

Why Should We Expect the Non Christian to Believe?

Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.^{Romans 4:3} But what *caused* Abraham to believe? God did not expect him to believe blindly, with no facts or evidence on which to base his belief. Abraham saw God in action. God spoke directly to him. God demonstrated His power to him. Based on all of this Abraham knew he could believe God. In short, there were *reasons* as to why Abraham believed when God made promises to him.

WHY DO I BELIEVE?

I initially believed because my parents took me to Sunday School and church, and because they themselves believed. These “authorities” told me the Bible was God’s Word, and that it was therefore true. They told me Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Saviour, and the only means for my sins to be forgiven ... and I believed them. So I believed God because I trusted the authorities who shaped me.

But as we begin to think on our own, we begin to see some shortcomings in our logic. I trusted my parents. I trusted my pastor. I trusted my Bible teacher. And it was upon this that I based my belief. But *why* did my parents believe? Was it because they trusted their parents before them? Why did my Bible teacher believe? Was it because the schools he attended told him to believe, because other authorities and experts before them believed?

What if my ancestors from generations ago that first began to pass down their beliefs were wrong? What if my Bible teachers were simply passing along false information, because it had been accepted as truth in Bible colleges and churches generations ago?

God does not speak to me in an audible voice as He did with Abraham. Perhaps He speaks to me today through the Bible. If the Bible is truly God’s Word, then I can trust what it says and I can believe. But how do I *know* the Bible really is God’s Word? On what do I base that?

Paul did not expect his audience to believe that Jesus Christ was roused from the dead without any *evidence* to back up that fact. He points out to the Corinthians that the risen Christ was seen by *eyewitnesses* ... Cephas, and the twelve, and over 500 brethren, and even by Paul himself.^{1 Cor 15:4-8} These eyewitness accounts provided reasons for the Corinthians to believe. But today there are no remaining eyewitnesses to the resurrection. So today are we expected to believe blindly?

Some people today claim to hear God’s voice. But do we trust them? How do we know they really are hearing from God? Could they perhaps be hearing from Satan instead? Or could they be fooled by their own mind, not really hearing from God at all? And isn’t it strange that the various things these folks claim to be hearing from God are conflicting messages?

WHY SHOULD WE EXPECT OTHERS TO BELIEVE?

Most Christians today base their beliefs on the Bible. So we go out into the world and we try to convince others to believe what the Bible says. But we encounter a problem. Others are not convinced that the Bible really is God’s Word. Some think the Koran is the Word of God. Some don’t think there is any word from God at all. Some do not even believe there really is a God.

So how do we convince others to believe the Bible is really the Word of God? Should they believe because I tell them it is? Or because my parents believe that it is, and their parents before them? Or because by Bible teachers say it is the Word of God?

We basically expect the world to believe that the Bible is the Word of God *blindly* ... offering no rational evidence. We use warnings and threats to convince them *they had better believe*, or they will find themselves in endless torment when they die. We try to scare them into believing ... but we don’t *help* them to believe.

At least Paul offered the Corinthians reasons to believe. And Abraham believed because he saw God in action, and he heard his voice. But we expect non-Christians to believe because we believe ... and so they better believe ... or else.

CAN WE MAKE PEOPLE BELIEVE?

We believe that our dining room table exists because we can see it and touch it. We believe the sun will rise in the morning because this has been continually demonstrated to us every morning in the past. We believe a person is guilty of a crime if there is ample evidence, or if there are reliable eyewitnesses.

To believe is to be *convinced* of something based on certain evidences.

If someone holds a gun to our head and tells us we must believe the earth is flat, we might *confess* that the earth is flat because our life is being threatened; but do we really *believe* the earth is flat? Isn't this the same as telling those of the world they had better *believe* Christ Jesus is their Saviour, or else? Can we really *make* them believe without offering some legitimate evidences to convince them?

WHAT ARE WE UP AGAINST?

So we set out to provide reasons to convince people to believe that the Bible really is the Word of God, and that Christ Jesus really is the Son of God and the Saviour. What are we up against? What are the obstacles that will prevent people from believing?

Remember there are other authorities telling people that the Bible is not the Word of God. Some people trust these other authorities. Why should they now trust what we are saying, instead of what these others have told them? We must be prepared to offer *reasons* why these other authorities are wrong, and why the Bible really is God's Word.

