



General Topics :: The bible and college education

The bible and college education - posted by DEADn (), on: 2012/1/12 16:01

This is a topic that has made me tremble at times. My wife took some bible course in college as part of her degree. She shared a few things with me on it that disturbed me but always emphasized about the 'scholarly' belief about things in the bible. I wonder, how much can a person trust in the scholar position on anything in the bible?

I told my wife that I sort of fear that if I took any bible courses in college I might become an agnostic only because of the holes that can be generated using biblical text and history. In this way I am more of a fundamentalist-meaning if there are things in the bible that are not right then what am I doing using it as biblical truth?

Wife and I got in a small discussion about religious beliefs as a result of a question on Jeopardy. It dealt with the Great Flood that was recorded by a king of the Summerians- Gilgamesh? I asked the question- Is that flood a local flood or a world wide flood. I wanted to reference it to Noah's time. My wife said that every religion takes a piece from another religion and that is how it is built up. Meaning, this writing of the Flood was there before the bible was written. I thought, if this is the case, Wicca claims to be the oldest religion-does this mean it is truer because it is older than the rest as it claims?

This is just one thought that went through my head. Other things deal with the historical context of scripture and who wrote what and why. I have never done an in-depth study on what makes the bible true and I wonder if I should, yet I wonder if it would cause me to doubt the bible as a whole.

Does any of this make sense?

What do you think of this?

Re: The bible and college education - posted by pilgrim777, on: 2012/1/12 19:54

Brother,

I believe if you have the Holy Spirit you will believe the Bible. I deal with Agnostics and Atheists all the time whose idols are Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris and Dennett and try as they may with arguments that you are mentioning and many others, God always has an answer.

If I don't know an answer to their questions I just tell them I don't know the answer and brother, remember this: the fact that you don't know the answer does not invalidate the Scriptures. Let God be true and every man a liar.

The "New Atheism" is different from the past and they have new strategies, but an old source (Satan).

I have been told that the Holy Spirit is just my intuition and how do I know it is God talking to me. Or how do you know who is a true or false Christian? Or, they say they are more moral than the God of the OT, because He killed women and children and they would not have done that. It can be very challenging but they have not caused me to doubt any of the Bible. I just dig in and look for an answer because I know God has one. I don't believe the Bible blindly, either as they say I do. I really get before the Lord to get these answers. Their challenges have actually made me dig harder than I normally would.

The Bible is the only Book in the entire world where you have to know the Author to understand the Book.

Rest in Him and trust in Him,
Pilgrim

Re: The bible and college education - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2012/1/12 22:36

Quote:

My wife said that every religion takes a piece from another religion and that is how it is built up.

I've spent a great deal of time in secular and private Christian universities wrestling with these claims. I'm familiar with a lot of the ancient Mesopotamian myths, and how many of them even have great parallels to events that we read about in the Scriptures. Our faith isn't the only story that contains a creation story, a flood story, or even a story about a god who comes to the world and dies for sins, and rises again.

But at the end of the day, what does that prove? Well, it only proves that there are similar stories, figures, and events in the religions of the world. That's all it proves. The assertion that your wife is claiming, and one that is often taught in many secular universities, is that all these ancient religions stole each others stories, and adapted them for their culture. Such a claim is rather elementary in my opinion, and is a claim for people who are still playing in intellectual kiddie pools.

It's important to note that this is an assertion that cannot be proven whatsoever. It's a plausible thesis, but one that is very difficult to prove, and cannot tell the whole story. So much so that there are individuals like famed psychologists Carl Jung and scholars like Joseph Campbell who said that while this may be true to some degree, it doesn't explain the entire story. Sometimes there are very ancient cultures that are thousands of miles removed from one another that developed similar sounding stories and cultic religious practices about the same time in history, though, finding any common link between the groups proves to be impossible. Rather Jung and Campbell believed that the way we as humans are hard wired from a psychological standpoint explains why there is so many common threads between groups continents apart. Because we as humans have evolved with certain "archetypes" built into our psyche.

And tapping into the idea of these two men, George Lucas created the famous "Star Wars" series, which was a deliberate attempt to create a "modern religion" exploiting the concepts that these two men taught. And the reason Star Wars was such a hit from the get go, Lucas attributes largely to the psychology of the movie being something that we all internally connect with in our humanity at a subconscious level. Lucas simply used things such as Campbell's "hero mono-myth" framework to build his movie series from.

