



# HOAW Newsletter

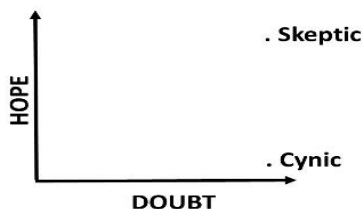
...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and respect... 1 Peter 3:15-16

October 2022

HELPING MEN LIVE LIVES OF INTEGRITY AND HONOR

## Skeptics and Cynics

Dr. Greg Bourgond



In western culture particularly, two modes of thought are on display when confronted with the claims of the Gospel or the subject of the Gospel, Jesus Christ. These two modes of thought can be summarized descriptively as *skepticism* or *cynicism*.

Essentially, a *skeptic* raises arguments against a belief or asks questions to deconstruct a faith argument. Every skeptic I have encountered has a threshold of skepticism mediated by some

degree of hope in the midst of significant doubt. The right argument, a substantiated response, a credible spokesperson, can breach the threshold leading to a new openness to truths heretofore denied by the skeptic. Once their reservations have been adequately addressed, they are open to honest consideration of the proclamation being made. Many who profess to be agnostics fall into the skeptic spectrum.

Skeptics may begin a conversation by asking a general or universal question such as, "What do you think about religion, climate change, gender neutral language, capital punishment, ultimate reality, humanity, or something less controversial like the weather, sports, diet, exercise."

How you respond will determine whether they move to a deeper or inferential question such as "I know

a person who is struggling with \_\_\_\_\_? How would you respond?" Once some degree of trust is reached, they may proceed to a more personal question about themselves. This is a 'feeling out' process to find out if their questions will be handled respectfully or disrespectfully before they decide to have a meaningful conversation with you.

A *cynic*, on the other hand, is firmly convinced of their own position and will not entertain any argument to the contrary. No matter how adept the argument or compelling the evidence, they will not listen or be persuaded otherwise. They will postulate an alternative response designed to undermine any espoused position that does not reflect their own conclusions. The questions they raise are more pronouncements of their beliefs than serious inquiry. They have significant doubt with

little if any hope. They probe for holes in the logic of faith discussions rather than seriously seeking understanding or common ground; unless of course that 'common ground' matches their preconceived notions. Many who profess to be atheists fall into the cynic spectrum.

How does a person of faith deal with a skeptic or a cynic? Is there a single approach to both or must they be engaged differently? I would suggest the following.

When encountering a *skeptic*, the best approach is to simply and concisely answer the questions they are asking and no more. Such an approach honors their inquiry without regurgitating everything one knows on the subject at the first chance. The temptation is to proclaim what one knows thoroughly and completely. It takes patience and respect to wait until they approach the subject again at some later time.

In such an occurrence, the same approach is appropriate—answer only the questions they are asking even if they seem designed to undermine your argument. Do so with gentleness and reverence. You will find a growing openness to your comments over time provided that they are consistent, coherent, and congruent.

*But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and*

*respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:14-17 ESV*

When encountering a *cynic*, the best approach is to simply question the remarks they are presenting. For instance, "How did you come to that position?" "How does that statement correlate with your previous statement?" "How does 'Y' logically follow from 'X'?" "Given your comment the logical outcome is 'Z'. Would you agree or disagree?" "Could you please explain in more detail your position on this issue?" In other words, you are simply asking questions, not supplying answers – yet!

When a cynic's argument begins to implode under the weight of respect and honest (not trick) questions and the cynic is given an opportunity to fully explain their position, they often come to the conclusion that their position is not supportable – even though they might not openly admit it.

In 2008, Greg Boyd published a book, *Letters to a Sceptic*. An introduction to the book reads, "*When Greg Boyd became a Christian, his father, Ed, thought he had joined a cult. For fourteen years, Greg tried to talk to his agnostic father about Christianity, with little success. Then, in what he saw as a last-ditch effort, Greg invited his father to participate in a dialogue through letters in which Ed could express all his doubts and questions and Greg could attempt to answer*

*them and prove the validity of his own views. To Greg's surprise his father agreed. This book is the collection of those letters.*"

I thought that was a pretty good strategy to enter into a dialogue with my father. My father was both a skeptic and a cynic. Just before his death, I met with him in his home in Michigan. The conversation that followed was after we had engaged earlier on various topics. During our interaction he felt comfortable enough to share his unguarded opinion on a number of subjects including the existence of God, personhood, the major dilemmas facing the world, solutions to those dilemmas, and the ultimate destiny of humans. When he put on the 'cap' of a skeptic, I simply answered the questions he was asking. When he put on the cap of a cynic, I simply questioned the answered he was giving—always in an attitude of gentleness and respect.

