

Tackling the Top 5 Objections Young People Have to Christianity | with Cliffe and Stuart Knechtle – Part 2

(January 16, 2024)

FRANK:

So, what do you say to people who say to you, I would never be a Christian? There's just too many hypocrites in Christianity. What's wrong with you people? I wouldn't want to be part of your group. And by the way, if there is a really good God, why does He allow all the evil in the world? Is He not powerful enough? Is He not loving enough? What's the deal? Why does he allow bad things to happen to good people? I mean, the world seems to be so unjust. The righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper. Why is that? And how do you deal with these issues, particularly among the young?

Well, back by popular demand, are Cliffe and Stuart Knechtle who were on the program last week. And I wanted to extend our conversation because they both do great work on college campuses. They are both pastors at a church in New Canaan, Connecticut. So, if you're anywhere up in that area, and you want to find a good evangelical church, we have one for you. And so, they're back with me. Gentlemen, thanks for being on the midweek podcast. Cliffe and Stewart, tell us again the name of the church just so we get that on the table here. So, if people are anywhere in that New Canaan area, they know where to go to church,

STUART:

Grace Community Church, and it meets at Grace Farms.

FRANK:

What's the website?

STUART:

GraceCommunityChurch.Info. And you can find Grace Community Church on Facebook in New Canaan.

FRANK:

Alright, check that out ladies and gentlemen, Grace Community Church. Alright, let's talk about hypocrites. Speaking of the church, let's start with that objection. That's such a big one you get on college campuses. Sometimes I get it too. There's too many hypocrites in the church. How do you respond Cliffe?

CLIFFE:

I love to get an African American brother or sister to stand next to me at that point, and say, you know something? If anybody has a right to reject Jesus Christ because of Christian hypocrisy, it's my African American brothers and sisters. Their ancestors were enslaved by white



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Christians for years. They were whipped during the week, and they were brought to church on Sunday and told about Jesus. So, if anybody has a right to reject Christ because of Christian hypocrites, it's my African American brothers and sisters. But what I respect so much about my African American brothers and sisters, is their open mindedness. They are open enough to read the Gospels for themselves, and to realize that Jesus Christ did not have a racist bone in His body. Jesus did not have a hypocritical bone in His body.

He taught an amazingly high ethical standard. And then He displayed the moral power to live up to that standard without fault. In John 8, Jesus could look into the faces of His enemies, and ask them, which one of you can prove me guilty of sin? And His enemies were silent. So, the issue is, was Jesus racist? Was He a hypocrite? No, He wasn't. And I would encourage you not to give power to a Christian hypocrite, to turn you off to the true Jesus, who did not have a hypocritical bone in His body.

FRANK:

I wonder how often people consider the fact that kind of everybody's a hypocrite, right? Do any of us live up to even our own standards? I mean, do atheists live up to their own standards, you know? It doesn't prove whether it's true, or false, or not. But I love that tactic there Cliffe, of talking about African American Christians. They are open minded enough. Have you heard of John Dixon's response to the hypocrisy charge? He asks people who say well, Christians are hypocrites. He asks them, when someone plays Beethoven poorly, who do you blame?

CLIFFE:

Good point.

FRANK:

You don't blame Beethoven, right? You blame the player. So, when someone plays Jesus poorly, you don't blame Jesus. Jesus isn't the problem. Look, just because I'm not true and beautiful doesn't mean Jesus isn't true and beautiful. In fact, if I was completely true and beautiful, I wouldn't even need Jesus. I wouldn't need a savior. So, of course, we're all hypocrites. If we weren't, we wouldn't even need a savior if we were perfect. So, it doesn't disprove Christianity. It actually just shows that we're fallen, and we actually do need a savior. And all this is related to the problem of evil because Christians often do evil as well. But Stuart, why would a good God allow evil to exist at all? Why doesn't He stop it?