To me the most convincing evidences are found within the Bible itself. The many prophecies that were fulfilled. The detailed eyewitness accounts provided by the Biblical writers. And most convincing ... the absolute perfection that is found throughout the Bible.

There are truths about human nature that we know from experience are absolutely true. We try to be righteous, but are not able. Even the best of us will say things or do things at times that we know is not right. Try as we might, we cannot be righteous.

We must admit that without a revelation from God, when we die there is no way we have of absolutely knowing what will become of us, if there is anything at all beyond this life. If this life is all that there is, it is all quite senseless and temporary. It would be logical to *assume* there is more than just this life, but if there is no God Who tells us what lies ahead, we really have no way of knowing with certainty.

The Bible tells the story of humanity in such a way that we see all of our shortcomings, all the patience and wisdom of God, and a perfect conclusion to all things. This is the overwhelming evidence, and the compelling reason I believe the Bible is truly the Word of God.

FURTHERMORE, THERE ARE SPIRITUAL FACTORS AT WORK

Paul tells us, "*Not one is just – not even one. Not one is understanding. Not one is seeking out God.*" Rom 3:10-11
If this is true, how is it that *anyone* would ever seek God, and believe without some help from God?

Paul also writes, "... *and this from God, for to you it is graciously granted, for Christ's sake, not only to be believing on Him, but to be suffering for His sake also...*" Phil 1:29 If believing on Christ is something that is *graciously granted* by God, can we expect to convince someone to believe if God has not granted it to him to believe? Can we assume that God graciously grants it to *everyone* to believe? Or could His protocol be to grant it to *some* to believe, with the expectation that those who believe will play a role in God's ultimate purposes with all mankind?

In Acts 16 we read of a woman named Lydia "*whose heart the Lord opens up to heed what is spoken by Paul.*" Acts 16:14
Doesn't this infer that Lydia would not have heeded what Paul spoke, had it not been that the Lord specifically opened her heart?

With these spiritual factors in mind, listen to what Paul tells the Corinthians. “*Now, if our evangel is covered, also, it is covered in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this eon blinds the apprehensions of the unbelieving so that the illumination of the evangel of the glory of Christ, Who is the Image of the invisible God, does not irradiate them.*” ^{2 Cor 4:3-4} It is bad enough that even left on his own, man does not understand God and is not seeking God. But to make matters far worse, the god of this eon (*Satan*) **blinds the understanding** of the non-believer.

SYSTEMATIZING THE DECEPTION

There is one additional factor at work. When Paul urges the Ephesians to grow into maturity, “*to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ,*” he adds: “*that we may by no means still be minors, surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching, by human caprice, by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception.*” ^{Ephesians 4:13-14}

Without growing in maturity, then, there is a danger that the believer will be deceived in wrong teachings. And when Paul uses the phrase, “*the systematizing of the deception,*” what is he referring to? I believe it is “the church.” I do not mean Christ’s church ... the body of Christ. Christ’s church is invisible. It is comprised of every believer worldwide.

But Christ’s church has been **systematized**. It has been organized into denominations. It has been infiltrated by a man-made hierarchy ... a bureaucratic structure. Man-made requirements are imposed that go well beyond the bounds of Scripture. One must not only believe God ... he must believe what the authorities say about God.

What is the proof that the churches of man ... the organized churches of many flavors ... are this “systematizing of the deception?” If spiritual truth is understood and taught by these churches, then why is it that the many different churches teach so many different things? Church members argue over Biblical interpretations, and churches split. Like a cancer that has metastasized, differing opinions have caused multitudes of divisions among believers. Is this not exactly what Paul referred to when he describes the danger in not maturing ... “*surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching*”?

This is human nature at work. The Jews took the truth that was handed to them in the Law and the Prophets, and they **systematized** it. They turned faith into a bureaucracy that added to the Scriptures, creating their own rules for “religious observance.” The chosen people of God became a vehicle for the systematizing of the deception, ultimately leading to the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Likewise the church created by God has been hijacked by man, often with the best of intentions but hijacked nonetheless, and the resulting churches of man have become a vehicle for the **systematizing of the deception**.

Now let me suggest the biggest deception, as I see it, that is being perpetuated by “the church.”

