

Be a Monster or a Hero? John Cooper of Skillet

(March 18, 2022)

Ladies and gentlemen, do you have to have a degree in theology, philosophy, or apologetics in order to speak powerfully and accurately about how the church is being influenced by the culture? If you think so, if you think that all of this should be left to the professionals, to some kind of expert class, or clergy, then you haven't been reading your Bible enough. You've left that to the expert class, or clergy, which is exactly the problem we're seeing in the church today. You know, I'm just gonna sound odd, but we're all supposed to be priests. We're all supposed to be ambassadors of Jesus.

Peter, who wrote to Christians living in an unbelieving society wrote, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." That's First Peter 2:9. Also, Paul says to his student, Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." He said that in Second Timothy 2:15. And as you know, Paul writes to the Corinthians, "we are Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us (2 Cor. 5:20)".

So, we're not supposed to leave the ambassadorship of Christianity to the experts, we're all supposed to be experts. We're all supposed to be priests. We're all supposed to be studied to show ourselves approved. You don't have to have a formal degree to get involved. In fact, ladies and gentlemen, think about this, the first universities which were started by Christians weren't formed for more than 1000 years after the church was established. People were discipled by others and became ambassadors by being diligent to learn the Scriptures. And a man who has learned the scriptures, who is out there on the front lines and is engaging the culture and reeling the church back into where it should be, is John Cooper. He's the founder and lead singer of the Christian rock band Skillet. Some of you may know whose Skillet is, some of you may not, but you're gonna learn from John today. But more importantly, he's an ambassador for Christ. He's a husband, and he's a father, and it's great having John on the podcast right now. John, how are you?



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John:

Man, I'll tell you what, Frank, you are preaching my language. You're preaching my language. What you just shared is exactly my testimony. And I know that you don't actually know that because we've never spoken. So, I'll let you ask me questions. But man, now I'm pumped up. Now I'm ready to do our jobs. Do our talk, man.

Frank:

Let's go to war, baby. [laughing]

John:

Come on. [laughing] I'll tell you what, baby. Love it. Yeah.

Frank:

That's a little inside joke but we'll explain that here in a minute. John, I want to start, because a lot of people don't know who you are. My kids have known who you are forever. You know, I'm 60 now, so your band was a little after my - I mean, I love rock - but it was after my rock phase. You know, I grew up on The Who, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones. And my sons were always like, Skillet, Skillet, Skillet. I mean, they've been saying that for years. I got three sons. And so, I want people to know who you are. First of all, when did you become a Christian? How did it happen?

John:

Well, sounds like you have three Godly kids.

Frank:

That's right.

John:

They know good music when they hear it. Yeah, I became a Christian as a kid. My mom was a Jesus fanatic. And I mean, in all of the right ways. My mom was fanatical about the Bible. She taught me the word of God, she prayed with me, she made me memorize Scripture. Everything that happened, my mom would say, no, that's not right because Proverbs says... You know, it was always like that. And of course, that had its annoying moments and stuff, but because of

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that, I always believed in God. I knew God was real. And not only that, but I also saw my mom put the word of God to the test, you know. So, she would say, well, the Proverbs say, either you do A and you and it leads you to righteousness, or you do B, and it leads you to destruction. And I've seen those things work. And so, I believe in the word of God.

Gave my life to Jesus when I was five years old. I just thank the Lord that I don't have any crazy backsliding testimony. I know a lot of people do. When they give their life to Jesus as a five year old, then they backslide, and then maybe they truly get born again when they're in college or whatever their story is. They say, I've never really understood it. I gotta say, I understood it enough. I understood that God was my boss, whatever God says was right, whatever he said, I had to do it, trust, and obey. It was very clear to me as a kid and I'm so thankful to the Lord that I didn't have that major backsliding time. So, that's how I became a Christian.

And I wouldn't just mind saying one more thing, because what you just preached that I love. That's what got me on fire for Jesus when I went to college, You know, I was reading my Bible and I suddenly realized, you know, there's this passage of scripture in Ephesians 4 where God says, He gave gifts to men, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists. He gave these gifts to men for the equipping of the saints. And I remember reading that going, but wait a minute, wait a minute, that means - I think, actually, the Scripture says, for the equipping of the saints for works that minister. So, I remember thinking, so I'm supposed to do works of ministry, even though I'm not a preacher. I'm supposed to do works of ministry, even though I'm not in theology school, and I don't live the best life in the whole world, and if I was a preacher, there's some things that would change about my speech, and the things that I watch on TV. There are all these things that I do, but I'm not one of those. I'm just a normie. And I all of a sudden realized, there's no such thing as a lay person, in that sense.

