

Transcript 109

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. If you've been tuning in, you'd notice that we occasionally like to spotlight another ministry that we believe is doing some great things for God. Great things in the kingdom. And that's going to be the focus today, and I'd like to welcome back Jonathan McLatchie. He's been on a couple other times just discussing some both apologetics issues and some creationism related issues. But today we're actually going to be talking about a new venture, a new website, a new ministry that he's recently launched called TalkAboutDoubts.com. So Jonathan, welcome back.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

Thank you, Shea so much it's great to be here again.

Shea Houdmann

I'll let Jonathan do the full intro, but I what I love most about TalkAboutDoubts.com is that it's very complementary to what we do at Got Questions in that at Got Questions our goal is to provide brief answers to the questions that people ask. And a lot of those involved doubts. But so many people come to us and they need something more. They need to actually give a conversation with a real person rather than just a e-mail exchange or even reading articles on our site. And that's what TalkAboutDoubts.com is all about. So Jonathan why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about TalkAboutDoubts.com. On what gave you the vision to launch the site and what exactly you guys are doing?

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

So TalkAboutDoubts.com launched in December of 2021 to last year, but really, it's a spin off of something I've been doing since 2016 on my personal website, which is for many years had a form on my website that people could fill out and write to me to inquire concerning doubts that they might have concerning that veracity of the Christian faith. And then I would reach out to them and schedule a one on one zoom call to discuss with them their doubts and in confidence and to help them to develop a protocol for working through doubts in intellectual responsible way and also help to engage with their particular concerns that they have.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

So last year in 2021 I had the vision to create a network of scholars, experts, and thinkers in different fields, so we have people with expertise in biology or physics or astrophysics or about chemistry or New Testament scholarship or Old Testament scholarship or Biblical Hebrew or philosophy or psychology and therapy and so forth. And these scholars on our team are willing to schedule private zoom calls with Christians who are having doubts about their faith, or indeed ex. Christians have already left the faith they want to explore whether there is perhaps a way back to faith rationally.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

And so basically the way it works is someone will come onto the website and TalkAboutDoubts.com and they will fill out a form and we will distribute that to one of our scholars. We have over 50 scholars on

our team. Will distribute the inquiry to a scholar who's relevantly qualified. Someone who I can speak to that particular issue and then that scholar will get in touch with the inquirer and schedule a time to do a one on one. Or sometimes a 2 on one zoom call to discuss with them that. We also now have a private discord community of past inquirers that TalkAboutDoubts.com as well as many of our team members. And so we're trying to also address a very common recurring theme that I've observed in the many hundreds of calls I've done with doubters, at which is that people feel lonely and isolated and feel like there's no one in their family that they can talk to about these matters or their church community. And the pastor doesn't really want to have anything to do with it, and so I'm trying to address that we're trying to address that by creating a community of like minded individuals.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

We also do weekly Zoom Hangouts now as well. We alternate between, uh, an emotional support group and a course that I teach every other week where we review the evidences or and the veracity of the Christian faith. So that's what we're doing at talk about TalkAboutDoubts.com

Shea Houdmann

So maybe what are a couple of recent examples of people who've come to TalkAboutDoubts.com with a doubt, something they're really struggling with that you've been able to connect them with an expert who's enabled to minister to them in that particular doubt they're struggling with.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

Yeah, so I've one topic that comes up very frequently is New Testament reliability. Why can we trust the reliability of the Gospels and Acts, which is one of my favorite topics to address. And also how that relates to a robust case for the resurrection of Jesus, and so the way that I would present that case is to argue from multiple lines of evidence. Those internal evidences within the gospels I suppose extra biblical evidence, is that the Gospels and Acts are written by individuals who are close up to the facts well informed, individual, scrupulous.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

And that being the case, then we can infer reasonably that the claims in the Gospels and Acts concerning the nature of variety of the post resurrection encounters with the risen Jesus actually reflect the testimony of those who are purportedly eyewitnesses of Jesus resurrection, and so when anyone makes any sort of claim, and whether that be a sexual assault allegation or witnessed a miracle or whatever happens to be there, are three and only three rob's explanatory categories, which could explain that claim why the made that claim one is that they lied about it. One is that they're honest mistaken and one is that they're actually giving as a reliable report of what happened. And when one looks at the content of the claim of the early Apostles, one discovers that that the experiences that are claimed and asserted by those who were reported by witnesses are multisensory or polymodal in character involving multiple sensory modes, not just individual sightings at a distance, that group sightings group conversations with Jesus, long discourses with Jesus, physical contact with Jesus, eating breakfast with Jesus and the Sea of Galilee, watching Jesus eat broiled fish and the four, or Act one of 16 verse 4 day time period.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