MISUSE OF THE BIBLE

As stated earlier, I am convinced that the Bible is the Word of God, and I briefly explained the evidence that has led me to this conclusion. But consider what “the church” has done to the Bible.

Keep in mind that by the end of the apostle Paul’s life, nearly everyone had abandoned him. ^{2 Tim 4:16} We know that when Paul made his final trip to Jerusalem, he was opposed not only by unbelieving Jews, but also by believers who were zealous for the law. ^{Acts 21:20} Throughout his ministry there were those opposing Paul who were trying to mix the law with the evangel that he had been given by Christ, and who were preaching “*a different evangel*” ... a **distortion** of the evangel of Christ. ^{Gal 1:6-8} So we see that even within Paul’s lifetime, the deception had begun.

What is it that leads us to believe that the majority of believers suddenly caught on, seeing the error of their ways? In the first few centuries following Paul’s death, and the death of the other apostles, is there anything that happened that suddenly caused the majority of believers to see the truth? Did those that plagued Paul throughout his ministry, trying to distort the gospel, suddenly stop doing so?

Do we trust the church of the third, fourth and fifth centuries to have finally gotten things right? Were they finally expunging all distortions and misunderstandings when they created the creeds, when they formulated the articles of religion, and when they burned all who opposed their interpretations (“heretics”) at the stake?

I see nothing in church history that would tell me that the church finally understood. Instead I see the *systematizing of the deception*. I see Paul’s gospel set aside. I see the law continually being added to Paul’s message of grace. Sabbath laws, tithing, a focus on the “Ten Commandments,” water baptism, and multitudes of others requirements are all examples of man-made requirements being added to the true gospel for our day. There is a continual *distortion* of the gospel. And thru the bureaucratic, man-made church structures I see the *systematizing of the deception*, and not the maturity of the faith that Paul called for.

THE BIBLE

In terms of our testimony to the world, as we seek to convince others to believe, the biggest tragedy is what the churches of man have done to the Bible itself.

Look around you. There are hundreds of English Bible translations to choose from. If God has spoken to us in His word, why do we handle it so carelessly? Translators take their own biases, or the biases of their church denomination, and have sought to create an easy to read translation. No longer concerned with accurate and faithful translations, they seek only to develop translations that are easier to read. If you compare the multitudes of different translations, you will easily find many inconsistencies between the translations. And if you take the time to compare *any* of the modern translations to the original Hebrew and Greek, you will easily see how inconsistent the translations are.

A single Hebrew or Greek word is often translated by using several drastically different English words. Does *aion* in the Greek mean eternal (endless), or does it refer to a finite period of time that will conclude? You will find it translated both ways in most translations. Inconsistency! Do the Greek *hades* and the Hebrew *sheol* mean *hell* ... a place of endless burning torment ... or do these words in the original languages mean *grave* or “*the unseen place*” where *all* men go upon death ... righteous and unrighteous alike. You will find it translated sometimes one way, and sometimes the other, to suit the theological beliefs of the translator(s). Inconsistency!

Going beyond the issues of translation, consider Bible interpretation. Here is where we have multitudes of church “flavors,” all teaching different things. Did not Paul say, “*Endeavor to present yourself to God qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth.*” ^{2 Tim 2:15} But most believers do not study the Bible carefully, and they make no attempt to “correctly cut” or “rightly divide” the word of truth. Peter’s message and Paul’s message are mixed together, even though Peter was commissioned to proclaim his evangel to the Jews, and it pertained specifically to them. Paul was commissioned to proclaim his evangel to the Gentiles, to the body of Christ, but most today instead prefer that which does not even pertain to them. All is mixed together, and becomes a *distortion* of the truth ... the same distortion that Paul warned of in Galatians.

Again from Paul: “*For the era will be when they will not tolerate sound teaching, but, their hearing being tickled, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and, indeed, they will be turning their hearing away from the truth, yet will be turned aside to myths.*” ^{2 Tim 4:3-4} Was Paul wrong when he said this? Or did he correctly understand that this turning away would really happen? Indeed, most Christians today will choose a Bible translation, or they will choose a church to attend, where they are in agreement with its teachings. They are not concerned with seeking out truth. They already believe they know the truth. If something is taught that they disagree with, they move on to a place where their hearing is being tickled, and they will find teachers in accord with their own desires.