STUART:

Well, why is evil bad to begin with if there is no God? Why did CS Lewis come to the faith? It wasn't because he was struggling with this big topic of God allows suffering, so I can't believe in Him, and God allows evil so I can't believe in Him. I mean, he wrestled with that one as well. But he ultimately came to the faith because he said, well, why is that so wrong? Why does that bug me so much if there's no moral objectivity, no moral obligation, oughts and shoulds? And so it was through the evil argument that he became a Christian. Got to God first, and then Christ. So, it cuts both ways. And I believe firstly, we have to say, we have no idea.

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And we have to take it from more of a counseling personal approach. Because so many people, Frank, you probably know this. You know, 30 years ago it was, is their truth? And then 20 years ago it was alright, what is that truth? Most people believe there is some type of truth. And then finally, now today on college campuses, the number one question is, why is there so much suffering, and please touch my pain. So, people are struggling with this in a big kind of way. And so, we start out with I don't know. But then we get to, hey, look. Where's that moral obligation piece? And why is it so evil?

And if you go to the savanna, and if one gazelle gets taken out. Her brother will look up for a second and then keep grazing. The suffering piece, the evil piece is not a big deal in the animal kingdom, typically. Thirdly, it's the whole piece of as pastors, we see it all the time. We go to the beds of those who are dying of cancer or other diseases. And you say, okay, here's the atheistic worldview. Here's the Buddhist worldview. So, with atheists, it's basically from life, to death, darkness to darkness, trapdoor falling to nothing. Obviously, the strong eat the weak, red in tooth and claw. And so, where is love? Where is self-sacrifice?

Where's the importance for human rights, like Christian Smith talks about in 'Atheist Overreach' out there at Notre Dame? And then you get to Buddhism. And Buddhism is all about, well, cut off your desires and suffering is an illusion. Evil is an illusion. Then you get to the cross, and it's the suffering religion. It's all about suffering. You have a suffering Savior who suffers with you. And so, as pastors, we land on that. And it's amazing to see people who have deathbed conversions, because they see, hey, look. This worldview is making sense to my head intellectually, right now, as I'm passing as well, definitely, of my experience of getting in touch with this suffering Savior.

FRANK:

Cliffe, why is it necessary for us to have free will to make this a moral universe? It does open up the possibility for evil. But why is it necessary? And do you get pushback when you talk about freewill on a college campus?

CLIFFE:

Yes, I do get pushback, but it's not a difficult one to deal with. If I don't have free will, I cannot love. If you don't have free will, you can't love. If you've been dating someone I often say to a student for the past month, and this person you've been dating has said to you, I love you. I love you. I love you. If your father calls you up tonight and says, you know that person that says I love you so often to you and you just revel in? Well, I've been paying them \$1000 a week to date you and to love you. How would you feel? You'd be royally bummed out.

Love, in order to be real, must be free. When I was at MIT, I met a student who was dating his computer. That's tragic. Why? Because a computer does not have free will in the same way that you and I do. And you and I know that love if it's not free, is not love. So, obviously God takes a limited risk when He creates us to love and gives us a free will. And the limited risk is that instead of choosing to love Him, we will choose to ignore Him, or rebel against Him, and even

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hate Him. And obviously, God chose to make that decision, to give us a free will, because He thought it was worth it. And to be honest with you, I'm real grateful. And guess what? You're real grateful also. Because if I try and brainwash your closest friend, you'll be all over my case like a wet blanket. Because when I brainwash somebody, or when you brainwash someone, you are depriving them of an integral part of their humanity, their ability to choose to make up their own life.

FRANK:

You know, it's amazing that people will say they have no free will. And yet, when you ask them, did you freely come to that conclusion? If they say yes, they've defeated themselves. If they say no, why should I believe what you just said, then? If that thought is just the result of physics and you didn't have any freedom to come to the conclusion because you were following evidence, why should I believe it's true? So, it's really a kind of a self-defeating position to take to say you don't have any free will.

But I think what you're doing there Cliffe, is very insightful, to talk about love and have somebody paying someone to love you. It just wouldn't work. How about kids talking about morality being relative? How do you deal with that? You know, because if morality is relative, well, of course, we don't need a savior because we really haven't done anything objectively wrong. But what are some of the ways they try and say morality is relative? And then how do you push back? You want to take that one Stuart?

