

Do you think outside the box?



It's been said that great thinkers think outside the box. That's true in many respects. I'm always amazed at people who come up with ideas I would never have imagined. While I can be somewhat creative in certain areas, partially because of my educational background (physics, engineering, and computer programming), I occasionally have difficulty thinking outside the box. I stick with what I know, often only able to focus on what is tried and true.

On the other hand, my daughter Tori has a knack for being extremely creative. She must have received those genes from my wife! Often, when I am faced with a challenging situation, I'll walk around the house asking myself, "What would Tori do?"

You may or may not be able to "think outside the box," but I want to look at this concept from a completely different angle.

I recently developed a new approach to having an initial discussion with an atheist. In the past, my traditional approach involved sharing numerous powerful apologetic arguments, hoping they would understand their worldview's extreme weaknesses and self-contradictory nature. While these conversations were usually very interesting, they were seldom very effective (as far as I could tell). One of the reasons is that even though an argument might indeed be extremely *powerful*, it's not a guarantee it will be *persuasive*. Interestingly, you can present a fairly weak or fallacious argument and still persuade someone. You can also present an air-tight, "bullet-proof" argument that lacks persuasiveness in the eyes of the skeptic. There's more going on behind the scenes, and that's where I'm headed with this month's question.

Here's what my new approach looks like:

I tell the atheist that I am a Christian which means that I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. I then say that because of this belief, I must live "inside a box," so to speak. In other words, I have to go by whatever the Bible says. If I don't, the atheist has every right to call me out for being hypocritical or guilty of "picking and choosing." Considering this, I have two major options regarding figuring out how to properly address the skeptic. I can either psychoanalyze them to see what approach to use or check Scripture to see if there's anything in the Bible that helps me better understand their point of view. (At this point, I don't get much push-back from the atheist because it's all very logical, and I am simply explaining my position. I haven't made any judgments yet about them being right or wrong.)

It just so happens that there's quite a bit in Scripture that addresses the atheist's position. I then tell them that Romans 1 indicates God has placed so much evidence in nature alone that people are without excuse. No one will ever be able to stand before God and say, "I would have believed in you,

but you didn't give me enough evidence." God could justifiably respond by saying, "I gave you plenty of evidence, and I also placed the knowledge of my existence inside you."

I then tell the atheist, "Because of this, if I am to be consistent, I have to believe you know God exists." That's where their demeanor typically changes. They are quick to state, "That's not true. I don't believe God exists!" I let them know that I completely understand them making that statement, but I, as a Christian, HAVE to believe they know God exists, because that's what the Bible says. If I don't believe that, they can call me out for believing some portions of the Bible, but not all of them.

Next, I tell them that even though God has given more than adequate evidence for His existence, some people have chosen to reject that knowledge, not because of their superior intellect but because of their sin nature. They don't want to believe in God because they don't want to feel obligated to live by His rules. This being the case, God, in essence, says, "OK, I'm not going to force you to believe in me, but if you reject all the evidence I've given you, there are consequences." The rest of Romans 1 describes quite a few of those consequences, including giving them over to a reprobate mind and darkened thinking. Romans 1:22 states, "Professing themselves to be wise they have become fools."

God is not name-calling. He's not callously saying, "Oh, they're just fools." He is describing their thinking process. They will not, in general, be able to think clearly. Specifically, they will lack the wisdom that is necessary to take whatever knowledge they have gained and interpret it correctly. Proverbs 9:10 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

I would finish the initial discussion by saying something like, "Because of what the Bible teaches in Romans 1, I don't think for one second that if I tell you how unbelievably complex DNA is, you will change your mind about the existence of God. We're dealing with a heart issue and until you are willing to humbly admit you might not know everything and that you are open to whatever the truth might be, we're not going to get anywhere. So, with all this in mind, how would you like to proceed?" Here is where I get the "deer in the headlights" look. They were all set to discuss and debate technical, scientific details, and I just told them that's not the ultimate issue. They don't know what to do with that. There are several directions the conversation could go from there, so I would rely on the Holy Spirit to help me determine the correct path going forward.

So, back to our question. Do you think outside the box? When it comes to Scripture, your answer should be a resounding, "No!" However, too many Christians *do* go outside of God's Word for guidance or simply base their responses on however they feel about a particular situation. Then they return to Scripture with their newly gained "knowledge" and use it to tell God what He really meant. You've probably heard me share how this plays out related to the Genesis creation account and the Genesis Flood, but there are many other portions of Scripture that get reinterpreted based on someone going "outside the box" for their ultimate source of authority.

Question of the Month

If we genuinely wish to be effective in our evangelism, we need to ensure all our communication is based squarely on God's Word. As I've often said, even though the Bible is God's first shot at writing a book, I think He did a pretty good job!

If you have any questions about this or any other issue, please don't hesitate to [contact us!](#)