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Before You Ask

The purpose of this series is not to destroy faith, but that readers may be *"...fully persuaded in your own mind"* (Rom 14:5) and be *"ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you"* (Peter 3:15).

NOTE: The goal of these articles is to assist individuals to develop Critical Thinking abilities; to ignore excess information, dismiss the useless frill, and uncover the heart of things. "To be fore-warned is to be fore-armed." And for the reason that "...I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe," (John 14:29). For additional information, books about the subjects of logic, debate, argumentation, rhetoric, critical thinking or speech usually contain sections on faulty reasoning. I have researched fallacies, logic and the art of asking questions, but I do not claim to be an expert. This is a review of my studies, conclusions, opinions and recommendations. **Your comments, experiences, examples and recommendations are invited.**

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Before You Ask - Chapter 1

Unanswered Questions

Do you remember a time when you had a particular question that was bothering you? Perhaps you looked forward to an upcoming visit from workers and planned to ask your question then. You were confident they would be able to answer it to your satisfaction. Did you get your answer, or did you realize later that your question was STILL unanswered?! If so, you are not alone! What happened? Did the conversation get side-tracked onto another subject? Did you become even more confused? Did you come away feeling attacked, stung or stoned (Luke 11:11-12)? Were you made to feel somehow inferior, as though:

- your spiritual life was lacking or defective
- you weren't worthy to have your question answered
- you were out of place for asking
- you should be ashamed or feel guilty for asking
- you were making a mountain out of a molehill
- you were the problem for noticing a problem

A reply that sends you a deficiency message will not answer your question. All answers are replies...but not all replies are answers. YOU and your circumstances are irrelevant to the answer to your question. Although you may not be able to pinpoint exactly what's wrong, you somehow know when you're not given a straight-forward answer; and you know when you're not being leveled with. A reply that doesn't ring true, make sense, add up, sound right, or click probably didn't answer your question either. Quite simply stated, a question is a request for information; for supporting evidence and sound reasoning to accept a judgment, conclusion, practice or belief. When you ask a question, the other person has three choices:

1. Answer the question

2. Refuse to answer the question
3. Evade the question

It stands to reason, if they know the answer, and they don't mind telling you the answer, that they will answer your question plainly. A simple answer is the easiest way out, right? On the other hand, if they don't know the answer, they will either refuse to answer or attempt to evade the question. REMEMBER: If someone attempts to evade your question or refuses to answer your question, that is a sure sign he either: (1) doesn't know the answer OR (2) doesn't want to tell you the answer. If your question has put them in the hot seat, backed them into a corner, pinned them against the wall, has them sweating; or if your question, for some reason, makes them feel threatened, defensive or attacked, an attempt may be made to divert the conversation into safer channels to save face and/or relieve the anxiety that they will be exposed. Some methods commonly used to evade questions are called fallacies. "Fallacies" are faulty reasoning, and not a recent invention -- some have even been recognized for so long they are commonly known by their original Latin titles. Since the varieties of faulty reasoning are practically infinite, this article will be limited to analyzing, blocking and countering only those fallacies frequently used by friends and workers.

Following are the definitions for three commonly used varieties of Fallacies of Irrelevance:

A. Diversion or Evasion intentionally introduced to shift attention from the original issue to another subject (smoke-screen, red herring, strawman, figurative analogies, humor, sarcasm, innuendo, minimizing importance, asking a counter-question, passing the buck, feigning ignorance, answering ambiguously, procrastination).

B. Attacks, abusing or accusing the questioner's personal character, origins, circumstances, opinions, affiliations or behavior. Shifting the blame. Character assassination using shame, insult, guilt, embarrassment, scorn, ridicule, name-calling, criticism, put-downs, stereotyping, pigeon-holing, labeling.

C. Appeals to Accept a Conclusion (special pleading), using irrelevant reasons or facts; attempt to persuade with inducement OTHER THAN the merits of the belief or conclusion:

1. Appeals to your Emotions; Play on your Sympathy, Pity; Appeals to your fears, pride, loyalty, guilt, hope, flattery, trust, love, friendship, sincerity
2. Appeals to an Inexpert Authority, to Special Revelation; to Results; to Force; to Consequences; to Tradition, to Quantity, to Status Quo; to What the Crowd Does; to the Benefits of Suffering; Pleas for Special Treatment

Fallacious Reasoning Quiz

Can you identify which of the three categories (diversions, attacks, or appeals) the following fallacious replies fall into? (Some fall into more than one category.) Of course, it's not nearly as important to be able to neatly classify replies that use fallacious reasoning, as it is to be able to recognize when they are being used!