And based on these theories, I would like to give a Christian "twist." You might see it already. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. As a result, deep spiritual things common to all of humanity is built into every single one of us. In our "psyche" if you will. Coupled with the fact that we as humans have all experienced in our origins a common history that transpired from real events, such similarities between the great religions on the ancient (and modern) world only further affirm the things we claim and believe as Christians.

Why shouldn't there be, after all, many ancient flood stories in the ancient world? Because in fact, there was an ancient flood. But why do these stories differ? Because of the million-and-one reasons men make alterations to stories all the time. And given a few centuries, it doesn't take long for old stories to become greatly manipulated to suit the needs of a group. Some such alterations may be demonic in the nature.

Some of these groups published their versions of the same story in similar ages. Others would do it much later. But, simply being the first to make it to the printing press and publish the story doesn't make it any more true. It just means some groups codified their stories in print before others. Some undoubtedly stole stories from one another. Some probably didn't. Being the first to put it in print shows that some cultures were a little more technologically advanced than others.

And it shouldn't be very shocking that the Jews were late in publishing Genesis. They were slaves for 400 years at one point after all. Then they wandered around as nomads in a wilderness that didn't exactly have an Office Max containing fresh reams of paper. Then they were a nation at war for a number of years after that. They didn't exactly have a lot of time to sit down and write. They had wars to fight, sheep to pasture, and bread to bake. They weren't exactly the embodiment of a great civilization until about the time of Solomon that had a caste of scribes who could dedicate themselves to such tasks.

At any rate, great questions. Don't be afraid to ask such questions, or study such things. Sometimes what you may study in a university will shock you, and will deeply challenge your faith. But in my opinion, such isn't a bad thing. Instead of looking at such studies as a time to begin to doubt, I think one needs to look at such studies as a Divine mandate to wrestle.

While some of the things I did study in the Liberal Arts and Sciences caused me to doubt my faith, after truly wrestling with the issues, I emerged stronger in my faith than ever before. And now I feel I stand in a place where no matter how much I study such issues these days, I don't feel the slightest bit shaken by what I read or hear. I know how to take all of these things with a grain of salt. I can analyze the premises made by the various schools of thought, and I understand why they say some of the things they say. And I know enough to critically examine what they say, and question some of the rather bold and dogmatic assertions some professors have often made over the years. Such will stretch you. But beyond that, it will definitely grow you.

Re: - posted by 1000faces, on: 2012/1/13 0:24

Jimmy, serious respect to you for speaking knowledgeably about Joseph Campbell here. Well done.

DEADn, I would suggest, agreeing with Jimmy, that the sharpening of one's critical faculties, as well as first-hand experience with the intellectual challenges facing the Church, make the experience of study at a college/university worthwhile. If we are pursuing and preaching capital-T Truth, it seems to me that we should be able to stand up to the biggest arguments that may be thrown at us. Further, being able to contextualize one's own belief in a historical/cultural/philosophical moment also allows one to critique one's own beliefs and tradition, working towards improving it. It is hard work to sort through the claims, but you are the stronger for it.

You wrote:

"I have never done an indepth study on what makes the bible true and I wonder if I should, yet I wonder if it would cause me to doubt the bible as a whole."

You certainly should! If a study of the history of the Bible, the arguments for its veracity and authority, and the reasons why we can stand upon it dislodges your current conception of "the bible as a whole," it would seem that your current notion is flawed.

We needn't fear knowledge. There is some value to what secular scholars of biblical texts say about those texts, their authorship, and their provenance. I think it is good for us to examine the claims in the light of our own beliefs and be aware of the differences, forcing us to reason through why we believe as we do. If we disagree, we should know why. Knowing why allows for a reasoned response and critique, in love.

The big questions for me as I began post-Bible college studies (from Bible college to an Honours BA to MA and now working on a PhD) related to understanding the influence of Greek philosophy upon Christian theology and, parallel, understanding the history of the church traditions that I, prior, had considered normative. Why do I pray like I do or believe what I do or feel comfortable in a certain style of service like I do? Being able to historicize Evangelicalism and trace its influences helped me to understand the baggage that the tradition carries. My faith is stronger both for the knowledge and for the process of learning and questioning.

I've gone on long enough. Back to my schoolwork.