So it's not just a brief, confusing episode and so forth, and these are the source of claims it's very difficult to be honest, mistaken about, and then we would want to look at the context of the early Christian community, where we discovered that the those who were purportedly eyewitnesses of Jesus resurrection were voluntarily endured sufferings and labours, and dangers and persecutions and hardships, and in some cases martyrdom on account of their testimony that Christ was raised from the dead. Which goes a long way, I think to establish their sincerity. And and so having shown the implausibility of those two competing alternative hypothesis, namely, that the apostles were lying about the resurrection and the hypothesis that they were honestly mistaken, and that in turn redistributes the probability such that the hypothesis that Jesus in fact rose from the dead is the best explanation of the relevant data.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

So that's a very common one that comes out with a very common topic that we field, and other topics that are that are common would include divine hiddenness. And the problem of evil. And on divine hiddenness I would. I would argue that the first of all I, I think that God at least construed in the broad sense is not necessarily hidden. I, I think that God is. I think Paul got it right in Romans one when he says that God is is not hidden. God is actually plain as such an obvious and from creation such that men are on a public key to us. Vote and apologetic without excuse. Because God's nature and divine attributes are fairly revealed through what has been made.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

And when one looks at living organisms for example, I think that one is immediately justified in coming from collusion that this is the product of design and engineering. Not only that but brilliant engineering. And I think that renders it non obvious that there is there's nothing to that the the Christian claim and so. So I I think that it's incumbent upon one, then to investigate the claims of the gospel. And almost in the same extent that it would be if one are very nearly convinced of its truth. So that that's one thing I would say on the problem of divine hiddenness and I I have confidence that so I have confidence that God will judge justly, and that he holds people accountable for the light that they have been given. So someone a very common expression of the arm from divine hiddenness is what John Shelenberger call the problem of nonresistant nonbelievers, which is the idea that there are non believers out there who are nonresistant and that is unexpected on the hypothesis of theism.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

And what I would say there is that it's very difficult to justify the assertion that there are long term nonresistant unbelievers, because if someone nonresistant nonbeliever at time T well, someone might it. It might well be the case that God just not finished with them yet. And we we don't really have biographical exhausted biographical information of anyone besides ourselves, it's very difficult to get inside people's minds and know what their true motivations are and whether they are truly non resistant or not. So I I do find the problem with find hiddenness is to be as strong an objection to atheism as many do. So that's that's often a topic that comes. Up very frequently so.

Shea Houdmann

Do we? We've definitely received questions along those lines as well, aside from like the pretty standard like the does God exist. You mentioned the evidence for the resurrection, which we get tons of

questions of course around Easter related to that. But maybe let me hit you with a couple of recent ones we've received just to kind of get how you would respond if someone expressing this particular doubt. Two that we've been getting recently that really stick out to me. The first one would be someone who they came to faith in Christ, say several years ago, and at first their faith was passionate. They were, they were. They felt love for God and felt loved in return. They even felt the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and then now several years later, it's not as exciting anymore. They don't feel God's presence. They don't feel love from him anymore and that's causing them to doubt. So this is definitely more of an emotional one than an intellectual one, but I'm sure you have or will receive questions along those lines. How would you and your team respond to someone who is in a situation like that?

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

Absolutely, so I would want to help such an individual to manage expectations of what one should expect to find on the hypothesis that Christianity is true. Now when we study the scriptures, do we find that individuals who believe in God and have relationship with God and so forth, always experience or have a tangible sense of God's presence in their lives? Well, you don't have to read very far in the Psalms, for example, to discover that people don't always feel God's presence. They have sort of a tangible experience of the divine. That's that. The psalmist also struggled with divine hiddenness, as did other biblical authors in particular Job. So we understand that God works in different ways, in different people experiences. I, I mean, I wouldn't claim to have some sort of inner theoretical experience, which I think is sufficient to justify by Christian belief. For me it's only I, I'm persuaded that Christianity is true because and only because I'm convinced by the public evidence for Christianity. Now there are other people such as would argue that they have some sort of inner witness experience and that that is sufficient for them to justify Christian belief. I don't know about their case because I didn't have insider knowledge into their lives, but I can only speak for myself and say that I don't have that.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