Frank:

That's right.

John:

We are all called to be ambassadors for Christ, we are all called to purity, we are all called to be representatives of Christ in the earth. What a privilege. That was the life changing moment for me. And that's one of the things I'm most passionate about. So, I'm glad you started with that.

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Frank:

Yeah, in fact, you know, there's a debate between the Protestants and the Catholics over that. The Catholics say, we've got all these priests, and the Protestants are saying, no, no, no, we don't have priests we just have lay people, forget it. You know, they're both wrong. The truth of the matter is, you don't get rid of the laity... Alright, let me say another way. You don't get rid of the priests; you get rid of the laity. There are no laity. Everybody's supposed to be a priest, according to Peter. Everybody's supposed to be an ambassador, according to Paul. We're doing that and you're doing that. Now before we get into what's going on - and the reason we're having John on is because John is having an impact with a generation that many people don't have the credibility to speak into. And so, you're going to see what he's doing when we get a little bit further in the program, but I just want you guys to know who John is before we get there. So, John, your musical influences growing up, who were they and how did you start Skillet?

John:

Well, you know, going back to my mom, my mom was a piano teacher and a voice teacher. My mom loved opera, she loved church music, she loved classical music, but nothing with drums, nothing with guitars. I mean, I'm telling you, the first time I heard Michael Jackson, I came home, and I was like, Mom, I heard this new song, and it goes like this... [singing Beat It]. You know, I love Michael Jackson. And my mom gave me the holiest booty whipping God ever created. I mean, my mom tore me up for singing the devil's music. So, all that to say, I grew up with classical music. I play piano. I also play the trombone. Not a lot of people know that. I played the trombone for about 13 years.

Frank:

Well, I know you don't go around blowing your horn, so...

John:

No, thankfully, thankfully, God ended that [laughing]. God ended that time of my life. But I did get into hard rock music. When I was in fifth and sixth grade all my friends were listening to Bon Jovi and Metallica, Motley Crue. It was the 80s and all these great metal bands, hair metal, glam metal, rock, hard rock, and when I was in sixth grade is when I discovered Christian rock music.

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And Christian rock music was the only thing that my mom thought was worse than rock music.
[laughing]

Frank:

Oh really?

John:

Yeah, because it was wolves in sheep's clothing, you know. They were pretending to love Jesus, but they really just wanted to lead Christian kids astray. But I eventually convinced my mom to let me listen to a few select Christian artists like Petra. I love Petra. DeGarmo and Key, Amy Grant, Stryper. And my mom didn't like it, but she finally allowed it. Just in my little testimony, my mom died from cancer when I was 15. So, at that time, I kind of could begin to listen to whatever I wanted to, because my mom wasn't around, but I still didn't listen to secular music. I still listened to Christian music like Petra, and all these great bands, and that's what I cut my teeth on.

Frank:

Alright, we're talking to John Cooper, founder, lead singer of the rock band, Skillet, who is also engaged in the culture. You'll see right after the break. Don't go anywhere. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. Our website is CrossExamined.org. We're back in two.

Alright, let's put all this into a skillet and see how it turns out. That's my guest today, John Cooper, lead singer, founder of the Christian rock band, Skillet. Which, by the way, is a crossover band. It also has a lot of followers who are not Christians. In fact, John, I heard you saying this on your podcast the other day. You said something like Skillet, was it in 2019, had 2 billion streams? Was it something like that? Or was it in one year? I can't remember.

John:

Yeah, just last year alone, we had 2 billion streams, you know, of course, that's all of our songs combined. 2 billion streams. In 2019, Billboard released their end of decade stats, and at the end of decade stats, Skillet had the number 40th biggest selling rock album of the decade, which I couldn't believe. And we were actually only one of, I think four, what I would call hard

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rock bands - the other bands weren't hard rock, they were more like Fall Out Boy what I would call kind of pop rock - so, the only hard rock bands were Nickelback, Linkin Park, Foo Fighters, and Skillet. It was just pretty cool.

Frank:

And you beat out the Foo Fighters for number of downloads.

John:

Yeah, that's right. It was pretty cool.

Frank:

That's great. And so, you started the band in what year? And what took it off in popularity? What was the break that made it go?

John:

Well, we started the band in 1996. And I just wanted to play music to share my faith. I mean, I loved music, and I don't mean that didn't enjoy the art. I love the art. But art to me has always been about expressing something to the Creator that glorifies Him, you know, because we are made in His image, and so, we have the ability to create. Our God is creating God. This is an amazing gift that God gives to human beings, right. So, I want to create something that glorifies God, but also want it to, hopefully, be used as a tool for evangelism. I want people to hear the songs and, you know, when you listen to music, the words get inside of you. And that's something I think that the secular world has always understood, more than the Christian world, funny enough. The secular world sings these songs about sex, and drugs, or violence, or anger, and we all just listen to it and eventually, all that stuff, all that negativity, all that evil is sinking into us whether we know it or not. Garbage in, garbage out, right.