Re: Bible Integrity - posted by Sidewalk (), on: 2012/1/13 22:52

Several things come to mind regarding the Bible's credibility.

The first is that the Word of God must be spiritually received. Scholars have been tearing it apart for centuries, and always motivated by the belief that if the Bible is flawed, they are not subject to God's demands therein. If it is the Word of God, they are obligated to seek Him. They do not want to do that!

Here is what happened to me back when I was back in Bible School in the last century....long, long time ago.

I had a fabulous baptism in the Holy Spirit, and a ripping, flushing repentance that was long overdue. I'd been a Christian for many years without any clue how much I needed all of that. But something weird showed up in my newly refreshed spirit. I believe I heard from God- not audible but strong and repetitive. He said "You can believe My Word."

I was taken somewhat aback. I had no doubts about the Bible, I already believed it. But the words kept coming back into my heart and mind, "You can believe My Word."

Over the years, I began to increase my appreciation of what that really meant. It was like God was giving me a venue for conversation with Him, keeping me in the path of truth, and revealing Himself in a thousand different ways that were deeper than just having an opinion that the Bible was a reliable reference tool.

The order of the words was exactly as He wished them to be, and I was invited to ask my Father anything about them. The Bible is so personal, just like the relationship He calls us into. Not that we have a right to personal interpretations, but certain passages will come alive for me that might not touch others the same way.

There's more.

The Bible remains the primary source for much of the archeology being pursued in the areas of the world where Bible stories originated. And that's because so much of what has been found confirms the stories. People like Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel have gone to great lengths to compile these findings. It is good reading.

Then there was the discoveries by Russian mathematician Ivan Pannin, born long before computers. He did exhaustive research into the numeric patterns he saw when he looked at the scriptures and counted words, consonants, vowels- all with the numerical equivalents from Hebrew and Greek alphabets. He found snowflake-like numeric images that startled and amazed him, and he found these in both the old and new testament books. Also interesting was that the patterns were totally absent in non-biblical writings of the period. He became a believer- funny way for God to pull another soul in.

I agree with the sentiment that God is not afraid of putting His Word up to the light of truth. Even the discrepancies in the gospel accounts add credibility- they were not doctored and sanitized to say the same thing, the author's personalities shine through.

The book of Job is an enigma, we don't know who Job was, when he lived, how the manuscript came into being. Also, some of the ancient manuscripts are so bad that pieces are missing and translators have had to smooth out the text as best they can. None of the "fixes" affect critical theology, and the book is filled with grand theology!

By not hiding the flaws, the credibility tends to increase. But ultimately we each need to go to God and get a personal confirmation from God.

"Call to Me, and I will show you great and mighty things that you do not know!" (Jer 33:3)

Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2012/1/14 19:42

Quote:

----- I emerged stronger in my faith than ever before

Quote:

----- the sharpening of one's critical faculties, as well as first-hand experience with the intellectual challenges facing the Church, make the experience of study at a college/university worthwhile. If we are pursuing and preaching capital-T Truth, it seems to me that we should be able to stand up to the biggest arguments that may be thrown at us. Further, being able to contextualize one's own belief in a historical/cultural/philosophical moment also allows one to critique one's own beliefs and tradition, working towards improving it. It is hard work to sort through the claims, but you are the stronger for it.

I ditto the above.

I took a non-evangelical Bible course, as a requirement for a particular program. It was a New Testament introduction course based on a text book by Bart Ehrman. To me the book fails the test of good scholarship! Also, Ehrman leans towards atheism. For that reason, I had to work hard. I applied Carl Sagan's Baloney Detective Kit to expose the baloney in Ehrman's "proofs" against biblical reliability. That was a grueling ordeal, but it paid off - for me (not for my grade!).

In such a course you either sink or you swim. I saw evangelical students sink. That disturbed me. I could see that their biblical foundation and their critical thinking skills were simply too weak. Also they were in it more for the credit than the challenge. So they bought into Ehrman. That's the horrendous tragedy of slothful preparation in evangelical churches.

I came away from that course being utterly amazed at God - how he put our Bible together in such a way that it can withstand the most rigorous assaults - even in our modern age. I realized that if anyone must rely on a series of invalid argumentations to disprove the Bible, it is pretty sturdy! Good scholarship need not threaten the Bible.

