

15 Answering Skeptics



FOR ALMOST THREE YEARS, GEORGIA AND MARK worked together at the front desk of the beachfront hotel. Mark was a married father of three young children, and had been at the same job for nine years. His warm personality won fans among the guests from the first moment he waited on them, and his problem-solving, guest-soothing skills were legendary. Mark could turn a ranting angry alcohol-fueled desk-pounder into a groveling, grateful, and meek person almost effortlessly. Mark was also the go-to person of faith in the complex. Anyone who had a struggle came to Mark for prayer, and sometimes help.

Georgia, on the other hand, was eager to move up the ladder, and three years in the same job frustrated her. She couldn't understand why Mark turned down opportunities to move up, offers she would have killed to get herself. During downtimes Georgia liked to needle Mark about his faith. It wasn't that she was anti-faith, it's just that she was so sick of the "self-righteous rants of the public televangelists," as she put it, that she didn't want to have anything to do with Christianity. Raised in a tepidly religious household, Georgia preferred to dabble in faith, picking a little Buddhism here, a little New Age there, and even mixing in some Christianity when it suited her own interests.

Sometimes, though, Georgia asked serious questions, and Mark was careful to take the time to think carefully about his responses. When he didn't know an answer to a particular question, he was also careful not to

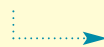
guess, or to say he was guessing when he did occasionally venture an opinion.

One day, Georgia showed up at Mark's home, visibly upset. She had been out of town for her grandmother's funeral, and while there, had been present when the pastor visited the family. During the visit, Georgia thought the pastor had spent too much time trying to find out whether her grandmother "was saved." Georgia spit the term out as if it were a curse. When the pastoral visit was over, she walked the pastor to his car and challenged him.

Fire in her eyes, Georgia told Mark what the pastor had said. "I'm sorry if I offended you," he started, "but your grandmother never attended services, and only once or twice did I have the chance to meet her before she went into the nursing home. We never had the chance to talk about heaven or her faith in Christ, and since your family has asked me to do the funeral, I felt like I needed to understand that."

Georgia exploded as she recounted the story to Mark. "How could he even THINK my grandmother isn't in heaven! What kind of a God would send a gentle old woman like that to Hell!" She was standing up, breathing hard in anger. Mark and his wife waited for her to settle down, then started to answer the questions they knew were coming.

What should Mark and his wife say to Georgia?



Scripture Passages

I Corinthians 13:1

I Peter 3:15

II Timothy 2:14-15

II Timothy 3:16–4:5

Psalms 119:11

Psalms 119:105

Job 12:1-12

Job 13:1-12

Job 16:1-5

Job 19:1-22

Job 26:1-4

Job 42:7-9

Luke 23:8-12

Luke 1:1-4

Study

List some tough questions you hear from non-Christians.

What are some tough questions you or other Christians sometimes ask?

Christians should rarely be surprised by tough questions from skeptics in their workplace. The hard questions have been asked before and are the same ones we'll hear again, so the real problem isn't the questions but our preparation.

When Peter says in I Peter 3:15 that we should "always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in us," he isn't being rhetorical. We know what questions are out there. Being ready to give an answer is a call to action.

Using the following Scriptures, describe key steps in being prepared to answer skeptics about your faith.

I Corinthians 13:1-3

I Peter 3:15

II Timothy 2:14-15

II Timothy 3:16–4:5

Psalms 119:11

Psalms 119:105

We've learned in the passages above that we are called to study. We cannot teach what we do not know. What kinds of study aids are available? Besides the Scriptures, what other kinds of study aids do you use?

Edith and Francis Schaeffer's ministry, L'abri, is built on engaging difficult questions. Their writings are a tremendous source of information and encouragement. So are the works of Peter Kreeft, John Stott, and Norman Geisler. What other authors might group members benefit from reading?

So the first step in answering skeptics is to be prepared for the questions we know are coming. In the passages of Job listed at the head of this lesson, Job's friends illustrate the second major point: It's better to be silent when we don't understand. Discuss the passages in Job you read in preparation for the class. What were the effects of the friends' speeches?

How did God view their words?

Read Luke 23:8-12. Why do you think Jesus was silent before Herod? Would it have made any difference if He had not been silent? What can we learn from this in answering skeptics?

And finally, we are commended throughout Scripture to teach what we've learned of Christ. How might that prepare us to answer skeptics?

Testifying to the work of Christ in our own lives is something we're experts on. No one knows better than we do what Christ has done and is doing for us. The ring of authenticity that emanates when we're talking about something we know soothes even the harshest of skeptics.

Because most of us work more than we do anything else, the skeptics we encounter are often likely to be our coworkers. No answer we give will take root unless it's borne out by its evidence in our life. Think about an area that needs work in order for you to be a stronger example of faith in Christ to those you encounter at work. Commit this to Christ and work on it!

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- We can't teach what we don't know. Study is the first prerequisite in being able to answer questions the critics ask.
- We shouldn't be surprised by the tough questions skeptics pose. They're the same ones we ask.
- When we answer skeptics, our goal must not be proving them wrong, but rather filling them with the truth. Our motivation must be love.
- Guessing at answers isn't helpful. When we don't know, we should be silent.
- The one part of our faith where we're the experts is our testimony—what Christ has done and is doing for us.