Well, with Christian music, I thought maybe it could be the same thing. Maybe somebody that does not know God, does not want to go to church, hates God, maybe they listen to my music, and little by little by little the word of God is seeping inside. And as we all know, the word of God is living and active, sharper than a two edged sword. So, maybe the Holy Spirit, through our music, could begin to do a work in someone as they're listening over and over. So, that's why it's Skillet started. I can't remember if that's what you asked me. [laughing]

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Frank:

Yeah, that's what I did ask you. And that's a good insight because music, when you listen to it over and over again, you can remember the lyrics without even trying. And you have that song, Monster. If you're listening to enough of the evil stuff, pretty soon you do feel like a monster, don't you?

John:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Frank:

And we do anyway because we're struggling with sin, we're fallen creatures.

John:

Yes, absolutely. That's what that song was about. It was like, I had small kids when I wrote it. And I gotta be honest, I was struggling. Yeah. Because having kids is really hard. You're exhausted, you end up yelling at people when it's not even your personality to yell at people, and you're always on the edge. And maybe you take your bad day out on your kids, and you know you don't want to be that person. And so, that's song Monster was like, man, there's stuff in me that I need the Holy Spirit to change. You know.

Frank:

That's right. Now, how did you meet Korey and how old are your kids now?

John:

My kids are 19 and 16. My daughter is the oldest one. My wife is Korey. So, she's from Wisconsin and I'm from Memphis. Short version is that we were kind of a sister church, I guess she would say. And my pastor and his family knew Korey, and they kept saying, this girl, Korey is going to come down and visit the church. I want you to meet her because she plays music. She has her own band, you have your own band, and you guys might be friends, but they never in a million years ever thought we would like each other. They just kind of thought it was interesting. Because Korey is very introverted, intelligent, deep, theological. She went to Bible seminary. And I was just a madman. I was just crazy, loud, obnoxious, not a deep thinker. Just, you know, I speak first and think later. But we ended up, you know, really connecting because

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of the passion for Jesus. We both had the same vision to use music to share about the greatness of God, and that's why we connected, and the rest is history. We just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary two weeks ago, so a quarter of a century. I'm feeling good.

Frank:

That's great. Now, she's a part of the band. She's on tour with you all the time. How did the band take off? Like, what was the break that made it so popular?

John:

It took us ages. I think we were a band for 10 years before people really knew who we were. Our first record came out in 1996. In 2006, we released an album called Comatose. It still did not have mainstream radio appeal. We were signed to Atlantic Records, so we were signed to a major secular album label at that point, but we still couldn't get played on radio. But there was this underground swell, word of mouth. We were getting really big on; at the time it was MySpace. I don't know if people listening remember MySpace, but MySpace was kind of a pre-Facebook. And people on MySpace would always play their favorite bands. And there was always something really cool about a teenager saying, this is my favorite band. And if that band is a band that's never been heard of, it kind of gave you some cred points, you know. You were cool because you were underground.

Frank:

Right.

John:

And all of a sudden Skillet became a very popular underground band that all these fringe kids, and kids that always felt not in the mainstream or misunderstood, they all liked Skillet, And so, Skillet began growing and growing. And then it was in 2009 or 2010 when we released Monster and Monster got picked up by WWE wrestling, and then it got picked up by the SEC football league, and all of a sudden, the song became a hit. And our lives changed almost overnight. So, I usually tell people it took us 13 years to become an overnight success.

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Frank:

Alright, what's the hardest thing then about getting that kind of success? How do you put boundaries around yourself to make sure it doesn't go to your head? How do you maintain the proper relationships, the proper Christ like attitude, when it could be easy in a celebrity world to treat people however you want to treat them because nobody's ever gonna say no to you? What do you do in that regard? How do you protect yourself there?

John:

Well, that's a fantastic question. And you're really right. I will say this, there's a practical thing, when it takes you 13 years of driving your own bus, fixing a trailer tire for 13 years straight - actually, we weren't driving a bus for the first five years, we were driving a van - and setting up your own merchandise, and having people tell you you're never going to be good enough - we appreciate your heart for Jesus, but you're not that talented - it kind of does something to you that... In other words, when the success comes, you're just so thankful for it, you know. But in reality, I think it is with all things - and I know that sounds like a Sunday School answer, but it's the God's honest truth. Great Bible theology protects you from all of this. Because the truth is, I've met a lot of very unsuccessful bands, who are driving their own vans, and changing their own trailer tires, who are some of the most arrogant musicians that I've ever known. They don't have any success, but they think that they deserve it. So, in other words, it's not always the success that reveals what's behind it. Sometimes it's already there.

