

NICK GUY
& THE
GREAT REFRAMING AFFAIR
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THEME: Time and again, when Jesus was asked a question, He would answer with a question of His own? Why did He do this? Was it a tactic to distract the questioner as a means of avoiding answering a difficult question? Was Jesus attempting to change the question so as to answer the question He wanted to be asked?

WHY DID JESUS ASK QUESTIONS?: This is a good question. So what is the answer? In an article dated October 9, 2014 in the Huffington Post, author Mick Mooney, in a piece entitled, “Why Jesus Taught with Questions Rather Than Answers,” came to this conclusion:

“When people asked Jesus a question, often he gave them a question back. In fact, he hardly ever gave a direct answer to anything. Jesus liked to share his thoughts through parables that required his audience to go away and figure out the answer for themselves. I think that is a really significant thing to understand regarding how we learn from God. It’s not about waiting for answers, but, rather, we learn by daring to follow the questions God stirs in our hearts.”

This sounds like a viable answer, but, unfortunately for Mr. Mooney, it doesn’t find support in Scripture.

JESUS AND SHARING HIS THOUGHTS: In response to Mr. Mooney, it’s best to start with the idea that Jesus used parables as a means of “sharing His thoughts.” When Jesus spoke, what He spoke were not merely His thoughts, as if He were merely a man giving His opinion. He spoke the Truth. As He claimed in John 12:49 -

“For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has Himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.”

It is a distinction that must be made, because the words of Jesus are not the words of a mere mortal, they are the words of God Himself.

SO WHY DID JESUS ANSWER QUESTIONS WITH QUESTIONS?: There is a saying: If you don’t ask the right question, you won’t get the right answer. Many times Jesus was asked questions that were being asked from a faulty foundation. They were based on a wrong understanding of Scripture or a cultural bias that had strayed from

the Truth. Sometimes the questions were asked as a means of trapping Jesus. In answering questions with questions, Jesus was reframing the original question in order to answer it properly.

EXAMPLE: One time, the Pharisees came to Jesus with a question designed to trap Him. They asked: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

Here is the dilemma: If Jesus had answered "Yes," they would have accused Him of denying His allegiance to God. Jews considered allegiance to Rome, in the form of paying taxes, as idolatry. On the other hand, had He answered "No," they could have gone to the Roman authorities with the charge that Jesus was encouraging sedition. So what did Jesus do?

Well, first of all, the question was based upon a faulty understanding of the relationship between civil government and God. Civil government has been ordained by God, and is ultimately under God's authority. To obey the civil authority, so long as what they command is not contrary to God's commands, is to obey God Himself.

Jesus answered their question with a question of His own as a means of reframing the question. Mark 12:15-17 gives us this account:

"But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap Me?" He asked. "Bring Me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and He asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH: In his article (mentioned above) Mick Mooney presented a very interesting perspective on how Jesus' use of parables and questions will lead us to Truth. "He came to encourage us to ask what we think about God." Mooney wrote, "He presented parables to get us to stop and think, to question our own perception of God, to draw us into questioning what our own beliefs about God's nature and plans are...it is actually the only way to truly step out of the prison of belief-by-indoctrination that religion binds us to."

At first glance, this may sound reasonable, but, again, it's at odds with Scripture. Jesus didn't come to "encourage" us to question our own perception of God, He came to "correct" our own perception of God. Belief-by-indoctrination can be binding, but Belief-by-my-own-imagination can be equally binding, as well as condemning and enslaving.

JESUS' USE OF PARABLES: First of all, a parable is a story that is used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Jesus would use them to amplify or clarify a particular teaching. They were not meant to encourage us to look within ourselves and search for an answer. Their meaning was clear and precise and the understanding of

that meaning was something that God gives to those whom He chooses.

Matthew 13:10, 11 gives us this explanation:

“Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”

JESUS AND DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS: In his article, Mick Mooney makes this provocative statement:

From the earliest times of the human experience, religion was steadfast in presenting God to mankind in the form of as an exclamation point; when Christ entered the world, he bent the presentation of God into a question mark...Jesus didn't try to enforce upon us a doctrinal statement. He didn't come to indoctrinate us. He came to liberate us. He came to encourage us to ask what we think about God.

The answers to the questions Jesus asked were never ambiguous nor subjective. He did not present doctrine nor Himself as a question mark. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” That is a doctrinal statement, and in it Jesus is making a very exclusive claim as to who He is and what He came to earth to accomplish.

Jesus did come to liberate us, but from sin, not from Truth.

