly or is a cue that you misheard them. If they think you misheard them, they can restate their point and you can repeat it to assure that your question is appropriate to the context and meaning of their statement. Based on how they respond to your question, you may have comments or follow-up questions.

The key in asking questions is to understand what the person you are speaking with means by what they said. If they mean one thing and you think they mean another, your conversation will probably go in a bad direction. Asking questions will help you know that you are responding to what someone really believes. The love of God will guide you in asking the right questions.

Another reason for asking questions is to get to the **root** of why people say what they do. Here are examples of some common objections. Think about what questions you might ask in each situation. Keep in mind that the purpose of asking questions is to deepen the communication.

Atheist – “Christians are just stupid to believe the Bible.”

Christian – “Why do you believe that?”

Atheist – “Because they are.”

Christian – “I understand that you think Christians are stupid to believe the Bible, but what brought you to that conclusion?”

Atheist – “A loving God would never let people suffer.”

Christian – “Why not?”

Atheist – “Suffering is bad, so anyone who would allow suffering is bad.”

Christian – “How do you define ‘love’ and suffering’?”

Atheist – “Christians are judgmental?”

Christian – “Is that your judgment of Christians?”

Atheist – “I’m not judging anybody. Christians are the ones who judge.”

Christian – “How do you define judging?”

Atheist – “There is no absolute truth.”

Christian – “Is that true?”

Atheist – “Of course it’s true!”

Christian – “If, as you say, there is no absolute truth, how can you support the truthfulness of your statement?”

Atheist – “Christians are intolerant people and they frustrate me.”

Christian – “Are you being tolerant of Christians?”

Atheist – “Of course I am! It’s Christians who are intolerant.”

Christian – “How do you define tolerance?”

Atheist – “Jesus never existed. He’s a myth.”

Christian – “How do you know that?”

Atheist – “Everybody knows that! Christians made up Jesus.”

Christian – “Do you have evidence that Christians ‘made up’ Jesus?”

Atheist – “I do.”

Christian – “I’d love to go through the evidence with you.”

The purpose of asking the questions in these scenarios is to learn why the atheist believes what he believes and to move from confrontation to communication. Asking the right questions at the right time in a discussion can lead to deep communication that results in people realizing the powerful evidences for believing in God and the Christian worldview.

2 – Answer Questions

A good conversation will include questions from everyone involved. It is a demonstration of true engagement in a discussion and helps ensure a fair exchange of ideas. If you are talking with someone about spiritual matters for several minutes and notice that the person has not asked you any questions, stop for a moment and see what questions they may have for you.

“Thank you for answering my questions. Do you have any questions for me?”

If the person has no questions for you, it may be because they are not engaged in the discussion, think they understand what you mean, or that their opposition to your position is so intense they do not want to know what you mean. Ask them a question to find out what questions they may have for you.

"I'm curious what questions you have for me."

The goal is to build the best communication possible with people. Each party asking and answering questions for understanding is an excellent way of doing that.

It almost goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway), answer the questions asked of you to the best of your ability. If you are not sure of how to answer someone's question, be honest and let them know you will think about it and get back with them. Christians should be interested in knowing and speaking truth, so there's no reason fudging an answer when you're not sure.

3 – Speak Truth

Christians believe they know the truth. Jesus said He is the Truth, so anything a Christian believes must be the truth since all Christians know Jesus. Right? That wasn't even true during the early years of Christianity, so we know it's probably as bad or worse today.

Something I hear a lot when talking with atheists about Christianity is how can they believe anything we say when we don't even agree with each other (Christians with Christians). Good point. If we're going to be involved in representing God on earth, we need to know what's true about Christianity.

Speaking the truth means we have to 'know' the truth before we speak it. I recommend that Christians who want to be involved in an apologetics/evangelism/discipleship ministry should have a good understanding of the truth from 'primary' texts. That includes the writings of the prophets and apostles and people who trained with the apostles. The idea of a 'primary' text is that it was written during the time under study. If you want to know what Christians believed and practiced during the 1st century AD, read the writings of Christians who lived during the 1st century AD (e.g. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, Paul, Clement of Rome). I've also found it helpful to read the writings of Christians who lived during the 2nd century AD to see what they believed and practiced as well (e.g. Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr).

4 – Reason with Logic

Christians are often accused of being 'unreasonable' and 'illogical' in the way they think and the way they speak. Unfortunately, those accusations are sometimes true. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be that way.

Jesus is called the 'logos' (word, reason) of God (John 1:1). The idea of the Greek word logos is of a collecting or collection of thoughts in the mind that are expressed in words. It's the process of reasoning in the mind first, followed by speech.

The Apostle Paul was said to have 'reasoned' with people as he shared the 'good news' of Jesus Christ. Using logic and reason was one of Paul's primary methods for 'persuading' people in many contexts about the Gospel of Christ.

"Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'" Acts 17:2-3

"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Acts 18:4

"And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Acts 19:8-10

"And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning

the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Acts 24:24-25

"Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!' But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.' And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." Acts 26:24-29

Study the words of Jesus Christ and His apostles to see how they used logic and reason as they talked with people, especially people who opposed them. Also study the writings of Christian apologists during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD when Christians were undergoing extreme persecution and the writings of current Christian apologists and those from the past 100 years. Watch how they build logical arguments and reason with non-Christians.

5 – Finish with Hope

The Gospel of Christ is a message of 'hope.' The early Christians included that message in their communication with non-Christians. The Apostle Paul told Governor Felix that he had 'hope in God' that there will be a 'resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.' (Acts 24:15). Paul told Christians that the 'riches of glory' of the Gospel message was "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27) 'Paul referred to 'hope' more than 40 times in his letters to churches and Christian leaders. It was a primary theme for the apostle.

The Apostle Peter spoke of the 'living hope' Christians have 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' Peter called that hope 'an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'" (1 Peter 1:3-5). Peter also told Christians to be ready to give a defense (apologia – reasoned answer) "to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:15) The context of the 'hope' Christians have to give a reasoned defense is because of the 'resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'

The Apostle John, writing in the context of the future resurrection of Christians because of the past resurrection of Christ, wrote that

“everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3)

Christians are a ‘people of hope’ and should therefore be hopeful. Demonstrating that hope should always be an important part of our sharing the Gospel message with non-believers. The hope that we experience now ‘can be’ their hope as well.

Keep in mind that good communication involves much more than following a formula or format. You are doing far more than just (1) asking a question, (2) answering a question, (3) speaking truth, (4) reasoning with logic, and (5) finishing with hope. You are ‘communicating’ at the deepest level possible .. mind to mind, heart to heart, soul to soul, life to life. There is no more important communication than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is truly ‘life changing.’

Putting It All Together

7 Basic Rules for Responding to Street Epistemologists

#1 – Be in Prayer

#2 – Be Loving

#3 – Be Confident

#4 – Be Humble and Kind

#5 – Be Clear

#6 – Be Patient

#7 – Be Available

5 Basic Methods for Responding to Street Epistemologists

1 – Ask Questions

2 – Answer Questions

3 – Speak Truth

4 – Reason with Logic

5 – Finish with Hope

Completing the Circle

Let me complete the circle we began at the beginning of this study. We responded initially to comments by Peter Boghossian and other street epistemologists about the goal of street epistemology being to 'talk people out of their faith.' Dr. Boghossian tweeted about our article ([Breaking Down Street Epistemology](#)) and we heard from many street epistemologists who questioned us about our thoughts concerning defending the Christian worldview. That led to this special series about understanding what street epistemologists are doing, why they are doing it and how Christian parents can prepare their children and teens to talk with atheists about Christianity. Bottom line: **be on guard.**

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