Likewise, I've met some really successful artists, more successful than me, who are very, very humble. You know, Michael W. Smith, there's somebody. Michael W. Smith is a really successful guy but you when you meet Michael, this is a really humble guy. This is a guy that knows that everything he has been given from God. So, I always tell people, the truth is this, if you are arrogant when God gives you a little bit, you are going to be arrogant when God gives you a lot, you know. So, I hope that that's helpful for people. For us, we just always knew that it wasn't about being the most talented, it wasn't about writing the best song in the world, it was all about God's providence. All we're doing is writing what he's given us and if God decides that he wants to give us a little extra in the storehouse, or a lot extra in the storehouse, that's all within his goodness and I don't need the slow clap from the world to feel good about my art. My art is to glorify God. You might like it you might not.

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Frank:

Well, we're gonna get into that. I do have to ask you this though, John. I know you're ministering to believers and non-believers out there, especially those who like rock, who like to heavier side, the metal, but how do you respond to critics who say, hey, John, you're touring with non-Christian groups? Does that ever present a moral dilemma for you in any way? If the other band is promoting stuff that you don't agree with, it isn't biblical, how do you get past that? Is that a problem? What would your mom say, in other words?

John:

[laughing] My mom would have been upset so long ago. We're way past that? When I got my ear pierced, my mom would have lost it. Anyway, I mean, for me, personally, it's never been a moral dilemma. I do understand that a lot of people feel that way. And I will kind of be totally honest, it's never even made me upset that they feel that way, probably because I grew up in a household that was a little bit like that. I know where they're coming from. For me, it hasn't been a moral dilemma. I believe in this idea - well, everybody listening that believes in the Bible believes in this idea - of being sought in the earth, of being the light of the world. I believe in that. And I think if we don't go to where the darkness is, then we're not really going to do that. Now, there have been some things that I have declined. In other words, there are some boundaries that I say, hey, I can't do that. But if I am being asked to go and be an opening act for their audience, then I'm really happy to do that. I mean because that's their audience. I get a chance to come in and be the light and the salt of the earth. And I just really love that opportunity.

But there have been some things, just so you know, that we have turned down when I've thought, that's too far over the line and I just can't be a part of that. So, I have my boundaries. I won't say any of the band names because I don't want to offend anybody. It's not that I'm judging them, but I go yeah, that's too much. But if it's something where they asked me to come and share my music... Now, listen, if they said, John, we want you to come share your music but you have to change your lyrics, you cannot say the word Jesus, well, that would not be okay with me. And then that would be a line that I'm not willing to cross because I feel that now you're stamping down on the word of God in my music, and that would not be something that I'd be comfortable with.

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Frank:

Yeah, I look at it this way. If somebody invites me to their church, or their organization, they're agreeing with me, I don't have to agree with them. Right? They are the host and if they're going to allow me to come in and, uncensored, say what I want to say, then I'm going to take that opportunity because I want to reach their audience, just like you said. But if they're going to put limits on me, then I might say no. We're talking to John Cooper. He is the lead singer, he is the founder of the Christian rock group, Skillet. And he's also a cultural commentator, which is what we're going to get into right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek. We're back in two minutes. Don't go anywhere.

I want to mention that I will be at the National Christian Conference on Apologetics in April, April 8-9, and so will my friend and guest, John Cooper. He's gonna be there as well, along with J. Warner Wallace, Hugh Ross, Alisa Childers, Jorge Gil, several others. You're gonna want to be there. Go to SES.edu. (Southern Evangelical Seminary) for more. You're gonna want to be there, just south of Charlotte, NC in Rock Hill, SC. Not far from where I'm sitting right now. And my friend John Cooper is coming all the way from Norfolk, Virginia somewhere? You're on the road.

John:

I'm on the road right now but I'll be coming from Wisconsin eventually.

Frank:

Alright, so John is on the road and his website is JohnLCooper.com. Check him out there. He's got a book there. We're going to get to it in a little bit. And you can see what John is up to. In fact, John, you started recently - I don't know how long ago was, a couple years ago, - you started a podcast called Cooper Stuff and that's how I really became to note to know what you were doing. I mean, my sons have always loved Skillet, but I didn't know you were really involved in engaging the culture with proper theology. Why did you decide to start this Cooper Stuff podcast? What was the impetus?

