

“The Case for Faith”

Book Highlights

Lee Strobel. *The Case for Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
Summarized by Ed Knorr, to facilitate discussion and study.

p. 8: “For Charles Templeton—ironically, once Billy Graham’s pulpit partner and close friend—questions about God have hardened into bitter opposition toward Christianity. Like Graham, Templeton once spoke powerfully to crowds in vast arenas and called for people to commit themselves to Jesus Christ. Some even predicted Templeton would eventually eclipse Graham as an evangelist.”

p. 12: “... Templeton’s latest book, whose title leaves no ambiguity concerning his spiritual perspective. It’s called *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*.”

p. 20: The “Big Eight” questions that Lee Strobel pondered before becoming a Christian:

- If there’s a loving God, why does this pain-wracked world groan under so much suffering and evil?
- If the miracles of God contradict science, then how can any rational person believe that they’re true?
- If God really created the universe, why does the persuasive evidence of science compel so many to conclude that the unguided process of evolution accounts for life?
- If God is morally pure, how can he sanction the slaughter of innocent children as the Old Testament says he did?
- If Jesus is the only way to heaven, then what about the millions of people who have never heard of him?
- If God cares about the people he created, how could he consign so many of them to an eternity of torture in hell just because they didn’t believe the right things about him?
- If God is the ultimate overseer of the church, why has it been rife with hypocrisy and brutality throughout the ages?
- If I’m still plagued by doubts, then is it still possible to be a Christian?

p. 32: Peter Kreeft: “How can a mere finite human be sure that infinite wisdom would not tolerate certain short-range evils in order for more long-range goods that we couldn’t foresee? ... imagine a bear in a trap and a hunter who, out of sympathy, wants to liberate him. He tries to win the bear’s confidence, but he can’t do it, so he has to shoot the bear full of drugs. The bear, however, thinks this is an attack and that the hunter is trying to kill him. He doesn’t realize that this is being done out of compassion.”

p. 39: Peter Kreeft: “Suppose you’re the devil. You’re the enemy of God and you want to kill him, but you can’t. However, he has this ridiculous weakness of creating and loving human beings, whom you can get at. Aha! Now you’ve got hostages! So you simply come down into the world, corrupt humankind, and drag some of them to hell. When God sends prophets to enlighten them, you kill the prophets.”

“Then God does the most foolish thing of all—he sends his own Son and he plays by the rules of the world. You say to yourself, ‘I can’t believe he’s that stupid! ... All I have to do is inspire some of my agents—Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, the Roman soldiers—and get him crucified.’ And that’s what you do.”

p. 42: “... try to create a better world [than the Lord created] in your imagination. Try to create utopia. But you have to think through the consequences of everything you try to improve. Every time you use force to prevent evil, you take away freedom. To prevent all evil, you must remove all freedom and reduce people to puppets, which means they would then lack the ability to freely choose love.”

pp. 42-44: Strobel: “Evil people get away with hurting others all the time. Certainly God can’t consider that fair,” I said. “How can he stand there and watch that happen? Why doesn’t he intervene and deal with all the evil in the world?”

Kreeft: “People aren’t getting away with it,” Kreeft insisted. “Justice delayed is not necessarily justice denied. There will come a day when God will settle accounts and people will be held responsible for the evil they’ve perpetrated and the suffering they’ve caused.”

Kreeft: “One purpose of suffering in history has been that it leads to repentance,” he said. “Only after suffering, only after disaster, did Old Testament Israel, do nations, do individual people turn back to God. Again, let’s face it: we learn the hard way.”

p. 47: Strobel: “Is it possible, really, to thank God for the pain that befalls us?”