STUART:

There was a study at a Notre Dame that talked about how 25% of high schoolers are strong moral relativists. And so, they said that the suicide bombers who flew their planes into the World Trade Center, that was their truth. And so, who are we to get in the way of their truth? One that we see up here is, there's a lot of secular people who really like the idea of helping when it comes to social justice. And one we're thinking of in particular, went down to Africa, and really wanted to help end genital mutilation in a certain village. It was fascinating the pushback that she got where someone said to her, well, you're just an ethnocentric American, bringing down your truth, thinking that you know exactly the way to treat humans and to help certain humans when that's just your own type of idolatry of your own culture.

So, we see these different examples. And yet, we try and help these people land on understanding there's got to be objective truth when it comes to true help for others, and wellbeing for others, and even yourself. Because connected to the truth one, Frank, oftentimes is your authentic self. And so, oftentimes out here, especially the younger people, like you're saying, say, my authentic self is the culture I was brought up in. So, if I'm a husband, I'm not going to say thank you to my wife ever, because my culture doesn't say thank you. And so, they're on the verge of divorce because there's no graciousness in their interactions. But this is my authentic self, so don't change me.

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And so, you have to change and offer grace to your spouse in some kind of way, or the marriage will dry up. Or it's the authentic self of I'm going to be selfish, or I'm going to cheat in different ways. This is my authentic self. This is me. Okay. Well, let's see how that works out for you in your life if this is your truth and this is your authentic self. Jesus gave a different type of definition of authentic self. And if we live out in the moral fabric of the universe and how He set it up, then we're truly going to live life when it comes to the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That's living out your authentic self, not out of your flesh, which leads to a demise.

FRANK:

Yeah, my friend Alisa Childers heard someone say, save me from my authentic self. Because my authentic self is selfish. And I want to do my own thing. And I think that's really the nub, as we talked about in the last podcast, of the objections that people have to Christianity. It has, for most people, not a lot to do with evidence, but a lot to do with personal autonomy and personal authority. That's why I always ask them, if Christianity were true, would you become a Christian? No. Well, okay, why are we even talking about this then? Let's just go have pizza, because you're not interested at all. You're just trying to figure out a way you can justify your autonomy.

And yet, on the other hand, they're going to say that there are certain things that are objectively morally right, like whether they be gay rights, or trans rights, or whatever the rights of the day are. They're going to try and say that those are objectively right, correct rights. And of course, if there is no standard outside of ourselves, they're not really true. Now, Cliffe, you've been doing this for many years. Many of the people that listen to this show are apologists themselves. They like to interact. What are some of the pieces of advice that you've learned over the years, some of the wisdom that you've gained by doing this that you would like to pass on to apologists who are listening right now? Do this. Don't do this. What are the top two or three you can think of?

CLIFFE:

First of all, have a strong devotional life. Do not allow Christianity to be reduced to good answers to difficult questions. No, it's a love relationship with a living God, with the Lord Jesus Christ. And if I lose my personal connection with Christ, I'm a real loser. So, quiet time, reading Scripture, praying, meditation, submitting to Christ's Lordship, all crucial issues. Second point, do not be overly certain. I agree with a lot of non-Christians who say, well, some of the Christians I talk to are just too certain. Guys, we're talking about the most difficult philosophical questions. Why is a human being valuable? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Why do you live your life ethically the way you do? And is there life after death or not?

And if anybody comes off as, well I got this one all nailed down. This is absolutely the way it is. That is an overreach, I think. When we acknowledge that these are difficult questions, that we all struggle through these issues. I can promise you, when my brother, who is a transplant surgeon, lost his seven year old daughter in a horrible car wreck, both he and I struggled together to work through the pain of Lord, why did this happen? Why did you allow this to

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happen? Why did the babysitter not see the stop sign? Why did the babysitter go right through the stop sign? And why was a pickup truck at 55 miles an hour, just at the right place at the right time to slam into that car and send his daughter to an early grave? And if anybody thinks that they can give a watertight answer to that question, they are naive. So, I think we have to be careful that we don't get overly certain. But at the same time, I am convinced that Jesus Christ is the truth.