John:

Sure, you know that I could answer that this in a lot of different ways, but I think the way I'll go with is the simple version. I didn't want to start a podcast. I didn't feel qualified to start a podcast. I kept saying, how come other people aren't starting a podcast? Where's the person

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that's going to do this? What you see in the secular world is, you have your politicians, you have your head pieces for all the various things, you have your college professors, you have your Hollywood people, and it trails all the way down what I think in like hard leftism. All the way down to where, all of a sudden, there's a presidential election in 2016 and Katy Perry literally is going around knocking on college campus dorm rooms handing out Hillary Clinton leaflets and stuff. In other words, on the hard left, what you see is from the top all the way down, you have these boots on the ground folks, that maybe aren't philosophers, they're not the smartest people in the world, but they have a celebrity platform, and they will use it to say something they feel passionate about.

In the Christian music world, the Christian "celebrity world," we don't have a lot of that. And I kept saying, why? Why don't we have some really smart people doing that? Where's the guy, Lord, where's the guy that's going to do it? And I just had this little voice come in my head saying, John, maybe you're the guy. And I kept saying, no, Lord, I'm not because I'm not smart. John, maybe you're the guy. And I just got to a place where I just couldn't stand it anymore because the platforms that were popping up, even within Christian music, to be frank, and I won't mention any names, a lot of the platforms that were popping up, commenting on culture, I felt were really confusing the gospel. I just felt, you guys are making the gospel too confusing. And even as somebody that knows the gospel, you're saying stuff that I've never heard before. And I don't think it needs to be that complicated, so let's break it all down: What's happening in culture and what does the Bible have to say about it?

Frank:

By the way, if you're hearing music in the background, that's because John is on location.

John:

Yeah, I just heard that, and I thought, oh gosh, I hope that doesn't continue for the next hour and a half.

Frank:

That's alright. So, you decided to do it. It's called Cooper Stuff. Check out the podcast. And lately, you've been dealing with this topic called deconstruction. And in fact, you helped defend our friend Alisa Childers, our mutual friend, because she was defining what deconstruction was

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and there were some people who were not taking her very seriously. What do you think is the most accurate description of the kind of deconstruction that is really popular now, John?

John:

Man, this is such a long conversation. The short version is this. There are many different interpretations and definitions of what this word means. What I find really concerning is that, where the word comes from - and I hate to be like, some kind of purist or something - but it comes from this very postmodern viewpoint. And I'm not any expert in post-modernism, but I did write a book called, *Awake & Alive to Truth: Finding Truth in the Chaos of a Relativistic World*. The reason I wrote that book was because, to me, post-modernism is at the heart of all of our issues in society right now. This is the heart of all the things you're seeing being torn down in the Western world, within Christianity in general, within theology in general, within gender and sex, with radical gender theory, privilege theory, all this stuff is kind of coming from this post-modern worldview. So, I'm not an expert, but I know it when I see it, and what post-modernism teaches is basically that there is no absolute truth.

Well, deconstruction, where it comes from, is basically this; there's a way to hear words, or to read words, that is post-modern. I can never know what Frank Turek means when he comes on a podcast and he says, Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life. Well, I can't know for sure what he means. There's no absolute meaning. The only meaning is how I interpret it. I think that what he means is this or this, and I need to be aware that Frank might be saying those words out of a desire to rule over me, almost like in power and privilege. He may be saying these things from a hierarchical power structure, and maybe he's trying to keep me down. He says it's the truth but what he really means is, John Cooper, you say in your place. All of this is what they mean when you talk about deconstructionism, literary deconstructionism. You can go back and read the Bible, and you don't really know what it means.

This is why I'm so concerned. What we see happening in Christianity is we are deconstructing every little piece of it into where all that means is, hey, as long as we agree that in general, God is real, and God loves folks, that's all that matters and nothing else in the Bible can be known for sure. That's what I see happening with my eyes. Some people reject it, and they say no, all it is people are deconstructing from harmful cultural things like hyper-Americanism, or Christian nationalism, or white theology, or patriarchal complementarianism, and this and that and the

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other. I think a lot of that, to be honest, I think is a Trojan horse. I think you're saying that, but I think what is truly happening is basically just people that want us to look at the Bible with skepticism. And you also have to remember this, skepticism is a core definer of post-modernism. So, you want to look at the Bible with skepticism; how can we really know that that's real? And what I see is, I know 100 people that have fallen away from the faith who began their journey by saying, I'm just deconstructing from white American evangelical ideas. And now they've completely left the faith.