John 8:31,32 - “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

John 8:12 - “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

A HOUSE BUILT ON THE ROCK: In Matthew 7:24-29, Jesus told this parable:

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

In this parable, sand represents a subjective foundation, one that shifts and changes with time and circumstances. Rock represents the objective truth of God's Word. Those who place their trust and hope in the subjective feelings stirring in their own hearts will not stand in the day of judgement. But those who place their trust and hope in the objective truth of God's Word, depending upon Jesus' work of salvation on the cross, will stand.

The passage ends with this statement:

“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

The people noticed something different in the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the scribes. His teaching carried with it authority. He was not encouraging them to search for the answers within themselves, He was telling them the truth.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES/CONTEMPORARY QUESTIONS: We are living in a time where there is a growing hostility towards Christianity and the Christian Faith. There is an increasing divide between our culture and Biblical Doctrine. On a number of issues, not only is what the Church believes at odds with the culture, but is considered evil by the culture.

Perhaps this is most seen in the area of sexual morality. The Sexual Revolution has been victorious in our society. What was once considered abnormal is now embraced as normal and celebrated as liberation. As the Church maintains its position based upon Biblical authority, we will find ourselves increasingly vilified, ostracized and marginalized.

SEMANTIC MANIPULATION: Homosexual activists won a major propaganda victory when the media began using the term homophobia for those who oppose their agenda. It implicitly characterizes their critics as suffering from a mental illness. Adding the charges of hate and bigotry helped to marginalize all those who stand for Biblical morality. No argument, debate or discussion need take place with people who are hateful and unreasonable.

REFRAMING THE QUESTION: For a Christian, questions about homosexuality can be tricky because of cultural biases. With the societal mind-set that any opposition to homosexuality is based upon hate, bigotry or mental illness the Christian asked about whether or not he favors homosexual marriage finds himself in a similar situation as Jesus when asked about paying taxes to Caesar. With a “Yes” answer, he will be villainized as ostracized for his hateful and unloving views. On the other hand, a “No” answer will force him to deny his allegiance to God.

It's best to answer a question like this with a question of our own. First reframe the question this way. If homosexuality is natural, normal and healthy, then I would have to agree that there is no reason to oppose gay marriage. But, if homosexuality is unnatural, abnormal and unhealthy then there are many reasons to oppose it. If the second statement is true, let me ask you: Which is the loving response? Allow someone to continue in a lifestyle that will destroy them, or to warn them and deliver them from destruction?

There are two responses by Dr. Ravi Zacharias that I would recommend. In both instances he takes difficult questions concerning homosexuality and reframes them to answer the questions truthfully. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ut0z8f7hS3E
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPYRXop7aPA

CONCLUSION: In summary as relating to Mick Mooney's piece on the questions of Jesus and His use of parables. Jesus did not simply offer His opinion on anything, He spoke the truth. The meanings of the parables are not subjective, but objective. Jesus did indeed impose doctrinal statements on us. He spoke in exclusive terms of who He was and what He came to accomplish. And furthermore, He validated His claims through His works.

One example of this is found in Mark 2:3-12 -

“And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this Man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’?”

In answer to Jesus' question, which of the two things is easier to say? In one sense it would be easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” because there's really no way for us to prove that a man's sins are forgiven or not. But to say, “Get up, take your mat and walk,” that's easy to prove. All that has to happen is for the man to get up, take his mat and walk.

On the other hand, although it's impossible for mere men to miraculously heal a man by simply speaking it, it's even more impossible (if such a thing can rightly be said) to forgive that same man's sins.

Jesus continued by saying,

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

By healing this man being of his paralysis, Jesus gave validation of His claim to be able to forgive sins. Jesus' question helped everybody present to follow that logical progression. Through His questions, Jesus brought everything into proper focus.

CONCLUSION: Jesus would answer questions with questions as a means of reframing the question so that the answer would be clear and truthful and so false understandings and misconceptions on the Word of God would be corrected.

Nothing He said was ever ambiguous nor subjective. His questions *were* designed to cause us to question our perception of God, but not to the end that we would merely reform those perceptions based upon our own thoughts, but to correct them.

He did make exclusive, dogmatic, doctrinal proclamations. And we can be grateful He did, because it is those proclamations that opens our eyes to the Truth. And it is His work of salvation that gives us freedom from the power of sin and the sting of death.

RESOURCES: Ravi Zacharias: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ut0z8f7hS3E
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPYRXop7aPA
Phillip E. Johnson, *The Right Questions*