1. ____ "WHAT have you been reading!!"
2. ____ "If you had the right spirit, you wouldn't even question that."
3. ____ "It's like a seed that has been dormant..."
4. ____ "Why, you ought to be ashamed for even asking that question -- after all Jesus has done for you!"
5. ____ "Some things you just have to accept on faith."
6. ____ "Your asking that question tells me that you have a much deeper problem...perhaps you never really had a good understanding."
7. ____ "As the hymn says: 'We follow, with a faith that questions not.' "
8. ____ "Well, I remember what Willie Jamieson/George Walker, etc. used to say about that..."
9. ____ "You've been in this fellowship X years, and you don't know the answer to THAT question?"
10. ____ "Our old friends and workers lived and died in it; that's good enough for me."
11. ____ "There is nothing to discuss. Truth is Truth. It is just a matter of your not X (being willing, having enough faith, being rebellious, being vain, etc.)."
12. ____ "It's a dangerous thing to question the workers -- Why, that's the same as questioning God!!"
13. ____ "I know this is God's true way because, it feels right to me."
14. ____ "Well, the way is perfect -- it's just the people that aren't perfect."
15. ____ "After my parents professed, I never once saw my mother __X__ again."
16. ____ "It sounds to me like you're doubting. Be careful! Some in Revelations could not enter in because of unbelief!"
17. ____ "The history isn't really important. The important thing is when the gospel came to you, and began a work in YOUR life. Tell me, when was that?"
18. ____ "You can tell a goat because he is always 'butting.' "
19. ____ "Who have you been talking to?! Sounds to me like you've been listening to some who have read "those books full of lies" who are "tearing down the truth!"
20. ____ "I sure wouldn't want to be in your place on the judgment day!"

(Answers are at the end of this page)

Your Perfect Right --To Question

A claim or belief is a statement that is either true or false. A claim/belief stands or fall upon its own merits. Either there is or isn't adequate evidence and sound reasoning to support the claim/belief and prove it is true. "Truth is truth." The enclosed tract titled "What is Truth?" reviews the unique characteristics of Truth. Truth is the primary authority to which all things

must conform.

When someone goes on record stating they know/believe something to be true, it is presumed they can justify their belief/claim with adequate evidence and/or sound reasoning. FURTHERMORE, when a belief/claim is publicly stated, YOU have the automatic right to ask for the evidence and reasons supporting the claim or belief. In other words, if someone asserts that X is bad, you have the right to ask why is X bad, or what makes X bad? If someone asserts that you have violated certain rights or standards, and to request you have the right to ask how, evidence of the alleged standard in force. For instance, if someone claims you violated their constitutional right as an American citizen, they should be able to clearly refer to the precise law or right they allege you broke, and also be able to show proof of how you violated the standard. A child of God has certain rights, privileges and duties under their constitution, the Bible. If someone claims you have violated a Biblical standard, they should be able to clearly point to the exact standard you breached, and give proof of how you did so. An unproven claim is merely an allegation, assertion, accusation, opinion, theory; some can be construed as slander, maligning and false witness. When someone asserts a claim or belief, you have three choices:

1. You can accept and believe it.
2. You can reject or believe that it is false.
3. You can suspend judgment about it.

Critical Thinking is the careful and deliberate determination of whether to accept, reject or suspend judgment about a claim. The ability to Think Critically is vitally important since your decisions are based on what you believe and have accepted as true. Your life may depend upon it. Critical Thinking involves many skills, including the ability to listen and read carefully, to evaluate arguments, to look for and check out assumptions, and to trace the consequences of a claim. A Critical Thinker knows fallacious reasoning can be highly persuasive psychologically, so he doesn't take everything at face value. He doesn't assume -- he proves for himself whether a claim is true, questionable, dubious, or false. A Critical Thinker is a skeptic -- he won't buy just anything! He doesn't let others make up his mind for him. he doesn't allow his "...liberty (to be) judged of another man's conscience" 1 Cor 10:29. For a Critical Thinker, all things must conform to Truth. "God, who has given the Bible, has also given us our reason with which to examine and understand it; and we are guilty before Him if we bury this talent in the earth and hide our Lord's money" (by J. F. Clarke).