Quote:

----- I have never done an in-depth study on what makes the bible true and I wonder if I should, yet I wonder if it would cause me to doubt the bible as a whole.

Deadn - God will guide you about that. I simply wish to assure you that even questionable content can build your trust in the Bible. Above all, God is more interested in the transforming of your mind and strengthening your faith in the Bible than you can ever imagine.

For starts, you may wish to check out www.biblicaltraining.org/ . You can get excellent evangelical seminary lectures free there.

Diane

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2012/1/15 0:02

I forget who it was that said it, and it is a little vague in my mind, but one well known and respected minister said something to the effect that we as Christians have it harder in America than we think. He said many Christians who suffer for Christ physically in other countries, as terrible as that is, never have to face the intellectual assault we suffer every day in this country.

And I don't say this in anyway to diminish what our brethren are suffering around the world for the sake of Christ. But most of them will never have to face the hostile intellectual challenge we face in this country. If you are intellectually honest, you will admit there is a very compelling case against Christ in this nation. When I first started studying these things for myself, I was a bit overwhelmed and absolutely terrified.

If you honestly desire to understand the counterarguments against our faith, and not in the superficial way some apologists do, you will definitely come to a crisis of faith in your life. It is an amazing cross one will have to face head on. In fact, my crisis was so powerful that I was 2 days away from preaching a sermon on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, but, I wondered if I would still believe the gospel message when I woke up the next morning.

But by embracing this cross in my life, when I woke up the next day, I found my faith renewed and stronger than ever before. I had a fresh revelation of the gospel message that day, and truly knew why it was I believed what I believed. And ever since I passed through that sea of distress, I've never doubted for one second the truth of the gospel message from that day forward. But you'll never get there unless you can bear the great tension and intellectual challenges found in our colleges.

Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2012/1/16 9:13

Quote:
----- If you honestly desire to understand the counterarguments against our faith, and not in the superficial way some apologists do, you will definitely come to a crisis of faith in your life. It is an amazing cross one will have to face head on

KingJimmy, I agree. Head-on immersion into the adversary's worldview will test your faith till it becomes YOUR faith. That will prove to be far more resilient than the faith developed in safer places.

It may seem safer to avoid this violent crisis of faith by cocooning ourselves away from adversarial territory. But blissful naivety can no longer preserve the modern church. Furthermore it merely lends credence to adversarial positions. (Isn't that what happened in the early days of liberalism?)

In college, if you are not equipped to support a valid line of reasoning for your position, you won't make it. On the other hand if you prove yourself to be a scrupulous scholar, you can offer an amazingly credible testimony of God and his truths. It's a risk. But good professors are not quickly threatened by good thinkers.

Quote:
----- But you'll never get there unless you can bear the great tension and intellectual challenges found in our colleges.

Yes, it hurts the brain! What unexpectedly distressed me was the extent of cultural infiltration in evangelical institutions. You need to exercise your critical skills there too.

Overall, I have come to see that no academic institution can compensate for what was lacking in a student's earlier years. If they have not been prepared through a life habit of rigorous learning and disciplined study, they will not be strong believers in seminary. They may be ordained, but the habit of slothfulness in the spiritual disciplines merely infects the next generation of churchgoers.

Having said that, I now offer a disclaimer: It's one particular student I met. He was a medical student taking a seminar

y course. He grew up Muslim and then he met Jesus in a dream. I watched him defend Christ as the only way to salvation among students who had predominantly come to accept the more "tolerant" pluralistic position. For this student, Christ's love oozed through his every word. His ability to think and to write far surpassed anything I had ever seen. I will never measure up to his skill and his insightfulness—in spite of all my Christian background.

Perhaps it will be converted Muslims like this young man who will be our strongest Christian leaders in the future.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2012/1/16 12:45

Quote:

Head-on immersion into the adversary's worldview will test your faith till it becomes YOUR faith. That will prove to be far more resilient than the faith developed in safer places.

Definitely. In my opinion, few men are fit to serve as Christian leaders in America in this century until they have experienced the intellectual crucible of our culture. You might be able to insulate yourself from it if you live in the Ozarks or some other remote backwater type setting. But to deliberately not confront this Goliath on the field of battle is kin to the armies of Saul refusing to step forward and challenge the Philistine champion. And I thank God for the men and women, especially in academic settings, who have gathered their five stones and are ready to fight.

