

Questions and answers

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

October 22, 2014

Among the more delightful and rewarding tasks of managing a blog is dealing with the blight upon digital existence that is spam. My blog platform's spam settings are usually pretty reliable, but occasionally either a legitimate comment is labeled spam or something gets through that shouldn't. The sheer volume of spam seems to have dramatically increased over the seven+ years I've been doing this. (My dashboard proudly proclaims that it has "protected" my site from 1,187,079 messages.) I try to empty my spam folder out a few times a day—often there are hundreds to delete even after a couple of hours. Spammers (or, their programs) are, evidently, a rather persistent lot.

They're also getting more creative. Often, a "comment" will just be bunch of random nonsense in a wide variety of languages or a collection of unsavory links. But occasionally, spammers will try to sneak in apparently legitimate messages to improve their odds of escaping the filter. I've started a file on some of the more interesting ones. Recently I was intrigued by this one in particular:

I was really confused and this answered all my questions.

Oh, you clever spammers—preying upon the hidden desires and longings of every writer! Yes, this is what we would all love to hear, isn't it? Everyone who spends untold hours thinking and crafting sentences and paragraphs, everyone who puts together talks and devotionals and studies and sermons, everyone for whom communication comprises a major part of their professional life, everyone who is entrusted with the task of regularly delving into fearful and holy mysteries of God and meaning, forgiveness and salvation, sin and suffering. . . how we would *love* to hear something like this, even once. *Well done, good and faithful (and eloquent) servant! You answered all my questions!*

After staring longingly at these ten words, plaintively sighing, and pressing "empty spam," I returned back to the real world. I thought about some of the people I have met this week, some of the situations I have encountered, some of the painful life

situations that friends have been dealing with, some of the huge theological issues that some people struggle daily with, some of the perplexing minefields of biblical interpretation that regularly cause confusion and frustration among those I interact with. I thought about how often the things that we speak, the things we write, even the silences we observe leave *so many* questions unanswered. Confusion so often remains, even after (or, regrettably, sometimes *because* of) all of the words.

I decided to do a quick mental scan of the Gospels. I tried to recall the place where people came to Jesus and had all of their questions answered. What I found in a quick recollection of the interactions between Jesus and those closest to him was a little messier than that. What I found was, “This is hard teaching, who can accept it?” and “Teach us to pray” and “Seventy times seven?!” and “You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I put up with you?” and “Explain this parable to us!” and “Oh you of little faith!” and “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand” and “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?!’” and “Do you not know me, even after I have been among you such a long time?”

What I found was a Jesus who often provoked at least as many new and more difficult questions as he answered. What I found was a Jesus for whom instigating bewilderment and reevaluation was almost a *modus operandi*! What I found was a Jesus who seemed to think there were more important things for human beings to aspire to than the elimination of all confusion and the answering of all questions.

My mind landed on a few other statements in my quick mental scan of the gospels, if only because of their syntactic similarity to the formulation of the oh-so-alluring spam message above:

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.

I was a stranger and you invited me in.

I was naked and you gave me clothing.

I was sick and you took care of me.

I was in prison and you visited me.

I was really confused and you answered all . . . oh, wait. Never mind.

Yet another instance where our priorities and preferences do not seamlessly map onto those of Jesus.

I don't think that Jesus was pro-confusion or anti-answering questions. Jesus obviously *did* and *does* answer important questions and eliminate (or at least recalibrate) confusion. But Jesus also pushes us beyond the questions and confusion that can sometimes preoccupy us in unhealthy ways, and he gives us something concrete to do. Perhaps it is in the doing and the giving that the confusion and the questions can be looked at with fresh eyes and in their proper place. Or, at the very least, we can take a few steps toward asking better questions and coming to peace with the ones that will be part of the furniture this side of eternity.

Originally posted at [Rumblings](#)