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Busted

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SETTING THE TABLE

What an incredible age this is. We live in a time of technological marvels with new advances announced nearly every day. Computers and iPods are outdated before they can be shipped and earth-shaking innovations in cell phones and BlackBerries are passé before we can make the first call. Information comes at us from all sides in a relentless barrage. One would think in a day such as this that myths, misconceptions, and falsehoods wouldn't stand a chance of surviving without instantly being exposed, with clear-headed truth taking their place. One would be wrong.

Everyone knows someone who knows someone who has a friend (who wouldn't lie) who knew a guy who bit into a hamburger from (any fast-food chain) and found half a cockroach! Or, perhaps you've heard that "the infamous atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair has recently petitioned the FCC to outlaw Christian broadcasting" (a particularly heinous affront since she's been dead for years). If anything, the information age has increased the opportunities to pass these myths on, as well as countless others like them. It also raises the opportunity for someone to take myths head-on and expose them for what they really are. This is precisely what some Hollywood special effects experts decided to do.

ENTER THE MYTHBUSTERS

In a popular cable TV series, a few inventive souls with way too much time on their hands set out to debunk perennial urban legends. The show is called *Mythbusters*. Sometimes the daring investigators

actually wind up validating a myth or two, but they more often declare them “Busted.” Can someone really be sucked out of a pressurized airliner if a window is shot out at 30,000 feet? (*No, but he’ll never be the same.*) Could Ben Franklin really have performed the kite in the lightening storm experiment? (*No, unless we want to say his last achievement was inventing toast.*) Can a soloist really shatter a crystal goblet by hitting the right note? (*Yes, actually, but don’t try it at home, ever!*) The claims may continue in the culture’s collective consciousness, but the false ones are, as far as the record goes, shown to be false. The truth just needs the same amount of press as the nonsense.

This book is written in the same spirit of honest inquiry and desire to expose bogus claims, but with a different focus. While watching *Mythbusters* one day, it occurred to me that Christianity has its share of myths, legends, and outright lies attributed to it. People say a lot of things about the Bible and Christianity that are simply not true. Such statements are spoken as if they are take-it-to-the-bank facts, even though they’ve been debunked a million times (give or take a few) in scholarly literature. The myths are common knowledge; the responses are not. This book is about getting some of these responses into your hands.

IT’S NOT JUST THE CULTURE

Sometimes the attacks aren’t coming from the culture per se, but from biblical scholarship itself. Skepticism dominates the universities and permeates the media. The claims these scholars make are often just as bogus as the urban legend variety, but they have the weight of credibility owing to the prestige of those making them.

Please don’t misunderstand. I am not casually dismissing every view I disagree with as a myth. Scholarly discussions can be very involved and often result in new insights and discoveries. Conservative scholarship would be impoverished without the influence of challenging, and sometimes correcting, opposing perspectives. There is, however, a level of skepticism that is empty. It has nothing

to offer except venomous attacks on traditional Christian faith that, in fact, run contrary to the evidence.

As is the case with urban legends, this level of intellectual skepticism has been actively engaged on many fronts. Many of these skeptical claims have been soundly refuted, in some instances, several decades ago. You wouldn't know that, however, from watching PBS specials on the "real" Jesus, or perusing the articles that recycle this or that discovery casting doubt on the Bible. Skeptical scholars attacked; Christian scholars decisively responded, but the TV anchor didn't get the memo. This is why I would like to bring you up to speed on some issues that were settled long ago and tell you about some of the arguments that are currently being engaged.

REASONABLE FAITH

This topic gets a little dicey since we're dealing with issues of faith. There are among us those who insist faith is fine, as long as you keep it to yourself. They are also adamant that faith has no business interacting with the realm of facts. However, it is important for us to know that there are reasons for believing the Bible's testimony—there are facts that back it up. We definitely need to have faith, as the Scriptures make clear (Hebrews 11:6), but we don't need to be intimidated when someone points out that "It all goes back to faith." Of course it does, but it is not *blind* faith.

A central theme of Christianity is that God invaded history in the person of his Son. Jesus lived, died, and rose again in an occupied country full of strife and rival claims. In the same way, this faith continues to unfold in the real world, with Christians striving to make the case that the gospel message is "true and reasonable" (Acts 26:25). It is not an issue of "faith versus fact." No, it's an issue of the facts pointing the way to a reasonable faith.

If you've been around Christian circles for a while, you may recognize that I am talking about "apologetics." As it relates to Christianity, apologetics is the discipline of offering a rational basis

for the Christian faith—a defense, if you will. In fact, the New Testament itself has something to say about it. For instance, Peter tells Christians: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). When Peter mentions “answer” (some versions translate it “defense”), he uses a term that winds up in English as “apology.” Normally, an apology relates to smoothing over a tiff with your sweetie, but the word didn’t mean that in Peter’s day, and today it has an additional meaning. An “apology” in this technical sense refers to making a defense for a particular view.

You may not be accustomed to hearing the term as such, but we do apologetics all the time. “My favorite football team is clearly the best for the following reasons,” or “There’s only one correct way to cook a roast, and here it is.” (Anyone suspecting I might have had sexist categories in mind in these last illustrations has never seen my buddy’s wife come right off the couch like a screaming banshee every time her team fumbles.) What we’re doing in these instances is defending a viewpoint. It’s no different with Christianity. The Christian faith self-consciously presents itself as a truth capable of rational defense (Acts 1:3), one worth standing up for (Jude 3).

THE NERVE

That last line is bound to raise some folks’ hackles if spoken too loudly. Maybe you’ve heard a time or two that the Bible just can’t be trusted. After all, it’s been translated too many times. How could it be a sure guide to anything? While we’re at it, you may be asking yourself if *any* of this is really important. Isn’t truth simply relative, just a matter of convention? By contrast, if you *do* decide to stand up for what you believe, aren’t you really just being pigheaded? Some folks seem to believe that either going along or being a pain are the only available options.

Our culture has rightly highlighted the need for patience, dialogue, and tolerance; there is much to be said about avoiding need-

less offense. But those very things, especially tolerance, are too often used like a club in an attempt to silence Christians. Anything goes in our society—anything, that is, except the gospel. It must be silenced as a divisive and unscientific collection of fairy tales. It is interesting that Christians are often singled out as intolerant and insensitive toward other beliefs, but I never hear anyone in the culture or the media complain about those who level their attacks *against* Christianity. Have you?

A LOST ART?

We as Christians are often put in the position that something needs to be said in response to the barbs of the skeptics. But many Christians have gotten a little rusty when it comes to defending the faith, rusty enough that a book like this could be useful. It wasn't long ago that pastors and Christian authors waged a "battle for the Bible" against this onslaught, seeking to equip their people with answers to these attacks. The average churchgoer had enough knowledge about what was going on to be able to stand firm. In our day, the drumbeat of attack continues, but, for too many people, it has simply become background noise. Few are paying any attention, and those who *are* aware of the issues are reluctant to say anything. There are many reasons for this, but let me highlight three of them.

Whatever

One reason for the reluctance to engage such a topic as defending the faith is that we are in the "Whatever" generation. We may try to address a commonly held myth, but we are met with apathy. Usually uttered with a roll of the eyes, "whatever" is spoken with an air of exasperation mixed with a touch of condescension. It is uttered as the final word on the subject, or at least that's the impression we are to take from it.

"You don't really believe that Jesus rose from the dead, do you?"