And then the last, I think that God works in different ways in different people's experiences. Now if our own personal experience would be sufficient to justify belief in, say, a miracle or something like that. Then I think that it's rational to consider other people's experience. I think we should not. We should be careful not to limit the scope of our inquiry to our own personal experience. And when we study the works of, for example, Quirke Keener in his two volume set on miracles or the work of Christian philosopher Robert Llama, or Lee Strobell has that case of miracles. And so forth. We discovered that there are well documented in temporary miracles. Not all of the examples discussed in those volumes are equally persuasive or or equally well documented, but there are enough of them that are sufficiently well documented that I am convinced that there's there's something to this claim that God seems to be still at work in the world today. And so I think that I would encourage one not to base their assent or otherwise to Christianity on the basis of emotions or personal experiences. Emotions come and go. These there fleeting But I would encourage people instead to base their faith on the public evidence, which I think is quite compelling.

Shea Houdmann

So I'm probably going to butcher the pronunciation for from what I've read of planting and William Lane Craig, and I believe they call it the census divinites, its inner sense of God, and there's been times in my

life where I think I definitely have sensed something that I cannot describe to anything other than God's presence, but then there's other times where I don't and so not basing my entire faith on a feeling. I think it's very important and I'm not the most emotional person out there, but so I know for other people, emotional engagement attachment is a much bigger deal, so I think the advice you gave is to not base the veracity of your faith on a feeling is very wise counsel. At the same time, not denying that there can be that emotional attachment, that God can reveal himself in that way to some people, because he clearly does.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

For sure, and I mean for there you've heard stories, I'm sure of Muslims who have converted to Christianity having received a vision or dream of Jesus. And I actually knew someone within my own circle of contacts who was a Muslim woman she received. She didn't have a Christian background at all and and very limited Christian contact and she wasn't really interested in Christianity at all and then Jesus appeared to her in a dream, and she's become a Christian since then. So I mean that sort of thing does happen. God does reveal himself in special ways, and I think that for someone like the Amazonian tribesman, for example, who doesn't otherwise have access to the gospel or the the biblical text and so forth, I think God will judge such correspond basis of the light that be given. And I think that is quite plausible, but not example. Alternative arrangements for such individuals, including perhaps revealing himself even other ways, such as through through dreams and visions. Or something on those lines.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, excellent. Well said. With question number two and you'll instantly recognize that maybe the context of where this is coming from recent events and the various churches have given Christianity a bad name. We're receiving a lot of questions from people who are, whether they've had something bad happen to them in the church, or whether they know of other people. Or just heard of it. People who are denying the faith or having doubts due to the extremely poor behavior of other people who are claiming they met Christ. Well, if this person was fake or if these people who I used to admire were willing to do this or allow this or cover this up, how can I buy into a faith where people are doing those sorts of things. So how would you respond to someone with that particular doubt?

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

Yeah, I mean there there's unfortunately people that are hypocrites in all walks of life. Adherence to all worldviews. So I I do think you're going to find a worldview where there are where everyone is doing things that you would approve of. If Christianity is true, then it actually predicts that there are going to be people who are hypocrites and people who profess to be Christians who are in fact not. That's fair from the teachings of Jesus. Read Matthew 7, for example. That describes false teachers, and so the fact that we do in fact, in fact, find hypocrites involved teachers and false converts, people who are professing the name of Christ and yet know him not. Should not be particularly surprising on hypothesis, because Christianity is true and therefore it cannot be taken as a grave blow against the veracity of Christianity. Does that make sense?

Shea Houdmann

It does for sure. Have you had anyone even recently who has come to TalkAboutDoubts.com with that this particular struggle based on current events?

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

No, actually it's not a common one to come up at all. Almost most of our inquiries are asking intellectual questions about science and faith or the next reliability of scriptures and and also there are quite a number of people that that have more emotional doubts than rational doubts. So we have therapists and pastors, psychologists on our team also who are able to do calls with individuals who are struggling with the emotional aspect too.