Frank:

Yeah, and those of you who have listened to this program, we've talked a little bit about post-modernism. It's obviously self-defeating, right? If somebody says, there's no absolute truth, it's making an absolute truth claim. And isn't it interesting, John, these very people who say, you can't know what the Bible really says, they expect us to know exactly what they mean when they say something, right. They don't want us to deconstruct what they say. They only can deconstruct what the Bible says, which of course is hypocritical, and it is self-defeating, because to say, you don't know what the Bible means, but we should know what David French means, or what Phil Vischer means, or anybody else who's now creeping over to the left side, yet they claim they're Christians. And look, I don't know... I assume that both Phil Vischer, that's a person that you've talked about on your podcast recently. I assume David French, they're both Christians, they're both brothers in the Lord, but they do appear to be drifting left in terms of at least some of their political views. Are they directly advocating deconstructionism? Do you know?

John:

No. No. I do think that they are really. I think interpreting it in its best light, one of the things I see happening possibly with, you know, the Phil Vischer thing, I think interpreting it in his best light, I think it's this; I think that Christians, in general, feel that we have not done a great job of being nice to the world, of showing kindness, and being loving. We seem judgmental, where we yell at people, we have all these sins.

Frank:

No, we don't! Take that back, Cooper! [laughing]

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John:

We say we love America, and America is this really great past, but look at all the sins in our past. And because of that, a lot of people just don't want to sound mean or judgmental. And so, when they hear me say something hard about deconstruction, they go the other route, they swing the pendulum to such a degree that they never want to bring a sword. You know, they never want to bring a judgment and say, this is wrong, this is righteousness, this is wickedness, it's black and white. They don't want to do that. So, they become fudgy with everything. And then comes in all of the word language games that we so often see played in leftism. And so, I think, looking at it as best light, I don't think they're advocating for it, I just think that they don't like that we're saying such mean things against it.

But I will say this, and this is what the leftward drift does - and I think you'll agree with me - what I will say is this, even if these people don't end up advocating for it, they already are so sympathetic to it that they do not want to have division between us in that. So, in other words, if somebody has deconstructed and said, look, I don't actually believe in the literal resurrection of Christ, I don't think that's necessarily literally real, but I'm still a Christian, I think what you get with a lot of these people that have drifted left, they would say, okay, I don't agree with that, but I don't want to divide over an issue like that. We're still brothers in Christ. Whereas I think me and you, Frank would be like, no, that puts you outside of the faith. And we're not loving people by not being honest about that.

Frank:

That's right. Well, that's what Paul said, If Christ hasn't risen from the dead, your faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). They're giving up the core of Christianity if they're doing that, John, as you know. And if they give up the atonement, the whole gig is up. That's what Christianity is all about. Right?

John:

Absolutely!

Frank:

...that Christ pays our sins and trusting in Him we're not only forgiven, but we're also given his righteousness. And I've noticed, because you've spoken about this in your previous two

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podcasts, that it seems like they're always saying, yeah, it's a problem but it's not quite as bad as this other problem. Like yeah, abortion is not good, we're not for it, but have you ever thought about the poor? Have you ever thought about war? Why aren't you Christians talking about those things? And they wind up never talking about the pro-life issue, which by the way, the right to life is the right to all the rights. If you don't have life, you don't have anything. There couldn't be a bigger issue, I think in anyone's mind, than protecting innocent people. But they seem to not think it's all that serious, John, it seems to me.

John:

Yeah. You know, I think the biggest thing splitting the church apart right now is this issue of, it's not politics, it's really not. It's an issue of theology. What do we think the government is supposed to do? What do we think the government is not supposed to do? And it outworks itself into politics. And what really annoys me, I don't mind them voting for somebody different than I vote for, I would give them grace for that. I would say, hey, I think you're wrong and I'd like to have a biblical discussion about why that is, but what they end up doing, a lot of the movement - and they do it because it's culturally acceptable, right - they're 100% in line with popular culture, right. And instead of just saying, hey, abortion is really evil, but there's other things that we also think are evil and we're weighing them, what they end up doing is they maximize how evil the one thing is, and they minimize the evil of another in order to get to a political ends. And I don't dig that.

Frank:

What can we do to fix this? We're going to talk to John Cooper right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be and Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. JohnLCooper.com. Check it out. Back in two.

If you're low on the FM dial looking for National Public Radio, go no further. We're actually going to tell you the truth here. You're not going to hear this on NPR. I can tell you that. We're talking to John Cooper. Politically Incorrect. He's correct, not politically correct. And that's what we want on this program. He is the founder and lead singer of the Christian rock band Skillet. He's coming from the road to talk to us right now. John, you do have a new album coming out. When is that or is it out already?