Kreeft: “Yes. In heaven, we will do exactly that. We will say to God, ‘Thank you so much for this little pain I didn’t understand at the time ... these I now see were the most precious things in my life.’ ”

p. 50: “Kreeft gestured toward the hallway. ‘On my door there’s a cartoon of two turtles. One says, ‘Sometimes I’d like to ask why he allows poverty, famine, and injustice when he could do something about it.’ The other turtle says, ‘I’m afraid God might ask me the same question.’ Those who have Jesus’ heart toward hurting people need to live out their

faith by alleviating suffering where they can, by making a difference, by embodying his love in practical ways.’ ”

p. 55: A question for reflection: “How have difficulties, challenges, and even pain shaped your character and values? How are you different today as a result of the problems you’ve had to face in life? Can you ever imagine thanking God someday for how suffering has molded you? Kreeft said, ‘I believe all suffering contains at least the opportunity for good.’ Was that true in your case?”

p. 61: Dr. William Lane Craig, on miracles

“Only if you believe that God does not exist! ... Then I would agree—the miraculous would be absurd. But if there is a Creator who designed and brought the universe into being, who sustains its existence moment by moment, who is responsible for the very natural laws that govern the physical world, then certainly it’s rational to believe that the miraculous is possible.”

pp. 72-73: Dr. Craig:

“Paul the apostle had what he called ‘a thorn in his flesh’ that he asked God three times to remove ... I guess I don’t discuss this very much publicly ... but I have a congenital neuromuscular disease that causes progressive atrophy in the extremities. ... As a young Christian I prayed that God would heal me. But he didn’t.”

“As I look at my life, God has used this disease in so many remarkable ways to shape me and my personality. Because I couldn’t do athletics, in order to succeed at something I was driven into academics. I really own my existence as a scholar to my having this disease. It’s what compelled me to the life of the mind.”

Open question: Can you relate to the above experience?

p. 111: Nanoscientist Dr. James Tour, professor at Rice University’s Department of Chemistry and Center for Nanoscale Science and Technology:

“I stand in awe of God because of what he has done through his creation ... Only a rookie who knows nothing about science would say science takes away from faith. If you really study science, it will bring you closer to God.”

p. 121: Dr. Norman Geisler on the destruction of the Amalekites, and the apparent evils of Joshua 6:

“You have to remember that these people were given plenty of opportunity to change their ways and to avoid all of this ... In fact, ... they had four hundred years to repent. ... God’s nature demanded that he deal with their willful evil.”

“Now, we have to keep in mind that those who had wanted to get out of this situation had already done so; they had ample opportunity through the years. Surely the ones who wanted to be saved from destruction fled and were spared.”

“In Joshua 6, where the Bible talks about the destruction of Jericho and the Canaanites, you’ve got the same pattern. This was a thoroughly evil culture, so much so that the Bible says it nauseated God. They were into brutality, cruelty, incest, bestiality, cultic prostitution, even child sacrifice by fire. They were an aggressive culture that wanted to annihilate the Israelites.”

“You see, God’s purpose in these instances was to destroy the corrupt nation because the national structure was inherently evil, not to destroy people if they were willing to repent. Many verses indicate that God’s primary desire was to drive these evil people out of the land that they already knew had been promised for a long time to Israel. That way, Israel could come in and be relatively free from the outside corruption that could have destroyed it like a cancer.”

“And consider this: most of the women and children would have fled in advance before the actual fighting began, leaving behind the warriors to face the Israelites. The fighters who remained would have been the most hardened, the ones who stubbornly refused to leave, the carriers of the corrupt culture. So it’s really questionable how many women and children might actually have been involved anyway.”

pp. 122-124:

Strobel writes: “The prophet Elisha was walking down the road toward Bethel when he was confronted by some little children who teased him by making fun of his baldness. ‘Go on up, you baldhead!’ they taunted. ‘Go on up, you baldhead!’ He reacted by cursing them in the name of God. Then, in a stunning act of retribution, two bears suddenly emerged from the woods and mauled forty-two of them.”

He adds: “... Mauling forty-two innocent little children just because they poked fun of some bald guy is awfully severe.”

Geisler responds: “Scholars have established that the original Hebrew is best translated ‘young men.’ The New International Version renders the word ‘youths.’ As best we can tell, this was a violent mob of dangerous teenagers, comparable to a modern street gang. The life of the prophet was in danger by the sheer number of them—if forty-two were mauled, who knows how many were threatening him in total?”

