Lessons From The Ken Ham vs. Bill Nye Debate

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Reading Time: 5 minutes

Last night I was blessed with the opportunity to drive to Cincinnati with my wife and parents to attend the Bill Nye vs. Ken Ham debate. The debate was very interesting, and I wish to share with you my thoughts, along with four relevant lessons for all Christians.

Unfortunately, debates (like last night’s Ken Ham vs. Bill Nye) are rarely won by the man who provides better evidence. Debates, especially in our sound-byte addicted, entertainment oriented culture, are won by the man who is the most animated, articulate, funny, and passionate. Sadly, from this perspective, Bill Nye arguably won the debate. He had more debate experience and connected more with the audience.

A Night Of Missed Opportunities

If I had to summarize the debate in one sentence, I would say, “It was a night of missed opportunities.” Bill Nye gave Ken Ham some very good opportunities to respond with some very challenging arguments. Yet Ken Ham did not answer very many of them. Perhaps my biggest disappointment was Ham’s answer to, “What would cause you to change your mind?” He gave a weak answer about how he would always believe the Bible (and thus didn’t really answer the question). In so doing, he helped fuel the stigma that Christians are closed-minded and unwilling to reason with contrary views. A better answer, I believe, would have been, “If the Bible is proven wrong, I would change my mind.” That would have been powerful! Of course, the Bible never has been proven wrong (nor will it be).

The debate turned into a Creation vs. ‘Science’ issue, rather than a Creation vs. Evolution issue. Ken Ham could have done a better job in showing that Creationism in fact owns science, and that Christians support honest scientific research and achievement.
Perhaps Ken succeeded in showing the world that Christians are reasonable people. Arguably, he helped further the idea that Creationism is a viable model of origins in today’s modern, scientific era. Yet, he failed to captivate the hearts and minds of the audience. Again, debates [sadly] aren’t about being right; debates are about developing and communicating a more effective argument.

Still, overall, Nye failed to do the impossible. He failed to paint the atheist worldview as the more attractive option. Creationism is the most reasonable explanation of human origins.

The Night A Childhood Hero Died

Bill Nye the Science Guy is the childhood hero of many people. My generation grew up watching him on TV. He made science fun! How? He was funny, charming, and always knew the how to explain complicated things on a child’s level.

But last night, my childhood hero Bill Nye died. He wasn’t the great man he played on TV. Instead, what I saw was a slightly snarky, sarcastic, anti-Christian man simply trying to push the secular agenda. He spoke of the Christian worldview in a derogatory way, often referring to God’s account of creation as the “Ken Ham creation model” or a “disturbing” story based on “magic.” Bill Nye is no hero.

Four Lessons From The Bill Nye vs. Ken Ham Debate
For Christians:

1. **Don’t teach too much, too quickly.** Ken Ham, in a national debate with a prominent atheist about whether Creationism is a viable model of origins, talked a lot about “sin” and God’s purpose in the Cross. He also introduced his false “new earth” theology. He made the classic mistake of bringing too much to the table. Instead, he should have kept the debate simple. Matters of sin and redemption are too much for people who do not even believe in God to accept. Once Creationism is recognized as the only reasonable explanation of origins, spiritual matters can be discussed. But only then. After all, “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa. 19:1). Christians should follow the example of Paul during his sermon to the Athenian philosophers (Acts 17). He didn’t throw more at his audience than they could handle. Likewise, Christians need to make sure the people they are talking to believe in God and accept the authority of Scripture before engaging them with deeper theological issues.

2. **Know your limits.** The debate was stacked against Ken Ham from the beginning. The debate topic, “Is Creation a viable model of origins in today’s modern, scientific era,”
automatically put Creationism on the defensive. Additionally, Ken Ham was debating a famous cultural figure who had much more experience with debating in front of a camera and an audience. Christians, we need to make sure we do not bite off more than we can chew when discussing matters of faith and religion.

3. **Your presentation is every bit as important as being right.** Please don’t misunderstand what I’m trying to say. I know Paul said, “I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:1). I’d want to be right rather than popular. Truth will triumph in the end, so we don’t need to mask the beauty of God’s Word with our own rhetorical ability. Yet, in today’s culture especially, we need to make sure we are enthusiastic, passionate, knowledgeable, and aware of our audience when we speak. We need to make sure that our presentation of the Gospel is as excellent and as personal as we know to make it. Bill Nye had an easier time winning the hearts and minds of the audience – not because his argument was stronger, but because he connected better with the audience.

4. **Answer the arguments and questions the other side is making.** Again, Ken Ham missed too many opportunities. Why? Partly because he had too many pre-prepared arguments. Christians, we need to make sure we are listening to the questions the other side is asking, not asking the questions for them. As we appeal to others about the truth of God’s Word, we need to make sure we are answering the *real* questions in a relevant way.

While I am somewhat disappointed in the outcome of the debate, I really admire the courage and conviction of men like Ken Ham for standing up to intellectual bullies like Bill Nye. I appreciate men who are willing to take a stand for Christ, even if – like Ken Ham – they have an inadequate conception of God’s scheme of redemption and obedient faith. What we need is more men like Ken Ham! Parents, speak highly of creationists and encourage your children to contend for the faith. Our world, more than ever before, needs men and women of courage.

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