Near the end of our conversation, he threw out some rather bizarre comments regarding gods of other worlds, contradictory belief systems and the like. Near the end of his pronouncements, he became silent, looked out his picture window, and blurted out, "Why that sounded stupid didn't it." He finally saw the inconsistencies and incongruities of his beliefs and ideology. All I did during the course of our conversation was answer the questions he asked and questions the answers he gave.

Scripture tells us to always be prepared to give a defense for the hope that is in us. **For the *skeptic*, it rests on answering questions they are asking. For the *cynic*, it rests on questioning the answers they are giving.** Responding appropriately, can bring someone one step closer to receiving and embracing the truth.

## OTHER NEWS



**Heart of a Warrior Ministries** offers four journeys you can take to become who God created you to be.

**The Foundation** (Ground Zero) helps establish strong biblical foundations for the battles ahead.

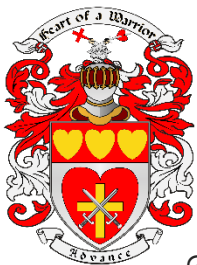
**The Compass** (Phase I) calibrates a warrior's heart and tunes that heart to the heart of God. I am currently leading 45 at Calvary Church WBL Campus on this journey.

**The Map** (Phase II) helps men focus on what matters in accordance with their unique divine wiring.

**The Guide** (Phase III) develops the spiritual discipline of being mentored and mentoring others.

Go to our website for more details.  
[www.heartofawarrior.org/journeys/](http://www.heartofawarrior.org/journeys/)

If you would like to contact me directly, email me at [Greg@HeartofaWarrior.org](mailto:Greg@HeartofaWarrior.org)



### Donations

Please consider giving to Heart of a Warrior Ministries. HOAW Ministries needs your financial support. Our ability to help men live God-honoring lives

depends on the resources we can use to that end. Simply go to the donations tab on [heartofawarrior.org](http://heartofawarrior.org). Thank you for being a subscriber.

Check out **The Store** on our website ([www.heartofawarrior.org](http://www.heartofawarrior.org)). There are downloadable resources you can use to lead a group through Phases I, II, or III, Foundations of a Warrior, and Bible Study Guidelines.

## Websites for Men

**Heart of a Warrior Ministries**  
[www.Heartofawarrior.org](http://www.Heartofawarrior.org)

**A Chosen Generation**  
[www.achosengeneration.info/](http://www.achosengeneration.info/)

**Band of Brothers**  
[www.bandofbrothers.org/](http://www.bandofbrothers.org/)

**Church for Men**  
[churchformen.com/](http://churchformen.com/)

**Every Man's Battle**  
<https://newlife.com/emb/>

**Every Man Ministries**  
[www.everymanministries.com](http://www.everymanministries.com)

**Iron Sharpens Iron**  
[ironsharpensiron.net/](http://ironsharpensiron.net/)

**Iron Works**  
[www.ironworksmen.com/](http://www.ironworksmen.com/)

**Legacy Minded Men**  
[www.legacymindedmen.org](http://www.legacymindedmen.org)

**Life Way Men**  
[www.lifeway.com/en/shop/ministries/men](http://www.lifeway.com/en/shop/ministries/men)

**Man in the Mirror**  
[maninthemirror.org/](http://maninthemirror.org/)

**Man Up God's Way**  
[www.manupgodsway.org/](http://www.manupgodsway.org/)

**Men's Fraternity**  
[www.mensfraternity.com/](http://www.mensfraternity.com/)

**Men's Ministry Catalyst**  
[mensministrycatalyst.org/](http://mensministrycatalyst.org/)

**Men with No Regrets**  
[www.menwithnoregrets.org/](http://www.menwithnoregrets.org/)

**National Collision of Ministries to Men**  
[ncmm.org/](http://ncmm.org/)

**Ransomed Heart Ministries**  
[www.ransomedheart.com/](http://www.ransomedheart.com/)

**Resolute**  
[beresolute.org/](http://beresolute.org/)

**Restoration Generation**  
[resgen.org/](http://resgen.org/)