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John:

Yeah, just came out in January. It is called Dominion, and I'm telling you, it is a record for now. You know, sometimes when you write a record, there are songs that they're always gonna - you could have written it 10 years ago and it could still be pertinent to now. Sometimes you write an album when you just feel like man, this is speaking to the issue at hand. And I think that because of everything I've been through with my podcast, and Cooper Stuff, and the culture, we made this record that when you hear it, you go, man, this record is speaking to now; cancel culture, standing in the storm against the culture, being willing to stand up for Christ in a culture that is going to cancel you, pull you off of social media, tell you you're a mean bad person. All of these things are really involved in the record, so people, go check it out. It's called Dominion.

Frank:

Dominion. Check it out. And if you just Google the word Skillet, you'll find John, his band, you'll find his entire history in terms of music. And if you listen to podcasts, hope you do, this podcast is called I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an atheist. So, if you're listening in on radio, you want to hear this again, go there. You should hear John's podcast too. It's called Cooper Stuff. Just search for, wherever you get podcasts, Cooper Stuff. And John, you've been talking a lot about deconstructionism, you've been talking a lot about some of these Christian celebrities. In fact, here's a question for you. What is the danger of following Christian celebrities, or only nominal Christians at best? I mean, there are some Christians celebrities like yourself, you're deep into theology, and philosophy, apologetics, this kind of thing, but some are just nominal Christians. What do we do when we see those Christian celebrities out there and so many people following them and obeying every word they say?

John:

Well, I mean, we're at a real scary place, you know, and I've been very vocal about Christian celebrities, Christian musicians. I've been very vocal about this, and I've been pretty hard on my community, which I feel good about. Being hard on folks, I guess, is my thing. But what I will say is this, the Christian music, it's no different than Christianity in general. I mean, which is why I'm doing this series I just did, which is called The Leftward Drift of Christian Elites. And I'm bringing it hard against people that are writing these think pieces on The Gospel Coalition, and the Christian podcasters, and the Christian scholars that always want so much nuance that they

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never tell us what the Bible says about a thing. The Bible is not supposed to be that confusing. So, what you have in Christian celebrities is really the same thing you have in Christianity in general. So no, you should not be hanging on every word that a Christian rock singer, or worship singer, or blogger on The Gospel Coalition, or whoever. You shouldn't be living your life - and that includes John Cooper and includes Frank Turek - living every second of your life going, I live by the word of John Cooper alone. No, you should not be living by my words, live by the words of God. Jesus Christ has the words of life. We're doing the best we can to kind of say, this is what I think the Bible means, this is how you can live righteously in this this time.

What you have in Christian music, though, is people that are less given to Bible theology. You know, they're artists. There are people that are emotional because a lot of times artists are... I mean, God made us to be emotional. I think that can be a great thing for art. They're more driven by emotions than they are intellect. And that's not a slam on them. That's a gift from God, I believe. But because of that, you can write what you feel, and it doesn't always line up with Scripture.

And then the other part is that a lot of the times, a lot of Christian musicians are on the road. They don't have a church; they don't even know what Scripture says to start with. And so, they're always looking for what sounds right and what feels right, and so that's a real dangerous place to be. And no one ever tells them no, you know. Nobody ever says, actually, no, you shouldn't do that. That's actually not good. You get used to hearing the praise of people and that's not always healthy. So, maybe somebody listening is a Christian musician, or maybe you want to be in a worship band, or maybe you want to write worship songs, I just encourage you get into a church. Do not ever be disconnected from a local body, like a local church, and have people in your life that will tell you yes, people that will tell you no, people that will say, go back to the scriptures and read this again and think about if this is really what you want to say.

Frank:

And it's important because we started the top of the program talking about this. We're not saying that Christian celebrities can't be good ambassadors of Jesus. We have a case right here where John, I think, is a good ambassador of Jesus, because he's studied to show himself approved. He's been interested in knowing why Christianity is true and what it means. We're talking about people who just claim to be Christians, but they're only an inch deep. We

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shouldn't just be blindly follow following them. In fact, John, I came across your stuff probably really two years ago. I can't remember who left the faith. Maybe it was Rhett and Link. Am I thinking properly?

John:

I think it was Marty Sampson and Joshua Harris.

Frank:

Joshua Harris. So, you had a Facebook post, which I thought was excellent, when you were talking about, I seem to remember you saying something like, these people have said to be Christians for many years, and now suddenly, they say they're not. You said, how about a little humility? Like, why don't you just stop trying to lead people now? You've been misleading them, at least you think you have, for so many years, thinking now, oh, I was wrong for so long, being a Christian. And now you think the lightbulb is turned on and now you want to lead him in another direction. How about a little humility? How about trying to figure out what really is true before you start saying, oh, now I know the truth. What people seem to forget, John, is when they deconstruct one worldview, they are automatically reconstructing another, and that other worldview may or may not be true. Well, it's not true if it opposes Christianity, but people don't seem to realize that. So, why do you emphasize that deconstruction so much? What really caused you to say, I need to say something here, man. This is ridiculous.

