

Questions – Role Play



Episode 3 Bible Contradictions ?

Leaders Introduction

In Episodes 1 & 2 we laid the foundations of understanding the importance of trust and the inevitability of people having an ultimate authority, be it reason, experience or revelation. We saw that reason and experience are important in the Christian faith, but not ultimate; they are used in thinking about faith but are not the content of faith. We began to look at why revelation from God in his word the Bible, as an ultimate authority is reasonable when you think about it and experience it.

Episodes 3 to 6 look in more detail at the reasonableness of the Bible as a foundation for knowledge by considering the Bible's historical reliability. The episodes break it down as follows:

Episode 3 – Looks at the idea of apparent contradictions in the bible

Episode 4 – Considers the question of whether the Bible was simply made up

Episode 5 – Examines how the Bible was put together (the canon of scripture)

Episode 6 – Looks at transmission and translation, how the Bible was passed down to us today.

Each of these issues is a part of the picture of the reliability of the Bible. In normal conversations they won't come up as nice neat separate subjects, but we have created an episode for each one to help focus on the specific aspects of each question in turn.

In considering the question of historical reliability we might be tempted to move over to a wholly evidentialist approach to apologetics (see the introductory video for what that means). But whilst the focus does indeed shift towards that, there is still half an eye on the key ideas unpacked in Episodes 1 & 2, namely that no one is neutral everyone has a faith position. So in considering evidence there is a reason why some people consider it convincing and others don't; none of us are objective.

Leader's Questions

1. When Andy starts to question Sam about contradictions in the Bible, how does Sam respond?

Sam respond with questions. He asks which 'contradictions' Andy is talking about, this can reveal whether someone actually has any in mind or whether they are merely repeating something someone else has said (and accepting it on trust!), when Andy gives an example it means Sam has something from the Bible to work with. When Andy accuses Sam of being biased Sam asks whether Andy might equally be biased.

Questions – Role Play

Leader's Questions

2. **Instead of assuming that differences between two accounts of the same event mean those accounts are contradictory, what other option does Sam suggest Andy might consider?**

Sam points out that people might simply be different descriptions focussing on different aspects (“there were elephants” vs “an elephant pooped on my homework.”)..

3. **What does Sam suggest Andy focus on when considering if two accounts are contradictory or not?**

He invites Andy to consider if the main points of the story are the same (the main stages of Jesus life, his death and resurrection).

4. **What does Andy think about two accounts that match up perfectly?**

He thinks they could have got together to make those bits up, they could have conspired.

5. **How does Chris' ‘accident’ help Andy see a way through these doubts he has over the differences between the gospel accounts?**

In listening to Beth and Holly's apparently contradictory stories Andy begins to piece together what actually happened, though his thoughts are only confirmed when he hears from Chris.

6. **Did you find the image of the recorder quartet helpful in thinking about this issue? If so, in what way?**

This question is simply a different way of approaching the themes in Q5.

7. **What does Holly suggest about the importance of someone's ‘starting point’ in considering apparent contradictions?**

Holly helps Andy see that whether someone finds a harmonisation of apparent contradictions convincing or not depends to a certain extent on their starting point; do they want to believe it or not. All sorts of ‘reasonable’ or ‘possible’ solutions can be given to apparent contradictions to the Bible, but whether someone finds them convincing depends to a great extent on whether they want to believe it or not. This brings us back to the question of neutrality and objectivity we focussed on in the previous two episodes.

8. **In the end Andy thinks that independent accounts that verify ought to be sufficiently different from each other to demonstrate independence and sufficiently similar to show coherence. Do you think the gospels meet this double criteria? If not, do you feel the accounts are too similar or too dissimilar?**

This question is meant to bring people into a reflection on their own views on the Bible and apparent contradictions.

Questions – Role Play

Role Plays

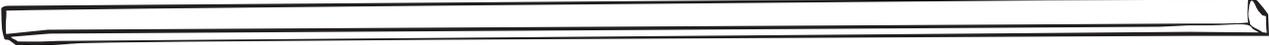
In pairs, in turn, have a conversation starting with one of the following:

- The Bible is full of contradictions isn't it?
- Why do you trust in something that is so obviously full of contradictory accounts, it must be wrong!
- All your explanations about the Bible are just your interpretation!

Remind them that they are focussing on responding with a question back to the other person.

If these conversations don't go well, don't worry and tell the people in your group not to worry, it is likely that it's the first time most of them have tried any of this and like anything else it takes time to get used to. You could finish your time together by thinking through one of the role plays as a group, pooling ideas of questions that could be asked.

Questions – Role Play



Group Member Questions

1. When Andy starts to question Sam about contradictions in the Bible, how does Sam respond?
2. Instead of assuming that differences between two accounts of the same event mean those accounts are contradictory, what other option does Sam suggest Andy might consider?
3. What does Sam suggest Andy focus on when considering if two accounts are contradictory or not?
4. What does Andy think about two accounts that match up perfectly?
5. How does Chris' 'accident' help Andy see a way through these doubts he has over the differences between the gospel accounts?
6. Did you find the image of the recorder quartet helpful in thinking about this issue? If so, in what way?
7. What does Holly suggest about the importance of someone's 'starting point' in considering apparent contradictions?
8. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have but to do so with gentleness and respect. How well do you think Holly and Chris did with both halves of this verse?
9. In the end Andy thinks that independent accounts that verify ought to be sufficiently different from each other to demonstrate independence and sufficiently similar to show coherence. Do you think the gospels meet this double criteria? If not, do you feel the accounts are too similar or too dissimilar?

Role Plays

In pairs, in turn, have a conversation starting with one of the following:

- The Bible is full of contradictions isn't it?
- Why do you trust in something that is so obviously full of contradictory accounts, it must be wrong!
- All your explanations about the Bible are just your interpretation!