“... Commentators have noted that their taunts were intended to challenge Elisha’s claim to be a prophet. Essentially, they were saying, ‘If you’re a man of God, why don’t you

go up to heaven like the prophet Elijah did?’ Apparently, they were mocking the earlier work of God in taking Elijah to heaven. They were contemptuous in their disbelief over what God had done through both of these prophets.”

“And their remarks about Elisha being bald were most likely a reference to the fact that lepers in those days shaved their heads. So they were assailing Elisha—a man of dignity and authority as a prophet of God—as a detestable and despicable outcast. They were casting a slur on not only his character, but on God’s, since he was God’s representative.”

“... This was a kind of preemptory strike to put fear in the hearts of anyone else who would do this, because there could be a dangerous precedent. If a menacing mob of teenagers got away with this and God didn’t come to the defense of this prophet, just think of the negative effect that would have on society. It could open the door to further attacks on prophets and consequently a disregard for the urgent message they were trying to bring from God.”

p. 137: Geisler on coping with contradictions:

“For example, assuming the unexplained is unexplainable, I’m sure some sharp critic could say to me, ‘What about this issue?’ and even though I’ve done a forty-year study of these things, I wouldn’t be able to answer it. What does that prove—that the Bible has an error or Geisler is ignorant? I’d give the benefit of the doubt to the Bible, because of the eight hundred allegations I’ve studied, I haven’t found one single error in the Bible, but I’ve found a lot of errors by the critics.”

p. 161: Ravi Zacharias on:

Acts 17:26-27 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

“... [God is] pointing out there there’s a sovereign plan in creation, where each person is assigned a place of birth. God knows where we will be born and raised, and he puts us in a position where we might seek him. We are clearly told that wherever we live—in whatever culture, in whatever nation—he is within reach of every one of us.”

pp. 178-179: “Objection 1: How Can God Send Children to Hell?”

Strobel: “People recoil at the thought of children languishing in hell. In fact, some atheists like to taunt Christians by dredging up writings by nineteenth-century evangelists who used horrific language to describe the ghastly experiences of children in hell...”

Moreland: “You must understand that in the afterlife, our personalities reflect an adult situation anyway, so we can say for sure that there will be no children in hell... And certainly there will be no one in hell who, if they had a chance to grow up to be adults, would have chosen to go to heaven. No one will go to hell simply because all they needed was a little more time and they died prematurely.”

“Besides in the Bible children are universally viewed as figures of speech for salvation. In all of the texts where children are used in regard to the afterlife, they’re used as pictures of being saved. There’s no case where children are ever used as figures of damnation.”

p. 180, Moreland on degrees of suffering in hell:

“There will be degrees of separation, isolation, and emptiness in hell. I think this is significant because it emphasizes that God’s justice is proportional. There is not exactly the same justice for everyone who refuses the mercy of God.

“Remember, if God really does let people shape their own character by the thousands of choices they make, he is also going to allow them to suffer the natural consequences of the character that they’ve chosen to have. And those who are in worse shape personally will experience a greater degree of isolation and emptiness.”

p. 186, “Why Didn’t God Create Only Those He Know Would Follow Him?”

Strobel: “If God knows the future, why did he create people whom he knew would never turn to him and who would therefore end up in hell?” I asked. “Couldn’t he have created only those whom he knew would follow him and simply not created those whom he knew would reject him? That option would seem to be much more humane than hell.”

“It depends on God’s goal,” said Moreland. “If God had chosen to create just a handful of four, six, or seven people, maybe he could have only created those people who would go to heaven. The problem is that once God starts to create more people, it becomes more difficult to just create the people who would choose him and not create the people who wouldn’t”.

“Why is that?”

“Because one of the reasons God put us here is to give us a chance to affect other people.”

p. 194: Strobel: “Mark Twain once quipped, ‘Heaven for the climate; hell for the companionship.’”

p. 216-217, Strobel quoting Luis Palau:

“The seismic shock of out-and-out atheism sent tidal waves across Europe and beyond, accounting directly for the annihilation and butchering of more than one hundred million people this past century alone. Humanity has paid a steep, gruesome price for the awful experiments in deliberate antitheism carried out by Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and others—each of whom was profoundly influenced by the writings of the apostles of atheism. ... After watching atheism proliferate ... it’s clearer than ever that ... without God, we’re lost.”

pp. 217-218:

Strobel: “What would you say are the positive ways Christianity has contributed to civilization?”