But I find it fascinating that when one of my heroes in the faith, Tim Keller, had pancreatic cancer, that he thought very, very carefully, once again, through the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Because all of a sudden, when you're looking at your own death in the face, all of a sudden, doubts come up, questions come up, the degree of certainty comes up. And I respect him so much for the way he wrote that book, then on hope, and the resurrection, and life after death at that time in his life. I think that that shows a realism, a humility, being in touch with reality that is outstanding.

And then thirdly, I would encourage everybody to pray as hard as you can, study as hard as you can, and then preach and communicate as well as you can. And remember, when you read the Gospels, Jesus listened to people. He listened to people so well, that in John 3, He said to Nicodemus, you must be born again. But in the next chapter, John 4, He didn't say to the woman outside the town of Sychar at the well, you must be born again. No, He said, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become a spring of water welling up to everlasting life. All right.

So, side by side, you've got two unique individuals. Obviously, Jesus knew about those individuals in a way that you and I don't because He was all knowing. He limited His knowledge. Yes, He didn't know when He would return. But He had tremendous knowledge. Well, the only way I'm going to get that knowledge is by listening to people. So, I've got to learn to ask questions, to listen to people respond, and then to seek to answer the question they're really asking. So, those are some of the principles that I go by.

FRANK:

I want you to amplify something I saw you say in a video Cliffe. You had a girl ask for evidence for I think, the resurrection. And she said, I need 100% proof that Jesus rose from the dead. You remember what you said back?

CLIFFE:

Well, I don't remember that dialogue. But I do know that I would say today, nobody has 100% knowledge in any field of knowledge. I have met some of the most brilliant university professors who have PhDs and postdoc work up the wazoo, and they don't know 100% about biology. They don't know 100% about chemistry, or history, or psychology. For anybody to think that they have 100% knowledge of any topic is incredibly naive.

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FRANK:

Yeah, I think I may have put it the wrong way. She needed 100% proof. And I think you gave a pharmacy example, where you said, you remember this? They gave a pharmacy example. You say, so if you go to the pharmacist and they filled you a prescription, you said you're going to go home and use a chemical kit to figure out if that medicine is exactly right? You're going to do that? [Laughter]

CLIFFE:

Well put Frank, thank you. [Laughter]

FRANK:

That's right. This was probably years ago. I just happened to see it on your YouTube channel. By the way, the YouTube channel is Ask Cliffe. You're going to see hundreds of videos up there. Yeah, I thought that was good. It would be like going to a restaurant. You order something and then you bring out your food tester to make sure it's not poison. You don't have 100% proof for virtually anything. What are some of the pieces of advice you would give, Stuart, to people who are trying to engage particularly with young people today? Do's and don'ts, anything to add to amplify or to add to what your dad said?

STUART:

Be loud. Win arguments, any arguments you possibly can. Preachers are the only ones that seem like they're not preaching now. Christians are always the ones marked to be the preachers, but everybody in university campuses, especially the far left, are the loudest we have. And so, I would just add, I meet too many university ministry students who are, look, I love the one on one evangelism. Don't lose it. It's so important. But go to Acts 17. Paul at the Areopagus. Paul is loud. Paul is so loud when he confronts the Pharisees in terms of, you know, he wants them to go to the point of cutting off their hoo-ha. But whatever it might be, you have to get loud and not fall prey to a politically correct culture, which is what so many Christians are doing.

FRANK:

I've got to ask you one more thing, because I think this is part of the air we breathe, so to speak. It's sort of the water we swim in. I think there are two unofficial commands that Christians think are true, but they're really not. I want to get your reaction. Command number one, always be nice. And command number two, never be combative. Why are those commands actually false? Start us off Cliffe.

