

I used to be a Christian?

I heard someone say, "I used to be uncertain. Now I'm not so sure." That's kind of funny. It's also my kind of humor. One of my favorite lines came from Yogi Berra, a famous baseball player of yesteryear who was known not only for baseball but also for his unique wit. Someone asked him if he liked a certain restaurant, to which he replied, "No one goes there nowadays, it's too crowded." There's somewhat of an internal contradiction there, which is what makes it funny.



When someone makes these types of statements in jest, it can be very entertaining. However, when someone makes them in all seriousness, it's a bit concerning.

Such is the case with the statement in our "Question of the Month." Many of you may have had conversations with a skeptic, who somewhere along the way, says, "Well, I used to be a Christian." They generally mean they used to "buy into" what you believe, but now they are more enlightened. They know too much to hold on to those antiquated, narrow-minded beliefs. In other words, "Been there, done that," and those views don't make sense.

How do you respond? Sometimes the skeptic is quick to shut you down, claiming they already know everything you're going to say, because they've heard it all before, and they're not buying it anymore. The situation can be challenging, but I think I have something that might help.

First of all, I am not implying what I am about to tell you is the only correct response or that it should be used in all circumstances. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit must lead you in how to respond in any given situation. There have been times when I finished speaking and was frustrated with myself, because I completely forgot to share a very important point I always convey as part of my presentation.

However, soon after, I found out that because of the type of audience in attendance, the point would not have gone over well, potentially doing more damage than good. I've also had the opposite experience in which I added something I've never said before, only to find out the particular segment had a HUGE impact on someone that evening. That's when I especially say, "Thank you God for knowing better than me and not letting me get in your way!"

So, what's my suggested response when someone says, "I used to be a Christian"? Very graciously, without sarcasm or condescension, I say, "Actually, you can't say that." The response I get from them every time is, "What are you talking about?" I further explain, "The reason you can't say that is because a Christian is someone who has an actual relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. But since you don't believe in God, you certainly don't think that Jesus is the Son of God, so you couldn't have had an actual relationship with Him. All you can say is that you used to be deluded,

Question of the Month

but now you think you're not. Furthermore, if you are admitting you were delusional about what you used to believe, how do you know you're not currently delusional about something different?"

Now, I have to repeat myself. Please *convey this response* as sincerely as you can. It would be all too easy to do it with an arrogant attitude, which would be self-defeating.

So, what's happening in most situations when the skeptic makes this claim? I generally believe one of two things.

First, they may have grown up in a Christian environment hearing all about God, the Bible, Jesus, etc. and generally accepted those things as true. Yes, God exists. Yes, the Bible is the Word of God. Yes, Jesus is the Son of God. However, there was never any real personal relationship between them and Jesus. Even if they didn't grow up with these beliefs but heard them at some point and "agreed with the facts," it wasn't effectual in their life. There was never a time when they confessed their sins, placing their trust in Christ's death and resurrection alone for forgiveness, actually being "born again" (John 3:3). It can be relatively easy to walk away from these loosely held, head-knowledge beliefs at any given time. Concerning this situation, 1 John 2:19 states, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

Secondly, they may have actually had a profession of faith and truly became "born again" but are currently really struggling. They may express disbelief due to significant trials they are experiencing and may even be very angry in general. I believe the Holy Spirit is still working in their life and we can be used to encourage them and help them during these trying times, being as patient as possible. The challenging part for you is that you don't know which category they fall into. That's where you have to rely on the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to say at the right time and in the right way. Only God truly knows their heart. Also, God's Word is always more powerful than our own, so we should try to share it directly whenever we can. His Word will never return void (Isaiah 55:11).

The suggested response I share in this article is not intended to be used as a "zinger" or a "gotcha." It is simply an initial response to get the skeptic to think a bit deeper and also to lead to a more meaningful conversation during which you hopefully get to the root cause of their unbelief. We're not trying to "win an argument." We're just trying to come along-side those who are struggling for any number of reasons and show them the love of Christ.

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