

DIALOGUE: RESPONSE TO CAFFERKY

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I appreciate Dr. Cafferky's acceptance of my invitation to offer "further analysis and discussion of this morally important issue"—should advertising employ shock tactics? Over the course of his response, Dr. Cafferky makes several good points and poses a number of helpful questions. At the same time, some of his analysis invites rebuttal. I will not take the time here to address all of the points that warrant response; however, I will reply to several of the most significant ones. For brevity sake, I will structure my responses in bullet point form, beginning with those points I would like to affirm.

Points of Affirmation

- I'm glad to hear that Dr. Cafferky is considering use of shock advertising as a topic of debate in his undergraduate classes. Hopefully other faculty will do the same. On several occasions I have assigned a short case about shock in one of my courses, which has produced valuable discussion. I believe a key to such an approach is to describe a specific, well-defined instance of shock rather than to consider shock advertising in abstract, or in general.
- Dr. Cafferky raises an important question concerning some preachers' use of shock for purposes of increasing response to the Gospel. Given what's at stake, perhaps such tactics do represent a legitimate use of shock. These cases, however, don't really represent *advertising* shock.
- I also appreciate Dr. Cafferky's list of "symptoms" of individuals in scripture who may have been shocked, e.g., paleness of the skin, weakness, trembling, etc.

Points of Contention

- Concerning the distinction between divine shock intended to effect a specific physical outcome and shocking communication, Dr. Cafferky says, "The justification for this

distinction might have been made stronger before employing it. One could argue that at a deeper level any action intended for a physical outcome is itself a form of a message." Near the beginning of the section titled "Shocking Communication Scripture" and immediately before the description of the "Research Method," I offer a paragraph designed to make this distinction, in which I reference the well-known example of Noah's ark and God's flooding the earth (Genesis 6): The flood certainly conveyed a message, but that message seems secondary to the physical goal of purging a sinful world. Also, within the section of "Old Testament Shock" I mention the examples of the plagues against the Egyptians (Exodus 7-11), the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) and a great fish swallowing Jonah (Jonah 1 & 2), all of which represent shock designed to precipitate specific physical outcomes. Later, at the beginning of the section titled "New Testament Shock," I provide another extended example of an act that was not purely shocking communication—the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). I also later refer to Jesus' death and resurrection, emphasizing that their purpose was "not simply to communicate a message; it was the necessary divine action for human redemption and reconciliation." While I agree with Dr. Cafferky's point that words and actions are closely linked and often "actions speak louder than words," it was necessary to focus on biblical shock that was more purely communication because advertising is more purely communication. Advertisers generally can only say and show things to us with the hope of persuading us; seldom if ever can they physically dictate our response. As such, I believe the distinction I made in the paper concerning shocking communication was appropriate, clear, and well-supported.

- Similarly, several of the new examples that Dr. Cafferky suggests do not represent shock that is more purely communication, e.g., Jesus healing a demon-possessed man (Matthew 8:25-34; Luke 8:27-37), Peter escaping from prison (Acts 12:3-16), and Jesus healing a paralyzed man (Luke 5:1-26). Yes, there were messages related to each of these miraculous acts, but each of the acts, unlike advertising, also directly accomplished a specific physical outcome. To ignore or downplay the primacy of the physical outcomes might suggest, for instance, that those who were healed were just a means to an end, which seems inconsistent with God's character.
- Likewise, Dr. Cafferky cites a few examples of shock that were probably not divinely mandated, e.g., Simon's use of magic (Acts 8:9-24), the slave girl who told fortunes (Acts 16:16), and Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery (Genesis 37:23-33). Biblical characters, even some of those who are most revered, sometimes took actions that we should not imitate (e.g., David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah; 2 Samuel 11). For this reason, I sought to analyze only examples of shock that could be reasonably attributed to God. Although we certainly can consider shocking acts that humans committed of their own initiative, it's hard to know whether those acts were right or wrong.
- Dr. Cafferky's list of ten "Other Questions for Community Discussion" is helpful. My reservation, however, is that the length of such a list may vary inversely with the likelihood that people will actually use it to make moral judgments. As such, there's great value in analytical and ethical tools that are both simple and effective. Along these lines, I wonder about two of the questions in particular: First, I'm not sure I see the connection between wisdom and destruction of relationships (Q #8). Second, I'd like further clarification of the difference between encouraging loyalty in relationships (Q #9) and being destructive of relationships (Q #8)? Perhaps these two questions could be combined, which, again, would simplify somewhat the ethical analysis.
- Dr. Cafferky raises some pertinent questions about the consequences of shock advertising; however, a moral decision about shock shouldn't be decided based solely, or perhaps at all, on projected outcomes. We need to ask what moral/biblical principles are being upheld or compromised, which some of his ten questions do target.

Again, I appreciate Dr. Cafferky's willingness to engage with this important ethical issue and to extend the conversation for the benefit of all *JBIB* readers.