So does the church today truly understand truth, when the church at the end of Paul’s life distorted truth? Or did Paul correctly see there would be this turning away from the truth, and is it this turning away that we find today in the organized church ... the *systematizing of the deception*?

THE BIBLE’S PERFECTION HIDDEN

Remember that I stated the biggest evidence that the Bible is truly the Word of God is the perfection we see in it. But that perfection has been veiled by the man-made church, as the deception has been systematized.

If you study the Bible carefully, you see God taking a helpless and hopeless humanity, and finding a way to ultimately make Himself fully known to every last person, reconciling all to Himself. But as the Bible is distorted, through inconsistent translations and faulty interpretations, we hear of a God of love, who asks us to forgive and to love even our enemy ... yet who is content with having a large percentage of His creation burning in the flames of torment forever and ever, while only a small percentage is saved.

Can we expect the non believer to become a believer, when the churches of man have taken the truth and distorted it into something that is unbelievable?

SO THEN ... SHOULD WE SIMPLY NOT ATTEND A CHURCH?

The churches of man do many good things. They participate in causes to help the poor. They provide a support structure for those who experience a loss. They provide places where friendships can be formed, and where practical help is provided for young parents who are raising their children. Within the churches of man you will find many wonderful people. Many of them are not only participating in a church of man, but they are also a part of the one true, invisible Church. So indeed it is possible within the organized church to find fellowship with others who are a part of the body of Christ.

Whether one attends a church or not really makes no difference. But if one does choose to attend, I would encourage them to ask questions, to study the Scriptures for themselves, to offer comments; not in a disruptive way, but in a way that will plant seeds of truth in the midst of the systematized deception. Surely it is possible that any given church may be proclaiming the truth correctly, but I fear such cases are few and far between.

The bottom line is that I am not criticizing the people of God who choose to attend a church. Instead, I am criticizing the structure of the churches themselves, and the leadership that refuses to consider any possible interpretation of the Scriptures beyond that which they have already determined is absolute truth.

IT WILL BE OK

I have painted a rather gloomy picture, but let me conclude by saying that all will be OK. It is not up to us to straighten out all of this systematized deception. God will take care of that. What, then, are we to do?

“Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them, and placing in us the word of the conciliation. For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ’s sake, ‘Be conciliated to God!’” ^{2 Cor 5:18-20}

Let us seek to be faithful ambassadors, as if Christ were entreating thru us. To be a faithful ambassador means we must be proclaiming the correct message to the world, and not a distorted message. We must endeavor to be qualified, to be an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth. ^{2 Tim 2:15} We must have a pattern of sound words. ^{2 Tim 1:13} We must be sure we are proclaiming the correct evangel, and not a distorted evangel. ^{Gal 1:6-9} To do these things, we cannot rely upon any man, or any man-made church, for we could be led astray by the systematizing of deception.

And as we proclaim the true evangel, we can expect much opposition, even from within the organized church. But since Paul himself received such opposition from believers in his day, and remained in the minority even to the end of his life, can we expect to be any different? We seek not to please men, nor to heap praises on ourselves. We simply seek to be a faithful ambassador.

We can be a faithful ambassador while attending an organized church, or we might choose never to attend a church. (As members of Christ’s body we *are* the church. It is not a question of where we *go* to church; we are called to *be* the church.) We need not quit our jobs and go into the ministry; we are already ministers and ambassadors. We need not relocate to some distant land (unless we choose to do so); we can serve as Christ’s ambassadors in our work place, our neighborhood, our circle of friends and our families.

And as we share the wonderful evangel with the world, we may not see visible results. But still we plant the seeds. Even if eyes are blinded to the evangel, still we plant the seeds of truth. There will be those that do not

believe in this lifetime, but ultimately they will believe. They will remember the words of truth that were spoken by the faithful, perhaps after the body of Christ has been called to be with the Lord. ^{1 Thes 4:13-18} Or like doubting Thomas, they may not believe until they actually see and touch when Christ returns. ^{John 20:26-29} But one day they will believe. And our faithful proclaiming in this current era will have played a part.

“For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ’s in His presence; thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. For He must be reigning until He should be placing all his enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet ... Now whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.” ^{1 Cor 15:22-28}

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