Learning to recognize, block and counter faulty reasoning techniques will help you in a number of areas. Being able to explain why a conclusion, belief or claim is faulty will gain you the respect of others, and help you present your own beliefs and ideas more effectively. It will also help you to evaluate information and make better, informed decisions, as well as prevent you from being manipulated.

A Critical Thinker must ask questions, even though it is sometimes like pulling teeth to get straight answers. All answers are replies...but not all replies are answers! Some replies do not even address your question(s). The most common method used to check out a claim or belief is to ask questions. God fully expects you to use your reasoning powers and intelligence. There is nothing shameful in asking an honest, sincere question with the purpose and motive to learn. It has been said: "Only a fool thinks he knows everything." You have absolute freedom to inquire; to search for truth. One must ask questions to discover information; to be able to "rightly divide" truth from error; to be able to "know whom I have believed." A significant number of Scriptures, when taken in context, highly recommend proving, testing, searching, studying, being FULLY persuaded of, FULLY comprehending, and increasing in knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

Scriptures Approving of Questioning

- Luke 1:4: "know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed"
 - Acts 17:11: Paul praised the Bereans because they "searched the Scriptures daily to make certain whether things were so..."
 - Romans 14:5: "...be fully persuaded in your own mind"
 - Eph. 3:18: "...be able to comprehend...what is the breadth and length and depth and height" of it all
 - Col. 1:9: "...be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"
 - Col. 1:28-2:2: "have the full assurance of understanding" (meaning certainty, full assurance, complete conviction.)
 - 2 Tim. 2:15: "study to show thyself approved unto God...rightly dividing the word of truth."
 - 1 Thes. 5:21: "prove all things and hold fast that which is good"
 - 1 Peter 3:15: "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."
 - 2 Peter 1:5: "...add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue KNOWLEDGE,"
 - James 1:5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."
 - Ps 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."
 - Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD"
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**Jesus often used the question method in His teaching.
Questions arouse attention and provoke thought.**

By what authority doest thou these things? Matt 21:23
How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Matt 18:21
Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not? Matt 22:17

Lord, is it I? Matt 26:22
What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? Matt 27:22
Ought not Christ to have suffered these things? Luke 24:26

What doth hinder me to be baptized? Acts 8:36
What must I do to be saved? Acts 16:30
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Rom 8:35

Is Christ divided? 1 Cor 1:13
Wherefore, then serveth the law? Gal 3:19
Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? Gal 4:16

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Heb 2:3
Who is a wise man? James 3:13
For what is your life? James 4:14
What manner of persons ought ye to be? 2 Peter 3:11

Rebutting "We're Not to Question" Replies

Sometimes, the reply will evade the subject entirely and instead it will be implied that the question should not have been asked. This usually happens when Biblical support is weak, inadequate or insufficient to warrant the practice or belief enforced, such as with questions involving William Irvine, or women's appearance. Some "hide behind the Scripture" and cite certain passages out of context to imply you shouldn't be questioning. For example:

"We are sometimes asked about the period between...the first century and the present twentieth century. We have no written records on earth of God's work in the world during this period. God's records are written in heaven," Mal. 3:16, Luke 10:20, Rev. 20:12. Any who would suggest a written genealogy record is necessary between the first and twentieth century would fall into the category of 1 Tim. 1:3-4: `That thou might charge some that they teach no other doctrine. Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.'" (Dan Hilton 1/1/84 Burlington, WA Special Meeting.)

"Personally, I have never been taken up with "endless genealogies," or other things that Paul warned against in 1 Tim. 1:3-4. My satisfaction is in the fact that the Lord has given to me all that he has promised." (Howard Mooney) While you are not to question God, the Scripture definitely recommends questioning MEN, and the Bible makes no exceptions for certain men or

groups. There is no Scripture recommending that a child of God refuse to answer an honest question; nor any Scripture prohibiting or discouraging questions. There is much to the contrary. Jesus answered His disciples' questions, but evaded some of the Pharisees' trick questions. You are not asking a trick question. Paul wrote long letters to answer questions of his converts. How can you "be careful" or "beware" without asking questions? What are you going to do? Follow men who say you should not question them or their beliefs and practices; or follow the Scripture that says "prove all things?"