Woodbridge: “[Christians] have been willing to work against their own personal interests to serve others. Losing all of that—all the missionary work, all the hospitals, all the homeless shelters, all the rehabilitation programs, all of the orphanages, all of the relief organizations, all the selfless feeding of the hungry and clothing of the poor and encouraging of the sick—would be a devastating blow to the world.”

“Christians have given their minds to God, and their literary, musical, architectural, scientific, and artistic contributions, if taken away, would render the world much more dull and shallow. Think of all the great educational institutions that Christians built, including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, which were originally conceived and constructed to advance the gospel.”

“Finally there’s the power of the Holy Spirit that colors everything good. Can you imagine what the world would be like if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn? I mean, talk about your local horror show! It’s bad enough the way things are now, but if the restraining power to the Holy Spirit were not here, then the horrible side of life would emerge even more graphically than it already does.”

Strobel: “Michael Novak extolled Christianity’s gift of dignity. ... Christianity insisted that every single human is loved by the Creator, made in the Creator’s image, and destined for eternal friendship and communion with him.

“He pointed to the civilizing ideas of liberty, conscience, and truth that can be traced to Christianity...”

“David N. Livingstone, a professor in the School of Geosciences at the Queen’s University of Belfast, Northern Ireland, focused on Christianity’s gift of science. ‘The idea that Christianity and science have constantly been at loggerheads is a gross distortion of the historical record,’ he wrote. ‘Indeed, Robert Boyle, the great English student of chemistry, believed that scientists more than anyone else glorified God in the pursuit of their tasks because it was given to them to interrogate God’s creation.

“He pointed out that those in the Reformation ‘believed that God has revealed himself to humanity in two ways—in Scripture and in nature. This enabled them to engage in the scientific investigation of the natural world.’ The results have been sweeping contributions by scientists who were spurred on by their Christian faith.”

“David Lyle Jeffrey, a professor of English literature at the University of Ottawa, described Christianity’s gift of literacy ... ‘In most of Europe, as in Africa, South America, and in many other parts of the world, the birth of literacy and literature essentially, not accidentally, coincides with the arrival of Christian missionaries.’

Historian Mark Noll wrote: “Of all such ‘signs of contradiction,’ the most completely Christlike have been those occasions when believers who are strong—because of wealth, education, political power, superior culture, or favored location—have reached out to the despised, the forsaken, the abandoned, the lost, the insignificant, or the powerless.”

p. 215:

Strobel: “ ‘Some Jewish people believe Hitler was a Christian—,’ I began, but Woodbridge jumped in and cut me off.

Woodbridge: “ ‘Oh, yes, that’s exactly right,’ he said. ‘Again, that’s why we have to make the distinction between cultural and authentic Christianity. During the rise of the National Socialists, Hitler tried to wrap himself around Christianity and Martin Luther. It was a clever ideological play. But Christian critics, like Karl Barth and others, didn’t buy for a moment that Hitler represented orthodox Christianity.’ ”

pp. 224-225:

Strobel: “I picked up the telephone and started calling my police sources. Had anyone ever heard of this Ron Bronski character? Sure enough, my contacts in the Gang Crimes Unit were well acquainted with him. He was the street-toughened second-in-command of the Belaires, a gang that terrorized parts of Chicago’s Northwest Side. He was dangerous and violent, they said. He had a hair-trigger temper, an appetite for illicit drugs, and an encyclopedic arrest record.

“ ‘The guy’s a sociopath,’ said one investigator. Another snorted at the mention of his name, then dismissed him with a single word: ‘Garbage’.

“ ‘They told me that there was a warrant out for his arrest on a charge of aggravated battery for shooting a rival gang member in the back.’ ”

“ ‘We haven’t seen him around for a long time,’ one undercover cop told me. ‘We figure he’s fled the city. The truth is, we don’t care where he is as long as he’s not around here.’

