

# Sharing the gospel with skeptics – Dr. Neil Shenvi

## I. The post/modern worldview

**A. Naturalism** - Nature is all that exists: miracles do not exist, spirits do not exist, God does not exist.

1. Naturalism is a metaphysical position, not a scientific position
2. *Methodological naturalism* is the assumption that supernatural entities won't interfere with experiments.
3. The success of *methodological naturalism* does not imply that *metaphysical naturalism* is true
4. Challenging naturalism:
  - a) What is 'nature'? Rocks? Magnetic fields? Energy? Wavefunctions? Quantum strings?
  - b) How do you know that nature is all that exists? How do you know that all real objects can be measured? Can wavefunctions be measured? Can propositions like 'the sky is blue' be measured?

**B. Relativism** - Good and evil are human constructs. Nothing is objectively right or wrong

1. Relativism is a metaphysical claim, not a conclusion based on evidence
2. Challenging relativism:
  - a) Does scientific disagreement mean science is false?
  - b) If morality is relative, what does it mean to work for a 'better society' or to oppose 'unjust' laws?
  - c) CIPHER's challenge: if you were offered whatever you wanted in exchange for committing a moral atrocity and having your memory of it erased, would you do it?
  - d) Amorality pill: if you were offered a pill which would destroy your ability to feel negative moral emotions like guilt or shame while leaving all pleasurable emotions intact, would you take it?

**C. Scientism** - Science is the only way to know truth. All truth can be known through science.

1. Scientism is demonstrably false because it is self-refuting.
2. Challenging scientism:
  - a) Is the principle that "all truth can be known through science" known through science?
  - b) How do we know mathematical truths like "1+1=2" or metaphysical truths like "other people have conscious experiences" or moral truths like "murder is wrong"?

**D. Pluralism** - All religions are equally true

1. Religious pluralism does not refer to loving people of different faiths, but denying that religion is exclusive
2. Religion is often described in terms of the blind men and the elephant: no religion has the whole truth
3. Challenging pluralism:
  - a) Have you ever considered the parable of the blind men and the five household objects?
  - b) How do you know that all religions are equally true?
  - c) If certain religions claim to be exclusively true, are they false? On what basis do you make that judgment?

## II. Engaging the post/modern worldview

### A. The God who is there

#### 1. God's existence changes everything

- a. God is the paradigm of goodness, love, holiness, justice, and compassion
- b. God created the universe and mankind to display His glory
- c. The purpose of our life is to know God and love him
- d. God will judge the world

#### 2. The God of the Bible is a revealing God

- a. If God exists, then he could make himself known
- b. If the God of the Bible exists, then he desires to make himself known to mankind

#### 3. God reveals himself both through general and special revelation

- a. Since God created the universe, he is reflected in creation albeit unclearly and nonverbally
- b. If Scripture of any kind exists (the Bible, the Qu'ran, the Book of Mormon), then God reveals himself in words, not just in mystical experiences

#### **4. Jesus is God's ultimate revelation**

- a. If God is personal, then the ultimate revelation that God could provide would be a person
- b. As God himself, Jesus fully reveals God's character

### **B. Who is Jesus? Lord, Liar, Lunatic, Legend**

#### **1. The gospels present generally reliable accounts of Jesus' words and deeds**

- a. **Manuscript evidence.** The NT is the best-attested ancient document that we possess (5000 NT manuscripts vs. 1700 manuscripts of Homer's Iliad; 300 years between the composition of the NT and the oldest complete manuscript vs. 1600 years for the Iliad).
- b. **Archaeological evidence.** Numerous archeological finds corroborate the existence of places, terms, and historical figures mentioned in the NT (burial box of Caiaphas and James, synagogue at Capernaum, etc...)
- c. **Corroborating evidence.** Numerous non-Christian authors provide corroboration for major and minor statements made in the NT (Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius)
- d. **Internal evidence.** The NT documents contain internal evidence for their reliability such as multiple attestation, inclusion of embarrassing details, reliance on personal accounts and eyewitness testimony

#### **2. Jesus made claims that would have been absolutely horrifying for anyone to make but God**

- a. He claimed to forgive sin (Mk. 2:1-12, Mt. 9:2-8, Lk. 5:18-26, John 8:1-11)
- b. He claimed to be the only way to God (Matt. 11:27, Lk. 10:22, Jn. 14:6)
- c. He claimed that he could heal the sick and raise the dead (Matt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22, Jn. 5:28-30)
- d. He claimed that we must love him more than our family or our own life (Mt. 10:37, Lk. 14:26)
- e. He claimed that he would return at the end of time to judge humanity (Mt. 19:28, Matt. 25:31, Jn. 5:28)
- f. Notice that these passages are taken from all four gospels and throughout Jesus' ministry

#### **3. Therefore, Jesus is either God or he was a criminally insane and evil**

### **C. Christianity is unique in its understanding of sin and salvation**

#### **1. If objective moral values exist, then by any normal standard I am an utter moral failure**

- a. I fail to live up to the own moral standards I had as a child
- b. I abandon the moral standards I claim to hold deeply when they conflict with my personal gratification
- c. I fail to live up to the objective moral standards of atheist philosophers like Peter Singer or Sam Harris
- d. I fail to live up to the moral standards prescribed by various world religions
- e. I fail to live up to the moral standards prescribed in the Bible
- f. I fail to live up to the moral standard set by Jesus to "Love God with my whole heart and love my neighbor as myself" which he said is the essence of God's law

#### **2. Jesus alone offers complete forgiveness and acceptance to moral failures**

- a. Jesus alone does not pretend that we are not radically evil
- b. Jesus alone offers complete forgiveness for those who are radically evil
- c. Jesus alone offers to transform my heart (i.e. my will, mind, and emotions)
- d. Jesus alone claims that my hope for forgiveness, acceptance, and transformation rests not on my own goodness, but entirely on the work of another

**D. Questions:** If Jesus appeared to you in an undeniable way and told you that the Bible was true in all it said, what would be your reaction? Would you gladly submit to Jesus' teaching and turn your whole life over to his lordship? Would you rush out to tell your friends about the forgiveness you had received in Christ? If not, doesn't this mean that intellectual issues cannot be the only reasons for your rejection of Christianity?

### **III. Practical tips**

**A. Preparation:** Learn apologetics. Learn theology. Live out the gospel. Love your neighbor. Pray.

**B. Expectations:** Recognize worldview issues. Be patient. Attempt great things, expect great things.

**C. Attitude:** Ask questions. Be humble. Admit ignorance.

**D. Topics:** Point to Jesus. Point to the gospel