REMEMBER THIS: ANY TIME Scripture is used to imply you shouldn't question MEN, you can KNOW FOR SURE that an "Evasion Attempt" is in process; and that Scripture is being misused, misinterpreted or taken out of context.

It's quite simple to prove this statement for yourself. Try this assignment. Take the following list of Scriptures commonly given to indicate you should not be asking questions (1 Tim. 1:3-4, 4:7; 2 Tim 2:14, 2:23-25, 4:3-4, 6:3-4; Titus 1:14, 3:9; Luke 9:45), and check them out. Are they being used in context? What is the author's real meaning and intent? Answering to the following questions for each passage will help you determine this:

1. To whom was the particular Scripture passage addressed? This can make a BIG difference. Was it addressed to Christians? Jews? Sinners?
2. Was the Scripture a part of the New or Old covenant?
3. Where does Bible indicate this is the ONLY acceptable practice or method of doing X?
4. Was it Jesus' intent for this practice to be continued by ALL believers or ministers for ALL times? Which verse indicates this? Was the message intended for a specific purpose or universal?
5. What was the principle behind the practice, instruction or application?
6. The Bible is a record of humans who made mistakes as well as victories. Be sure the Scripture passage supporting a practice or belief was not recording a mistake that should be learned from, rather than a practice to be imitated.
7. Are key words being defined by their meaning at the time the passage was written? (A word used by an author in the first century in Greek may or may not be the same as our 20th century definition for the same word. For example, the word "conversation" today does not mean "conduct," as the word meant in the first century)
8. Where else in the Bible does the Bible confirm this definition, belief, practice?
9. Who was speaking? Is the person a credible representative of God's will/word?
10. What time period did the message pertain to? Did it involve a specific time period? (i.e. "while praying," "until I come" etc.)

Suggested Replies to "We're Not to Question"

You have a perfect Right to question men. However, you may have to defend your right. Some

basic defenses you might use are:

You need to know the answer to Question X...

- (A) In order to obey X Scripture
 - (B) In order to heed X Scriptural warning
 - (C) In order to follow X Scriptural example
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Suggested Replies to "We're Not to Question"

(A) In order to obey X Scripture, you need to know the answer to X: The Bible says to: "Give an answer to every man that asketh" 1 Peter 3:15. So will you please give me the answer to my question why X?"

The reason I ask is because I take my responsibility very seriously to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" 1 Pet 3:15. So, what is your answer to my question? [NOTE regarding above: 1 Peter 3:8 shows Peter was addressing "all"; therefore, the workers are to give an answer to "all" who ask them a question.]

If I am to "acquire wisdom and understanding," which Solomon highly recommends in Proverbs, I must ask questions. My question is...

Since we are directed to "prove all things", I would like to ask what is the proof for the belief/practice of X?

(B) In order to heed X Scriptural warning, you need to know the answer to X:

Let me clarify the reason I am asking you this question. It is because I don't want to "...err (by) not knowing the Scriptures...." (Matt 22:29) as some did. What can you tell me about the reason they do/believe X in this fellowship?

I ask this because the workers are men, and as men, they are not infallible. Therefore, it is possible that the workers could be teaching for doctrine their own commandments, like the Pharisees did, Mark 7:7. Where is X commanded in the Scripture?

(C) In order to follow X Scriptural example, you are asking X:

I'm merely asking you to do what the disciples did to convince the Jews -- show by the Scriptures that the belief/practice of X is commanded. "For he mightily convinced the

Jews...shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" Acts 18:28.

It's interesting that you do not think I should question something I do not understand. How am I going to defend my faith as the Scripture commands, if don't know why I "believe" something? My question is simple; I just want to know what Scripture supports the practice/belief of X?"

Is it Really Wrong to Question?

Answers to Fallacious Reasoning Quiz:

A = 1, 3, 7, 14, 17, 18, 19

B = 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 18

C = 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20

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