

“The Set-Up Technique”

or

“How I used 5 questions to build a trap.”

Last week I asked Pete, a Jehovah’s Witness, if he knew (#1) the context of a verse he had just quoted, “faith without works is dead?” [James 2.18-26] Did he know (#2) the names of the two Old Testament individuals whose works were under examination in that 9-verse paragraph? He didn’t.

I also asked if he knew the phrase “faith without works is dead” was in fact used three times in James not just where he quoted it from (#3). James 2.17, 20 & 26

Further, I asked him if he was aware that quite clearly the *display* of my works was in the context of (#4) “show ME your faith” and “I will show YOU”? Obviously works is one means by which people judge each others’ works. Abraham was not displaying his works to God in the Genesis passage being cited. Did my friend know that God (#5) had justified Abraham by his faith seven chapters ago [in Gen 15.6]? Abraham was not justified by works. He was justified by faith. “. . . he believed in the Lord, and He [God] counted it unto him [Abraham] for righteousness.” [quoted 4 times in the New Testament—Jas 2, twice in Rom 4, Gal 3].

We were both trying to express why our understanding of the wording in a particular paragraph was stronger, clearer, and more reliable than our “adversary’s” argument. Pete and I were both seekers after truth. So we did not get angry because one of us was feeling the trunk of the elephant and our friend was feeling the leg or the tail. We both tried to see and understand the Scriptures. But we both were waiting for the moment when the other guy realized he was not feeling the leg of the elephant, he was feeling a tree nearby [entirely unrelated].

The Coup de Gras: [French for “delivering gracefully” is an idiom for “striking the fatal blow.”] Be kind when using this technique.

“Pete, you can see clearly now that your Bible does not teach what you have been taught in church. You have read and have been told that faith without works cannot save us, but I’ve made a list of 199 verses from the New Testament where God says lucidly that faith alone gives eternal life [new birth, justification, redemption. God makes us His children by faith alone.

“Together, you and I have just read Bible verses which contradict what your literature says. Those who write the JW literature don’t believe what the Bible clearly says about eternal life’s being a free gift without works.

“Let me leave you with this list of 10 verses that state clearly, in about three paragraphs, we are given righteousness **without works**.

Romans 3.20, 21, 27, 28 4.2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 16

“Thanks, Pete. Let me pray for you in Jehovah’s Name before you leave.”
[a gentle, and encouraging prayer for a new friend, please]

This same “Set-Up Technique” can be used to trap any arguer who thinks he knows it all about any number of debatable issues: eternal security, deity of Jesus Christ, hell, virgin birth, miracles, Jesus’ sinless life, the resurrection, death, or all-roads-lead-to-heaven. But you have to be super-prepared and know the Word.

1. Casually ask specific enough questions to determine exactly what your friend believes about the issue at hand.
 - * Ask the question with specific verses in mind which you are later going to ask him to affirm or refute.
 - * Keep his errors in mind—context errors and incorrect quotations
2. Repeat his exact words aloud during your conversation so that you can come back to those words later and say, “Didn’t you already tell me that you believe such-and-such?”
3. If possible, get him to agree that he believes two contradictory things about the same subject, but don’t let him know that’s what you’re doing. Later you will bring up his inconsistency.
4. Look for things in the passage which he has overlooked. Sometimes the same phrase is used differently in two different passages.
5. Your disagreement is not how you and he believe different things, it is about what the Bible says.
6. You are trying gently to show him how he incorrectly arrived at his error, not just that your opinion is better.
7. You are also intentionally planting seeds of doubt in his mind about the veracity of his other beliefs.
8. Remember the clincher is wrapped up in this kind question, “We’ve seen that you’ve been taught something that disagrees with the Bible. Is it possible that what you’ve been taught about salvation might also be wrong?”
9. Be willing to admit that you also had been taught a bunch of things that weren’t in the Bible and had to reject them.