

Defending Christianity

Dillon Burroughs



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Verses marked MSG are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Cover design by Left Coast Design, Portland, Oregon

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Ste #200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920. www.alivecommunications.com.

In many cases, names and minor details have been changed in the real-life stories shared in this book to protect the privacy of the individuals mentioned. Where individuals may be identifiable, they have granted the author and the publisher the right to use their names, stories, and/or facts of their lives in all manners, including composite or altered representations.

UNDEFENDING CHRISTIANITY

Copyright © 2011 by Dillon Burroughs
Published by Harvest House Publishers
Eugene, Oregon 97402
www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Burroughs, Dillon.
Undefending Christianity / Dillon Burroughs.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-7369-3702-3 (pbk.)
1. Christian life. I. Title.
BV4501.3.B874 2011
248.4—dc22

2010022204

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 / BP-SK/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Author's Note	9
1. Friend of Sinners, King of Beers	11
<i>Jesus was a friend to sinners and consumed alcohol. How'd that work?</i>	
2. Church's Chicken Versus My Church	15
<i>When you compare Church's Chicken to the contemporary church, it looks a lot more similar than you think...</i>	
3. Hollywood and Flaming Liberals	21
<i>Christians love movies and winning elections. They also love to rant against immoral Hollywood stars and call Democrats the devil.</i>	
4. I Love Homosexuals Even Though I'm Straight	27
<i>Jesus said to love your neighbor, love sinners, and love your enemies. Homosexuals should fit into at least one of these three categories.</i>	
5. Ending Slavery Begins with Me...and You	33
<i>More slaves exist now than any other time in human history. Even in the U.S., you can buy people if you know where to go. The only way to end it begins with you and me, one step at a time.</i>	
6. Beyond Awareness	39
<i>Jesus wasn't happy with religious people who talked a good game but would not act. Instead, He reserved His harshest words for Pharisees and Sadducees. You know the punch line—time to move beyond awareness and act. Here's an example of how a friend and I are trying to make a difference.</i>	
7. Porn Is Not the Problem—You Are (Dude Chapter)	45
<i>Accountability only works if you want it to. Porn exists because people consume it—lots of it. The problem is ultimately not just the content. It's inside those who consume it.</i>	

8. **Racism Makes Me Want to Cuss** 49
My rant against racism in the church, along with my failed and sometimes successful attempts to do something about it.
9. **Thanks, Dad!** 53
Today marks ten years since my dad passed away at age 49. I told him I loved him, but I never said thanks.
10. **Divorce Sucks Big Time** 59
America is, for the most part, a fatherless culture. My parents have each been married three times. My wife's parents have each been married a whopping total of four times—and we're Christians. Why are the odds stacked against traditional marriages? What can we do to become spouses and parents who follow the path of Jesus regarding holy matrimony?
11. **Pastors Lie About Sex** 65
Pastors like to preach that sex is lame outside of marriage. Liars! Sex is just as fun. It's the guilt that kills us.
12. **Goths, the Amish, Baristas, and Other People Who Like to Wear Black** 71
Wearing black is a symbol of culture—not sin. Love the sinner, hate the sin, and stop complaining that my jeans have holes in them!
13. **Sin Is Cool. Then You Die.** 77
Solomon's approach to sin: It's fun for a while, but when the party is over, then what? (Especially if teleportation doesn't work.)
14. **Homeless Church** 83
Church wasn't designed by an architect. (Technically, Jesus was a carpenter.) Why do we think of churches as buildings instead of groups of people who love Jesus?
15. **Why the Poor Matter More Than Your New Car** 87
Why helping the poor is more important than the car you drive (because smaller car payments allow you to give more money to those without food and clean water).

16. **Membership Matters, but Only to American Express** 93
Church membership isn't mentioned in the Bible, but why does the topic make such great sermons?
17. **The Day I Dropped Out of School** 99
Education is great, but sometimes a radical change is necessary. Or as Gandhi noted, "Live simply so that others may simply live."
18. **If Jesus Had a Blog** 107
What would Jesus say if He blogged today? Or would He blog at all? After all, blogs seem pretty random at times. And Jesus is anything but random.
19. **"I Caught You a Delicious Bass"** 115
Words that could apply to both Napoleon Dynamite and the Gospels (see the last chapter of John's Gospel). Why giving rather than asking is the first step in building relationships (and how the church screws this up all the time). Heck yes!
20. **Death by Potlucks and Krispy Kremes** 121
Gluttony is the most neglected sin in the American church. If four bodies are the temple of God, then American Christians are the megachurch.
21. **Why I Might Get Fired** 127
Christians like to be right. Some of us get paid to be right. When we admit we've misrepresented Jesus at some points along the way, tribal leaders are not always happy.
22. **To All the Haters** 133
A few kind words to those who disagree with the approach of this book.
- My Wake-Up Call: Helping Haiti** 137
On January 12, 2010, the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation was devastated by an earthquake that killed over 200,000 people. I landed in Port-au-Prince 17 days later. This is my story. . .
- Bonus Material: That Jesus** 147
Because Jesus is only Jesus if we're really talking about Jesus.



Friend of Sinners, King of Beers

Jesus was a friend to sinners and consumed alcohol. How'd that work?

