



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

CHAPTER 1. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UNBELIEF

I. The Heart Has Its Reasons.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) wrote about the relationship between the mind and the heart in these famous words: “The heart has its _____ which reason knows nothing of” (*Pensées*). We all arrive at an understanding of what is true not only by our heads but by our _____. “Just the facts, man” may have worked for Joe Friday (*Dragnet*) but for everyone else, more than the evidence is involved. Think about how people take positions on a variety of issues: Santa Claus, evolution, global warming, health insurance, etc.

II. The Intellectual Virtues.¹

If we are going to keep our head and our heart in sync and be effective witnesses in a post-modern world, we must learn to practice the intellectual virtues.

A. A passion for _____.

The truth is many people are not interested in the truth! Rather, they are concerned about _____, ideology, life styles, and personal preferences. The primary question for most people is not *Is it true?* but rather *Do I like it?* Jesus said: *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice* (John 18:37). Christians should be men and women who are ready to follow the evidence _____!

B. A passion for _____.

A _____ is indispensable for clear thinking! In biblical psychology, we think with our hearts. Herein lies the problem: our hearts as well as our minds are _____ by sin.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness _____ the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-20).

Often the problem in arriving at an understanding of the truth is not a _____ of evidence but rather the suppression of it! Many reject God because they don’t *want* Christianity to be true! One of the great purposes of redemption is to bring us to the place where we stop trying to make truth conform to our _____ and start praying that our desires would conform to what is true!

C. A passion for _____.

We live in a _____ not a multiverse! Thus, truth cannot be compartmentalized. What is true in one area of life will be true in all areas of life. All

¹ The material under this heading is inspired by two books written by James W. Sire: *Habits of the Mind* (pp. 106–125) and *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics* (pp. 94–97).

truth is God's truth! Whether we are talking about the Bible, science, history, origins, politics, or sexual ethics, truth-lovers seek consistency.

D. _____.

One of the surest evidences that one is walking in the truth is that he/she is humble. You have to be wise to know how _____ you are! *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know* (I Cor. 8:2). John Stackhouse² explains that Christians should be humble in at least three respects:

1. *Epistemologically* humble (humble in what _____). Just because we know God doesn't mean we know everything! *Now I know in part....* (I Cor. 13:12). As Francis Schaeffer was quick to point out, we can know something _____ without knowing it _____. Rather than pretending to know all truth we should humbly acknowledge that we know the One who does!
2. *Rhetorically* humble (humble in how _____). Avoid cockiness and an air of superiority that pretends the evidence is such that any idiot can see. Show _____ for others: their intelligence, their moral integrity and their spiritual interest. D. T. Niles said it well: "evangelism is one _____ telling another beggar where to find bread."
3. *Spiritually* humble (humble about our own _____). Only the Holy Spirit can change the heart and transform the mind! Paul wanted those converted under his ministry to ground their faith not in human wisdom but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:1-5).

III. The Psychology of Unbelief in the Gospel of John.

A. The purpose of the book is stated in John 20:30-31:

Now Jesus did many other _____ in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may _____ that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have _____ in his name.

One could say that the Gospel of John is the first book on Christian apologetics ever written. The author's goal is to _____ his readers of the truth so they will believe the Gospel and experience abundant life. To accomplish this purpose, John set for a select number of "signs" (miracles):

1. Water is changed into wine (2:1-12).
2. The healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54).
3. The healing of the paralytic (5:1-18).
4. The feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15).
5. Jesus walks on water (6:16-21).
6. The healing of the man born blind (9:1-41).
7. Lazarus is raised from the dead (11:1-44).
8. Jesus' own resurrection (20:1-29).
9. The miraculous catch of fish (21:1-14).

² Stackhouse, John G. *Humble Apologetics*. Oxford University Press, 2002. (pp. 227-232).

These signs are outward and visible, not inward and mystical. They occurred in time and space. They are _____. The same data was available to all.

B. The problem is not the **lack of evidence**. Read John 12:27–31a.

Numbers of unbelievers have said; “If only God would speak in an _____, then I would believe... of course!” That’s exactly what happened in this incident! John records it so we can understand that it takes more than evidence to produce belief.³ When God spoke from heaven, the crowd divided itself into:

- The naturalists: It thundered.
- The superstitious: It was an angel.
- The true believers: It was God speaking clearly.

C. The psychology of unbelief.

Atheists and agnostics seem to delight in claiming that Christians are uneducated, gullible, simpletons. John’s Gospel helps us to understand that the knife cuts both ways! Unbelievers also often have _____ that undergird their own most basic assumptions (beliefs). John explains that there are four possible reasons that cause people not to believe in Jesus Christ.

1. _____ difficulties. Read John 18:33-38.

Pilate’s problem was the philosophical concept of truth. *What is truth?* As a politician, his focus was on _____ (getting my own way), not truth. He was a _____, doubting the very existence of truth. Like many today, Pilate believed in _____ (multiculturalism, pluralism, political correctness). He was _____ that everything was uncertain!