“Then I called some church leaders in Portland, Oregon, where the lawyer told me Bronski had been living for the last couple of years. While working at a metal shop, he had met some Christians and supposedly abandoned his life of crime, married his live-in girlfriend, and became a devout follower of Jesus.

“ ‘Ron is one of the most beautiful, loving people I know,’ his pastor told me. ‘He’s totally committed to Christ. We pray together several times a week, and he’s always doing things like visiting the sick and praying with them, and using his street knowledge to preach to troubled kids. I guess people would call him a ‘Jesus freak.’

“ ‘He said that Bronski had been reconciled with God but not with society. ‘He knew there was still a warrant out for this arrest,’ he said, ‘so he saved his money and took the train to Chicago to turn himself in.’ ”

“As it turned out ... [the] street-savvy police detectives were absolutely convinced that the changes in his life were authentic. So was the prosecutor. After hearing the evidence, the judge agreed, and instead of sentencing him to the penitentiary, he set him free on probation. ‘Go home and be with your family,’ he told a surprised and grateful Bronski.

p. 231:

Lynn Anderson, D.Min: “ ‘Seasons of life can make a big difference,’ he replied. ‘Sometimes people are great believers while in college, but when they’re young parents with their second baby and they’re working sixty or eight hours a week and their wife’s sick all the time and the boss is on their back—they simply don’t have the time to reflect. And I don’t think faith can develop without some contemplative time. If they don’t make room for that, their faith is not going to grow and doubt will creep in.

“ ‘Another factor can be making comparisons with the faith of others. I met with a young woman who said, ‘I hate to go to church because I hear all these claims that I’m not experiencing. I believe, I study the Bible, I pray, I work as hard at ministry as any of them do, but I don’t get this joy, I don’t get my prayers answered, I don’t get a great sense of peace, I don’t feel like I’m in the hands of a God who’s guiding me down the road and is going to take care of me.’ ” People like this begin to think, “What’s wrong with God that he won’t give me those things?”

“ ‘I encouraged her to read the Psalms, because that will alter her perspective on what normal faith looks like. We like to focus on the upbeat Psalms, but sixty percent of them are laments, with people screaming out, ‘God, where are you?’ ” Normal faith is allowed to beat on God’s chest and complain.’ ”

p. 241:

Anderson: “ ‘By the way, in the gospel of John, faith is never a noun, it’s always a verb. Faith is action; it’s never just mental assent. It’s a direction of life. So when we begin to

do faith, God begins to validate it. And the further we follow the journey, the more we know it's true.' ”

pp. 256-258: “William Neal Moore ... is an ordained minister at the church, which is sandwiched between two housing projects in the racially mixed community. He is a doting father, a devoted husband, a faithful provider, a hard-working employee, a man of compassion and prayer who spends his spare time helping hurting people who everyone else seems to have forgotten. In short, a model citizen.

“But turn back the calendar to May, 1984. At that time, Moore was locked in the death-watch cell at the Georgia State Penitentiary, down the hallway from the electric chair where his life was scheduled to be snuffed out in less than seventy-two hours.”

“But the William Neal Moore who was counting down the hours to his scheduled execution was not the same person who had murdered Fredger Stapleton. Shortly after being imprisoned, two church leaders visited Moore at the behest of his mother. They told him about the mercy and hope that was available through Jesus Christ.”

“On that day, Moore said yes to Christ’s free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, and he was promptly baptized in a small tub that was used by prison trusties. And he would never be the same.

“For sixteen years on Death Row, Moore was like a missionary among the other inmates. He led Bible studies and conducted prayer sessions. He counseled prisoners and introduced many of them to faith in Jesus Christ. Some churches actually sent people to Death Row to be counseled by him. He took dozens of Bible courses by correspondence. He won the forgiveness of his victim’s family. He became known as ‘The Peacemaker,’ because his cellblock, largely populated by inmates who had become Christians through his influence, was always the safest, the quietest, the most orderly.”

“... the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole later voted unanimously to spare his life by commuting his sentence to life in prison ... [and on] November 8, 1991, he was released.”