CLIFFE:

Jesus never commands us to be nice. God never calls us anywhere in the Bible to be nice. To be nice in our culture means to be tolerant, and to affirm whatever anybody believes as being true. That is bologna. Christ instead calls us to love. To love means to be committed to the well-being of the other person. And if a blind man is standing on the edge of a cliff, and turns to me and says, hey, man. Which way should I step?

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And I really say to the person, the blind man, well, it doesn't matter where you step. Just be sincere. That is not kindness. That is not niceness. That is cruelty to the blind man. For the truth is, that if he steps off the edge of the cliff, he plunges to his death. Ideas have consequences. Good ideas have good consequences, and bad ideas have victims. And so, the challenge for us as followers of Christ is to love people and to always be motivated by love.

But love is sacrificial. It is not simply I accept you, whatever you believe, however you want to behave, and I'm going to affirm whatever you believe, and however you behave. That is not love. That is tremendous apathy and indifference towards a fellow human being. It's scary. And Christ calls us to do the opposite, to work for the well-being, the health, the flourishing of another human being, not their demise.

FRANK:

And the second command that people believe, that's a false command is never be combative. It goes with being nice. You can't really disagree in a hard way. Why is that false?

STUART:

If you don't be combative in the counseling office with somebody's crazy ideas, so like cognitive behavioral therapy. Or when Paul in Philippians 4 is frequently talking about changing your thoughts. You know, whatever is true, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, what's pure. If you're not combative with your own thoughts, and like Jordan Peterson talks about how a community where everybody is challenging one's thoughts, then you're going to end up in a serious pit, whether it's divorce, whether it's like suicide that we talked about.

So, apologetics is very similar to what I have to do in the therapeutic office, because it's challenging the thinking of other people, so we can really flourish as humanity together. Now, on the university campus, again, if you're not combative in the sense of challenging another's ideas, and you have to be loud doing it. You know, it's interesting. Whenever Cliffe bends over and puts his hands on his knees like Bobby Knight, some people will yell (typically from the far far left), oh, you're combative. You're combative, and you're judgmental, and you're a bigot. He's stretching his back after three hours.

And so, people will try and stretch as much as they possibly can to get to the point of saying and discounting you, Frank or discounting us in such a way where they're saying, you're attacking us. It's such an overreach. And they're stretching so far, because they don't want to really think through how you're challenging their ideas and not somehow being offensive or trying to dismiss them.

FRANK:

Yeah, of course. They won't be nice to you, and they will be combative with what you say. But you can't be combative with what they say. You have to be nice. Which means you have to agree with us. You have to affirm us, which of course is not love at all, as Cliffe said earlier.

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Well, gentlemen, it's been great having you on. Can you give the Instagram connection again, Stuart? Or the Instagram address so people can follow you guys?

STUART:

Yeah, it's Stuart_Knechtle. And then the TikTok is just the same. But it's Stuart Knechtle and no underscore.

FRANK:

All right, and the YouTube channel is Ask Cliffe. And the Facebook page for the church is?

STUART:

Grace Community Church in New Canaan, Connecticut and the other one is Give Me an Answer.

FRANK:

Wow, you've got several places you can go to track with Stuart and Cliffe. And if you don't go anywhere else, make sure you go to their YouTube channel because they have so many great videos from the college campus right out in the quad, interacting in open-air with people. They have one from last year in New York City. There's plenty going on, so you guys are doing great work. Thanks so much for what you're doing.

STUART/CLIFFE:

Thanks for all you do, man. Yeah, keep it up brother.

FRANK:

Same here. Hopefully our paths will cross at some point. And don't forget ladies and gentlemen, check them out. Also, I want to mention that I'm going to be at Live Oak Church in Denham Springs, Louisiana on the 21st of January, then revival Christian Fellowship in Menifee, California. That's just south of Riverside. That's the 28th of January. I'll be at Purdue University on February 1st. A lot more coming up during February.

Also, check out our 'Digging up the Bible' series. We're going to resume here in January and into February. We're going through every major archaeological discovery in the Bible. That's live streamed on certain Monday nights at 7:30pm Eastern. Check our calendar for more. And Lord willing, we will see you here again next week. God bless.

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