*There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative... Some are religious, some atheist; some are to the left, some to the right; some intend to be scientists, some humanists or professionals or businessmen; some are poor, some rich. They are unified only in their relativism and their allegiance to equality.... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance.... The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all (Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind*. Simon & Schuster, 1987. p. 25f.).*

Reaching people like Pilate typically demands a philosophical challenge to their most basic assumptions (relativism). Before such a person can believe that Jesus is the truth, he/she must discover the truth about _____.

2. _____ difficulties. Reading John 20:24-28.

Pilate was a cynic but Thomas was a _____. His problem was not with the concept of truth but rather with the need for evidence. He was open to faith but needed a reason to believe. He was an _____

³ Jesus made a similar point in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) which ends with the pointed application: “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

doubter. Until he knew that believing in Jesus was a _____ intellectual option, he remained stuck in his doubts and skepticism.

Many today don't believe the Gospel because the data they have is poor and they lack proper evidence. For example, listen to Richard Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, describe the God he doesn't believe in:

(God is) arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser;... a homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.⁴

To reach honest doubters, we may first have to help them find honest answers for honest questions so that their intellectual obstacles can be overcome and faith becomes _____. Common intellectual difficulties include:

- The Bible is full of myths (like the resurrection).
- Being a Christian an anti-scientific.
- But what about the crusades, the Inquisition and slavery?
- Why do Christians hate homosexuals?
- I don't believe in the Easter Bunny either.
- _____.
- _____.

3. _____ difficulties. Read John 11:20-27.

Sometimes a _____ life experience makes it "impossible" to believe in a kind and loving heavenly Father: *I can't (won't?) believe in a God who would let my baby die... who permitted my father to sexually abuse me... who didn't protect me from bankruptcy, etc.* When C. S. Lewis was a child, his mother became very sick. He prayed for her healing, but she died. So he became an agnostic. William J. Murray "explains" the atheism of his mother (Madalyn Murray O'Hair) in these terms:

*It is my opinion that my mother's maniacal campaign to remove all reference to God in public schools and government, plus her heated atheistic campaigns over the years, stem back to this issue. (She) was _____, and she was mad at God, who is male. Rather than confront her conscience, she determined to deny God's existence (quoted in *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* by Lee Strobel. Zondervan, 1993. p. 109).*

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died... (v. 21). Martha is a hero because she _____ to believe in Jesus even when life was falling apart! *Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?* (v. 40). Most people assume that seeing is believing. Martha helps us to understand the deeper truth that _____ is seeing!

Reaching people struggling with emotional hindrances to faith often demands that we _____ with them, pointing them to the cross of Jesus Christ where he too experienced evil: *My God, my God, why....???*

⁴ Every Christian I know would like the chance to say to Mr. Dawkins: "I don't believe in *that* God either!"

4. _____ difficulties. Read John 3:19-21, 11:47-48, and 12:42-43.

If Jesus is Lord, our lives have to _____! This means the one to whom we are witnessing will have to stop sleeping with his girlfriend, cheating on exams, drinking so much alcohol, and watching pornography. No wonder atheism is so attractive! Bonhoeffer said: “the man who _____ cannot believe, for only he who obeys can believe.”⁵ Atheistic philosopher Thomas Nagel at least was honest enough to admit the truth.

*I want atheism to be true... It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a god: I don't want the universe to be like that... (quoted in *The Reason for God* by Timothy Keller. p. 119).*

Those living in willful disobedience to the will of God must be made to see that until they _____ their will to God, faith will be impossible! Their problem is not intellectual. They are guilty of _____ against the Most High King.

IV. Steps to Faith.

For the honest seeker who longs to conquer the doubts that ravage his/her soul:

- A. Doubt your _____. *By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything...* (I John 3:19-20).
- B. Surrender your _____. *If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.* (John 7:17).
- C. Receive _____. *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* (John 1:12).
- D. Allow God to give you the _____. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* (Ephesians 2:8).

TABLE TALK

1. Think of the person closest to you who is a confirmed atheist (or agnostic, cynic, skeptic, etc.). Has this lesson helped you to better understand their unbelief? Explain.
2. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
3. Look again at the intellectual virtues. Which virtue is most missing in your life?
4. Think of your own spiritual journey. Which one of the “difficulties” to faith was the hardest for you to overcome? (Philosophical, Intellectual, Emotional, or Moral).
5. Has this lesson caused you to think differently about the way you currently witness to those around you?

⁵ See John 3:36—“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not _____ the Son shall not see life....”

My Faith Has Found a Resting Place

By Eliza E. Hewitt (1891)

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.*

*Refrain:
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

*Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I came to Him,
He'll never cast me out.*

*My heart is leaning on the Word,
The living Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name,
Salvation through His blood.*

*My great physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed,
For me His life He gave.*