John:

Well, it started for two things. One, of course, was the Lord and the other was the Lord through my wife. Okay. Which is usually how I know God is speaking to me because my wife says, you're supposed to do this. I say, yes, ma'am. No, I will take this back to 2012 or 2013 when I began first noticing a lot of Christian pastors, preachers think pieces coming out. I had been a Christian by this point, since I was five years old. I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but I'm reading these think pieces going, this doesn't sound right to me. What are they talking about? And I began asking questions. And so, basically, that led me into about a three to four year time period, from 2013 2016 or 2017, where I was just consuming books. I read theology, apologetics, philosophy, atheist philosophers, as well. I wanted to know: Where is this coming from? Karl Marx and Nietzsche. And I'm trying to understand the bottom root of all these things.

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Once I finally figured it out - in 2016 I finished reading a fantastic book called *White Guilt* by Shelby Steele, which was an amazing book. I ended the book, I was in bed, I turned around and looked at my wife and said, I figured it out. I can't believe it took me three years. I figured out what's going on. We live in a post-modern society and post-modernism is coming into the church. I didn't ever know that would be a possibility. And when post-modern comes into the church, well, then everybody can have their own interpretation of what the Bible says. It's all about the way I feel. Basically, we want to be our own gods. And so, I told my wife, this is what's going on. I know God wants me to speak about this at some point, but I don't know how, and I don't know what to do. And so, for about two years, something would happen, and my wife would be like, John, you need to write something, and I would say, I'm not the guy. And this went on for two years.

John:

And so, after Joshua Harris and Marty Sampson left the faith, I was so mad. I said, how come these people, they leave the faith, and then they start up a brand new platform where they're sharing all their new truth? And where's the humility? And my wife said, John, you need to write something. And I said, nobody cares. I'm a rockstar. Nobody cares what I have to say. John, you need to write something. And so, I said, I'll write it but I'm not going to publish it because nobody's gonna care. I'm a moron. Nobody cares what I have to say. And I wrote it and I read it to my wife, and she said, some of the grammar is bad but I don't even care. Don't change a word. Post it. She loved it so much. So, I think that that was the biggest, most obvious thing to me. I think it's one of the reasons that it went so viral. I think everybody read it and said, yeah, that's exactly how I feel. How can you teach the word of God for 20 years and now, not only say you disbelieve it, you apologize for the harm you did while preaching the word of God, which insinuates that God is mean, God is not nice? Now I'm more moral than God and I'm sorry for how mean he seems, and then you apologize. And then you say, what I've learned now is that life is about forgiveness, it's about loving people, it's about this...

Frank:

It's about approving them, no matter what they do.

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John:

Yeah. We don't need to know what you think. Now you've discredited yourself. Go away to the hills for a few years and be quiet. Why don't you have any humility? And I think that that's why it resonated with people.

Frank:

Well, it did. And they're assuming a moral standard when they claim God is somehow immoral. That's a whole other topic we could talk about. But John, you nailed it. And also, John, I got to say this, that song Hero, fabulous song. My son and I just wrote a book called Hollywood Heroes: How Your Favorite Movies Reveal God. It's coming out in about a month. How did that song come to you and who is it really about?

John:

Well, the song, of course, is about Jesus, but it came about - there's a funny story. My daughter is 19. I wrote that song in 2009, so that gives you an idea how old she was. We were in Target, and we were in the checkout line, and I saw a magazine and it had the, you know, so and so with the swimsuit body and the girl on the cover saying that it's really great. And I remember being really annoyed thinking: What kind of world are my kids going to grow up in? My daughter has no heroes to look up to because these Hollywood people have lost the plot. And I just felt that little voice inside my head say, you're supposed to be the hero. When you imitate Christ, you are imitating THE hero. He is THE light of the world, and we are a reflection of his light, so we become the light of the world. That's the short version of what Hero is. Which takes us back to how you started this whole thing. God wants me and you to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ.

Frank:

Couldn't be said better. JohnLCooper.com. Check it out. John, don't go anywhere. I want to talk to you a little bit more. We'll have this on special content. We've got a new thing with the CrossExamined community behind a paywall, so you won't get censored. We'll talk more about that in a future show. But John, it's been great having you on. Ladies and gentlemen, we'll see you here next week. God bless.

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