Shea Houdmann

So OK, what would you say is the people ask me this question all the time? It's like what is the most difficult question to answer. So with TalkAboutDoubts.com and mind what is the most difficult doubt to deal with?

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

I think the problem of evil would be the most challenging question that we receive. It's also very popular question, of course. And it's difficult because there's there's both an emotional component to the question as well as an intellectual component. You know people are very moved by the sort of suffering that we observed in recent times in Ukraine, for example, or starving people in Africa, or people afflicted with you know, AIDS or and all kinds of you know, human trafficking. Or all kinds of really horrific things that we observe in the world, the Holocaust or concentration camps in North Korea. I mean, just there's just some really horrific things going on in the world, and the question is if God exists, why would he allow such things to go on? Why would he not intervene? And why does he allow so much suffering in this world? And I, I think that we have to confess that that is a very difficult question. I think undermines our credibility when we try to trivialize that sort of question. And I think it is a difficult question.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

Now I'm of the position that the problem of evil constitutes some evidence that tends to disconfirm Christianity. I don't think that is sufficient evidence. I think that the evidence for Christianity is much stronger than the evidence against it, but I think the problem of evil would count as evidence against Christianity and and I think a very common mistake will make, by the way is to think of evidence as binary that does either all or nothing to either fully justifies inclusion or or it's, it's good for nothing. Or if you have any evidence going against the hypothesis that it justifies abandoning or rejecting their hypothesis. And I, I don't think that's a very reasonable way to to think about evidence. I think that that for any complex topic, whether we're talking about Christianity or evolution or climate change or whatever it happens to be. There's going to be evidence both for and against the proposition in question. And if you encounter someone that tells you for any complex topic that all of the evidence supports the position that they happen to adopt, that should be a major red flag. That this is perhaps something you want to listen to because confirmation bias is a major factor in that person's thinking now one.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

I think that people though sometimes overestimate the potency or the strength of the problem of evil. And this is because people, typically when they talk about the problem of evil, are impressed with the sheer number of instances that they that exist of, apparently gratuitous suffering in the world. But one

point that often gets overlooked is that these instances of suffering in the world are not epistemically independent. They're they're absolutely dependent.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

What I mean by that is that if we, let's consider the first instance of suffering that we discover in the world. But it doesn't necessarily follow that the second piece of evidence and of suffering and evil in the world carries the same evidential force as the first one, because if God has the moralizing mission justification for the first instance of suffering in the world you may well have a similar morally sufficient justification for the second one and the third one and the 4th one is supported, so this is what's called the problem of it of reducing returns by multiplying examples that the evidential value of each successive instance of suffering in the world actually depreciates over time, as each successive example is added, and so by contrast, though when it comes to the evidence for theism more broadly, in Christianity, more particularly, the evidence is not only in my view extensive, but it also varies in kind. We're not just talking about lots of different examples of the same thing, but we also have varied evidence that spans multiple disciplines. So given those two competing cumulative cases, I'm inclined to favor the case for Christianity, which expands a lot more at different disciplines and is a lot more varied in terms of the kinds of evidences that one can achieve.

Shea Houdmann

So Jonathan, this has been a great conversation, and again, I'm I'm incredibly excited about TalkAboutDoubts.com There's a huge need for something like that, and I really don't know of anyone else who's doing something exactly like that, and that's it's pretty unique. I mean, Christians have been now doing Internet ministry for, Got Questions around for over 20 years and I know there's some Christian websites that predate us, but to come up with something like this, I mean it's clear God was leading in this and I'm I'm praying for you guys that wisdom and discernment, what direction God wants it to go and I'm excited to have a ministry that I know the leadership is trustworthy that I can send people to who who can take people the extra step beyond what Got Questions can do, and I look forward to our future conversations of how we can possibly make this a little more formal or linked to TalkAboutDoubts.com more than we do. This is a fantastic ministry. Well needed, so good on you for listening to God and jumping into this new endeavour.

Dr. Jonathan McLatchie

Well thank you Shea. Great to to be on. Thanks for having me.

Shea Houdmann

And so this has been the Got Questions podcast with Jonathan McLatchie, founder of TalkAboutDoubts.com. We'll include links to where you can learn more about Jonathan. Of course the Talk About Doubts ministry and the show notes also on the description and when this video goes live on YouTube and also at podcast.GotQuestions.org. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.