

## Letters From a Skeptic Lesson 1: Overview and “The Invitation”

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”  
John 13:35



“Christianity isn’t a religion,  
it’s a relationship”

### Overview and Introduction

1. “*Letters From a Skeptic*”, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, by Greg and Edward Boyd
  - a. **Greg** (son): Theology professor at Bethel College in St Paul; “**preaching pastor**” at Woodland Hills Church. Ph.D. Div. from Princeton; M. Div. from Yale. Married with wife and three kids. Despite his theological background, Greg is extremely **well grounded** in the Bible, and “*rightly divides the Word of truth.*”
  - b. **Edward** (father): During the correspondence, lived in Lake Placid, Fl; father of 6; grandfather of 15; great-grandfather of 9; worked in sales management for Uniroyal; early Catholic; agnostic. (NB: Died on 1/1/2003, at age 84)

“*Exceptionally intelligent, intensely skeptical, very strong-willed, and 70 years old—could a more unlikely candidate for conversion be found than my father?*”

Greg Boyd, Preface

2. At the **son’s request**, father and son begin a long-term, written **dialog** raising **questions** and answering **objections** to Christianity
3. Loving others means **sharing your faith in Christ** with them!
  - a. **Ultimate goal:** **To help others get to heaven**
  - b. Dr. Boyd gives us a **very effective model** for how to do this
4. We’ll be **reading** many of these letters and **discussing** the points raised
  - a. Letters are only **slightly edited** for clarity and organization (not in original order)
  - b. **Caveat:** Father’s language not “cleaned up”
5. **Benefits** to this study:
  - a. Many of us have **non-believing loved ones** and **friends**. This can be a **resource** as you plan to reach out to them. **The father’s questions** are the **world’s questions!**
  - b. Helpful to believers who are **wrestling** with the rational foundation of their faith
  - c. An extremely **interesting study** of **apologetics** (defense of the faith)

<**Read:** “The Invitation: To Dad, with Hope,” pp. 17-19>

### 6. **Comments?**

### Correspondence 1: “Why has Christianity done so much harm?”

<**Read:** The father’s first letter, pp. 22-23>

1. Remember, these are **real letters!**
2. Father is **willing** and **interested** in the dialog—right from the get-go!
  - a. Do you suppose any of **your** friends or relatives might be **interested, too?**
3. Father doesn’t have positive beliefs, but rather **negative** ones
  - a. Quickly states he doesn’t have a “faith” or “worldview”

- b. He believes he knows what he doesn't believe
- 4. Father is somewhat **surprised** by son's beliefs, given his **liberal education**
  - a. Note this doesn't stop the dialog (i.e. you don't have to be "perfect" in someone's eyes)
  - b. Calls his son's belief in this "Christianity business" **implausible** (but again, he's willing)
- 5. The **objection**—How can an all-powerful, all-loving God allow the church to do bad things?
- 6. **Comments?**

<Read the son's reply, pp.24-26>

- 7. Notice how the son **engages** the father "**from where he is.**"
  - a. He **encourages** the father's **critical thinking**—cites it as **healthy**.

*"To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some."*

1 Cor 9:20-22

- 8. Note also that he **challenges** his father to "**keep an open mind.**"
  - a. **Perfect!** We don't want to convert someone only on our **charisma** or on their **fears**.
  - b. Let the Word speak directly to them!
- 9. Examine Greg's statement: "*My only claim—the one I want to attempt to defend—is that the foundational beliefs of Christianity are the most reasonable beliefs to base one's life on.*"
  - a. Personal, loving **God**
  - b. Revealed in/through **Christ**
  - c. Salvation by **grace** through this man Jesus
  - d. Inspired **Bible** is how we **learn** of, and **interact** with, God
- 10. The son's rebuttal points:
  - a. Christianity is *personal*, not corporate
    - i. Greg: "...for you cannot have love without freedom"
    - ii. The God of the Bible is a God of **love**, and therefore a God of **freedom**
    - iii. Without freedom, we'd simply be **robots**—and all the evil would be God's fault!
    - iv. We're free to **choose love** or **choose evil**
    - v. God is **pure good**—whatever is not good is not from God
    - vi. All **evil** in the world comes from free wills **other than God**
      - (1) He's setting the stage for a later discussion of **Satan**
  - b. Greg: "*Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship*"

*NB:* Throughout this study, notice how the son is **patient** and **long-suffering**, and focuses on just **a few key points**. The father, on the other hand, is **all over the map** in his criticisms and objections. **But from his point of view, his beliefs are very rational and normal.** Remember:

*"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."*

2 Cor 4:3-4

**Homework:** Read **Correspondence 2** and **Correspondence 3**.