As a kid, I was strictly taught alcohol was evil. My dad struggled with this demon for over a decade, nearly wrecking his marriage and our family in the process. He found God, dumped his Anheuser-Busch down the drain, quit smoking, and never looked back. He told me if I loved God or didn't want to visit Him in the near future, I would never touch a drink of the stuff.

I was three.

So I didn't. I am 34 years old as I type these words and have never tasted a sip of alcohol.

But when I read the Gospels, I've noticed that my dad's biblical paraphrase about alcohol being evil is slightly off. In fact, the first miracle Jesus performed was instant winemaking. No wonder people loved Him! He probably received a bunch of wedding invitations after that one.

Passover was observed with wine too. Since there was no refrigeration, nearly everyone in Jewish culture drank wine.

Then there's Communion, also known as the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, wafer-and-juicy-juice, or whatever your particular tradition calls it. The modern practice is far different from the first time Jesus shared communion. He handed out flat bread and wine, not crackers and juice. I don't know about you, but this sounds far more appealing to me.

Imagine a church actually doing this! "This morning, we will ask the ushers to pass around the tortillas and wine. Please wait until everyone has received theirs, and then we will enjoy them together." This sounds more like chipotle than church.

What people tell us in the Bible and what really *is* in the Bible is not always the same. This is why reading Scripture is one of the most important spiritual practices a person can develop.

Ask the people who lived in Berea when the apostle Paul arrived. Paul talked about Jesus as the Messiah. The Bereans looked up the verses he mentioned from the Jewish prophets to see if he was making his story up or not. They were the kind of people who would google your name after meeting you. When they discovered Paul was on target, some of the people believed his message. A new community of believers formed. We call this the church.

Wine. Church. Now add a little music...

In high school, God became real. He was real before, but I had my doubts. I had accepted and rejected Him several times, sometimes on the same day, because life seemed more adventurous when I could do whatever I wanted.

That was before doing whatever I wanted sucked.

At 17, I had been dumped by a girl I really liked. Nothing hurts more than getting dumped. Except maybe getting hit by a flying steak, but unlike Napoleon Dynamite, I haven't experienced that one, so I can't comment. Anyway, life was not fun at this point, so I decided to make it fun. After various failed attempts, I realized that doing whatever I wanted while also trying to believe Jesus is God simply does not work. I had to choose one or the other.

So I chose Jesus.

It sounds easy—I chose Jesus—but it was the toughest decision I have ever made. All of my plans and dreams died that day. I wanted to do something significant: Perhaps I could have become a big-shot CEO or have gone on to defeat Tiger Woods at the Masters. I might have become a rock star or an NBA great. Or all of the above. Now all I had was Jesus...

And question marks.

But then I read that Jesus was a friend of sinners. This still bothers me. Not because Jesus was a friend of sinners (because that came in really handy in my case). It bothers me because if I'm trying to live like Jesus, that means I'm supposed to be a friend of sinners too.

At first, I thought friends of sinners were people who loved their neighbors as themselves. I would just say I love everybody, just as every Miss America contestant says she wishes for world peace. Case closed.

But I was wrong. When Jesus was called a friend of sinners, it was because He spent time with people the culture thought were the “real” sinners—the sinners with a capital S. You know who I’m talking about: prostitutes, closet Prince fans, drug addicts, Trekkies, party animals, ninjas, and parents who send their kids to public schools. We all have “lists” of people who we think are way worse sinners than everyone else.

In Jesus’ day, the list included people like Matthew, who collected taxes for a non-Jewish government, and likely included extras for himself. It included Mary Magdalene, a mad woman who had been possessed by seven demons. There were also smelly fishermen, a political protestor, and at least one money-laundering traitor (Judas).

I’m convinced that if Jesus walked the streets of my town today, he wouldn’t just hang out at Starbucks or shop at the Gap. He’d also drop in at a downtown pub or bar once in a while, just to say hey and talk to people. Maybe He would eat at Chili’s, just as Michael does in *The Office*. He would probably be really friendly to all of those homeless people we neglect too. He’d wave and smile at kids and give directions to the tourists.

Actually, if you look closely, the only people Jesus was really mean to in the Gospels were the religious people. (He also spoke bluntly to Peter a time or two.) He wasn’t a *How to Make Friends and Influence People* type of communicator. He would just show up, start telling stories, heal somebody, and talk about God’s kingdom. The religious scholars couldn’t handle this way of life. It did not compute.

But Jesus doesn’t always make sense. He is God, you know. That means we can’t quite understand everything He says or does. We do our best, but the Trinity is not like an ice cube or an egg, and Jesus cannot be theologized by just making up a word and calling Him the God-man (I personally prefer Superman as a theological term, but I understand this name is already trademarked.).

So maybe an occasional beer wouldn’t be so wrong after all.

At least if I use it as an excuse to talk with people about God. Like people who wouldn’t hang out with me to hear a sermon on Sunday morning.

Or if I'm at a wedding reception.

Or celebrating Passover with some Jewish friends.

Or communion.

Or anywhere without refrigeration.

I'm still thinking about it. Maybe I can just order coffee or drink an O'Douls next time I'm at Chili's. (Even though O'Doul's *does* contain .5 percent alcohol.) Does that count? But when it comes down to it, I don't think the alcohol is really the point.

Living as a friend of sinners is more about me intentionally loving people on their turf. Their world. I can drink a cup of water and eat Pringles, and God is pleased so long as I show His love. Unconditionally.

Plus, Starbucks is still cheaper. Barely.