And I'm not talking about even in the world of the secular university. Even if you go to a conservative evangelical seminary, by nature of your studies in the academic world of Biblical literature, you will be greatly exposed to some of the most liberal scholars and thinkers. Some of them who are actually quite excellent reads, but will greatly challenge any notions of a "literal" reading of Scripture. And this, in part, is heavily fueled by many "higher critics" of the Scriptures, who challenge the authenticity and originality of many parts of the Old & New Testaments.

But is this why some students do not survive Bible college and seminary? Is this why the faith of some is shipwrecked after emerging from their studies, even in conservative schools? Having gone through my own intellectual and spiritual crisis, part of me wants to say yes, and show sympathy to such people. I do understand. But honestly, at the end of the day, I believe the reason many fail to emerge from their studies and still keeping the faith, is perhaps because they never had any true faith to begin with. That is, faith that is supernatural in its origination.

And I don't say this as somebody who is theologically Reformed. I am much more Arminian in my convictions. But, I believe the reason some fall away from the faith during these times is because their faith was much more "natural" in its origination. That is, they believed because they never really had any reason to dis-believe. Their faith was much more the product of culture and tradition than something that began and was daily maintained by a supernatural miracle.

The only way I worked through my intellectual and spiritual crisis in Bible college was by means of an encounter I had with Christ during that time, in which He caused me to remember the moment I first heard the gospel being preached, understanding it, and how He came into my life. The Lord reminded me that I heard His voice speaking into my heart that day. The day before I knew even the most basics of Biblical truth, or the complexities of textual criticism and theological liberalism. It was a day in where my exposure to God or Bible were minimal. But it was a day in which I heard the voice of the Son of God calling me unto Himself.

After remembering that, I knew why I believed what I believed, and rediscovered the foundation of my faith. The foundation of my faith was not that I studied all the theological opinions of men, and made what amounted to a mere logical conclusion to follow Christ. Rather, the foundation of my faith was based on a supernatural encounter I had with Christ when I was only 14 years old. It came after I heard the gospel with power. My faith does not rest on the flimsy foundations and arguments of scholars, but rather, my faith rests on the never changing Christ.

That's not to say I don't have some strong scholarly based opinions, and very reasonable intellectual persuasions for believing in Christ. I do. There is a mountain of scholarly evidence that agrees with our evangelical convictions. Not all of it does, mind you. But sometimes you have to do a little bit of digging and research to find what the actual truth of a matter is.

Especially since, in part, because some liberal scholars are hell bent on publishing some very convoluted theories. Some such scholars are actually quite terrible, and are guilty of intellectual dishonesty, and make some terrible assumptions, that while sometimes difficult to detect, eventually become impossible to ignore.

Some students never clear this hurdle though. They are either too far easily impressed with some of the counter arguments, or they just find them so overwhelming that they fold in fear. And some, because they are just lazy students who lack serious discipline, and don't have the internal fortitude necessary to engage in this battle.

But, if they do emerge from all this, as they should if they had a true faith to begin with, and did not try to take some short cuts along the way, they should emerge as a real man and woman of God who knows what it is to spend 40 days on a mountain covered with smoke. Many though, would prefer just to sit at the base of the mountain.

Re: College culture of death - posted by Sidewalk (), on: 2012/1/16 20:24

Thank you for that, KingJimmy. You have detailed it well, and your writing style is easy to read!

My older brother took his youthful untried faith and went to a prominent East Coast seminary. He became a Presbyterian minister, and retired recently. He is a far left liberal, has no living relationship with the Jesus I know. We can't even discuss these vital issues, and he holds me in considerable contempt as a "fundamentalist idiot."

It isn't fair to detail his life here, but he is not a happy soul. Never really has been. When we were both in college, I had a life changing repentance and baptism in the Holy Spirit. I sent an excited letter. The return letter ripped me up six ways from Sunday and I realized we were probably never going to have agreement in the Theological arena.

I was right-- very, very unfortunately.

Education can bless, and it can kill. Never stop going first to your knees.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2012/1/16 23:59

I'm sorry to hear of your brother's departure from the faith. You have said it right, education can bless or kill. Which it does will depend on what one does with what you learn. One doctor can become a skilled surgeon. The other can perform abortions with the same education. Prayer must become a vital tool in your education. For if you try to learn anything without God, it won't be long before you shall be without Him altogether.