

Several times a week I get emails from people who ask what it's like to be the subject of such vitriolic attack by those who don't agree with my views. Or they express regret and sorrow that I am so often or viciously attacked. Or they want me to stand up for myself and reply to my attackers. Almost always, when I get one of these emails, I think to myself: Am I being attacked by someone??? Huh. *That's* interesting.

The reality is that for the most part I'm blissfully unaware of assaults on my views (or character). I suppose that is mainly because I don't search around on the Internet to see who is saying what about me. I do know that fundamentalists and lots of conservative evangelicals think that if I'm not the devil incarnate, that at least I'm one of his more academic henchmen. And I know that the attacks by these conservative Christians pale in comparison with the attacks by the mythicists, who can't think I'm an incarnation of Satan since they don't believe in God, let alone Satan, but nonetheless go to great lengths to show that I'm clueless when it comes to topics like the New Testament, ancient religion, the historical (rather, the non-historical) Jesus, and so on. I've always found *those* claims to be particularly ... interesting.

In any event, I know all this not because I actually spend any time reading what they have to say, but because I have been in debates (either in person or on email) with a tiny number of such people (especially the evangelicals) and know they don't like my views and, in some instances, don't like me. But what are you gonna do? You can't make everyone like you. Or your views. And I don't see any reason to try. People are who they are. Of course fundamentalists will defend themselves by attacking me. What else are they going to do? If I'm right about the Bible, they are flat-out wrong about one of the most important things in their lives.

But if there are specific attacks against me floating around the Internet, I simply don't know it. And when I do know it, I don't find it particularly upsetting. At least not upsetting enough to dig into what someone else is saying about me.

I'll give a clear instance. I've had several public debates with my friend Dan Wallace, a professor of New Testament at the exceedingly conservative evangelical Dallas Theological Seminary. In our first debate, we were supposed to be talking about whether we can be sure that we have the original wording of the New Testament, given the fact that we don't have the original manuscripts but only copies made, in most instances, very much later, and that these copies all differ from one another in one way or another. In the debate, I talked about this topic and gave my views about it based on my years of research. And what did Dan do? He actually didn't talk very much about the topic. What he wanted to talk about was me, about how one thing that I said at one time contradicted something that I said at some other time - he came up with lots of these - so that I couldn't be trusted in anything that I said.

I thought that was a rather odd way to engage in a debate, since the topic was not whether Bart Ehrman was reliable but whether the manuscripts of the New Testament were. In point of fact, I could easily defend myself against this kind of attack - a lot of what Dan has said about me over the years involves taking my comments out of context, or misrepresenting my views, or ... well, there are lots of problems. But I refuse to defend myself at any length about such things. And why? Because to me, they aren't relevant to the topic. And I have better things to do than show that Dan's assaults on me are unfounded.

The clearest indication of the difference between Dan and me is that I would NEVER, ever read through all of the things that Dan has written, examining them down to the detail, with a fine-tooth comb, to see if something that he said in 1993 is at odds with something he said in 2004. Why would I bother to do such a thing? Why would I waste my time? Who in the world cares? If I don't care about such things, I really don't think others should either.

And so even though I am, in fact, pretty thin skinned, I normally simply don't get into these kinds of arguments.

I often get asked why I don't defend myself more often against what this that or the other person says about me. As I've been indicating, the main reason is that I'm not aware of what they are saying, and am not particularly eager to find out. Another reason is that I don't want to take the valuable hours and minutes that I have in a day to find out. And possibly the most important reason is this: I think any fair-minded and reasonably intelligent human being can read whatever it is I've written - say, in Misquoting Jesus, or Jesus Interrupted, or Forged, or Did Jesus Exist? - and then read what someone else says who is trying to attack me. They can then compare what I say with what the other person says. And then - if they are really interested and not simply looking for one person to trash the other - they can figure out who seems to be right. If someone isn't smart enough to do that, then none of us can probably help them. And if they aren't willing to do it, then even more there is no help.

I don't mind having public debates on matters of real importance. It's true, there are a couple of people that I refuse to share a stage with - but that's only because they are mean-spirited, rude, and believe that mockery and scorn are academic modes of argumentation. (I won't name names, but one is a fundamentalist and another is a mythicist.) But otherwise, I rather enjoy having a spirited back and forth about important topics. And I sometimes will do that in print, when I think there is a really important issue at stake that people might be misled about (for example in my responses to Craig Evans here on the Blog a while back, when he took serious issue with my view that Jesus was probably never given a decent burial on the day of his crucifixion). Or, OK, if there's a particularly egregious attack on my scholarship that I get tons of emails about, I have occasionally responded (once on this Blog). But I really don't see the need to peruse everything on the Internet to see if I and/or my views are under attack, and then defend myself before the charges.

Life's too short!



[Talks at the Smithsonian, March 21](#)
[The Blog Year in Review: 2014](#)