“Is It Always Wrong to Lie? Even During War?”

Our pastor claims it’s always wrong to lie. Is this true? What about during war?

It’s one of the 10 Commandments: “thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex. 20:16). In the New Testament, Jesus claimed to BE the truth (Jn. 14:6). Yes, it’s always wrong to lie, because God’s nature is truth, and lying is acting contradictory to His nature.

It’s always wrong to lie; it’s never wrong to tell the truth and trust God to work it out.

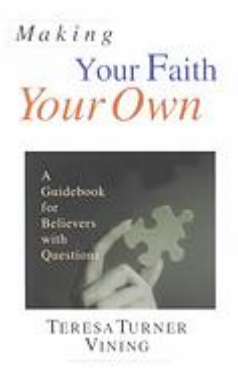
Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“I’m Having a Terrible Battle in My Mind”

I’m having a terrible battle in my mind. I know in my heart these terrible thoughts are lies, but getting it to my mind is hard to do. I have had thoughts of doubt, disbelief, and the devil has even questioned God’s holiness to my mind. About two years ago I got serious about my walk with Christ and answered the call to preach. I need your prayers very much.

The Bible teaches the principle of “displacement.” That is, rather than trying to make thoughts shoo away, we are told to replace them with what is good, true, and perfect (Phil. 4:8). As the truth comes in, the lies are displaced—much like when

we fill a bathtub too full of water, and when we get in, our bodies displace the water, which flows out over the top of the tub.



What are you doing to displace the lies with the truth? I suggest that you read and meditate on Psalm 119, memorizing portions of it and reciting them OUT LOUD whenever possible. I also suggest you play good praise and worship music whenever you can, not as background music but as something to focus on. One other thing: it would probably be good for you to invest some time in reading books that will build your faith and send the lies packing, such as Lee Strobel's books *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ*, and Teresa Vining's *Making Your Faith Your Own: A Guidebook for Believers With Questions.*

Also, spiritual battles are fought on the battlefield of the mind, so be sure to put on all your spiritual armor (Ephesians 6). It's all anchored to truth, so fill your mind with truth. That includes being careful what ELSE you're filling your mind with, such as TV, videos, movies and magazines that are filled with garbage. Most of those sources of information or entertainment come from the world, which is Satan's realm. Cut out the garbage, which is flavored with lies about God and about reality.

Let me pray for you, as you requested.

Father God, I thank you that _____ is recognizing there is a terrible battle going on for his mind, and I ask that You show him what to do about it. Father, give him a distaste for anything other than the truth, and give him a deep desire to immerse himself in Your word and in works—books and music—that bring glory to You. Show him the source of the lies and give him a hatred of them, Father. Give him joy in resting in You and in developing discernment about his thought life. Teach him to love You with his mind as well as his heart and

strength.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sue Bohlin
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"I'm Doubting the Truth of the Bible and God's Existence"

I was wondering about some matters pertaining to truth, specifically the truth of the Bible and existence of God. I've grown up in Arkansas in the bible belt my entire life and of course of been surrounded by churches, christianity, and an unquestioning world view that God exists and the bible is the truth.

Recently, I've started questioning reality and my perception of the world. I know it is dangerous to get caught up in humanly philosophies and crap like that, but a lot of things don't make sense to me about God. I'm trying to look at truth from all perspectives so I've been reading this book called *The God Delusion*. I know you might say I'm crazy and I'm going to be completely disillusioned by some stupid science and philosophy, but some of what it says doesn't seem to be completely crazy. Right now, specifically I'm struggling with contradictions that the Bible seems to present. I'm wondering whether all the Gospels are in agreement as to the birth of Jesus. I'm sure there are several other contradictions that

atheists would point out also. If you could address some of those and give me another viewpoint.

Thanks for your letter. There's nothing wrong with wanting to think carefully about what you believe and why. There's also nothing wrong with reading Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*—although many serious scholars don't think very highly of his arguments or condescending attitude. For a good critique of Dawkins' book, you may want to also read The Dawkins Delusion by Alister E. McGrath. It would offer an informed rebuttal of many of Dawkins' claims by a world-class scholar with doctoral degrees in both molecular biology and theology.

I deal with alleged contradictions in the infancy narratives in my article on the virgin birth here on the Probe Web site. A more in-depth article can be found here: www.tektonics.org/af/birthnarr.php.

Two other sites you should be familiar with are Bible.org and ReasonableFaith.org. The latter site is that of Christian philosopher/theologian William Lane Craig. I would highly recommend his articles on the existence of God, the historicity of Jesus, etc. Both sites have lots of great resources.

Wishing you all the best in your studies!

Michael Gleghorn

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Superman Returns: Superhero Still Needed?

Does the world still need a superhero?

Watch out, bad guys, as *Superman Returns* . . . fighting movie villains, rescuing the imperiled, desiring Lois Lane (now a single mom), saving the world.

The guy is everywhere. Superman's promotional ties include Burger King, Duracell, got milk?, even a dating website. NBA star Shaquille O'Neal has a Superman logo tattooed on his arm. Archvillain Lex Luthor hacked Superman's website, linking to his own MySpace.com webpage. Marketers work every angle.

Why has the Superman story remained so popular? What is it about the Man of Steel that captures the public imagination?

In the 1930's, the Great Depression had the world slumping. Fascist and Nazi menaces haunted Europe. Two Cleveland teenagers dreamed up a hero who would rescue the troubled, inspire hope, and set things right. The story was born.

In the new film, *Daily Planet* editor Perry White instructs his staff to cover everything they can about Superman's return. He especially wants to know, "Does he still stand for truth, justice, all that stuff?"

He does, and that's one reason Superman's appeal endures. Some probably many want to identify with someone bigger than themselves who embodies what's honorable, a hero to admire or emulate.

Look, up in the sky!

Lots of people need rescuing these days from crime on the streets and in the boardrooms, troubled relationships, terrorism, war, disease, nuclear threats. Superman has power.

He cares for distressed people. And he’s humble.

Plain, ordinary Clark Kent could be everyhuman. His mild mannered disguise hides phenomenal abilities. Ever dream of your peers, your foes, or the world glimpsing the real you, the one with more to offer than ever gets appreciated?

My childhood heroes included Superman, the Lone Ranger, and Zorro. I wore their costumes as I watched their television programs. Their struggles for good energized my youthful imagination.

Of course, not everyone believes the world needs saving. The new Lois Lane says, “The world doesn’t need a savior; neither do I.” Superman tells her, “But every day I hear people crying for one.”

Superman’s biological father, JorEl (voiced by the late Marlon Brando), prepared counsel for his child, KalEl, whom he launched into space as their planet, Krypton, exploded. Of earthlings: “They can be a great people, KalEl. They wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all their capacity for good I have sent them you . . . my only son.”

My only son . . .

Spiritual parallels have not been lost on media observers. *Rolling Stone* feels Brando’s words “establish . . . (Superman) as a Christ figure.” Jesus, of course, referred to himself as God’s “only Son” sent to rescue the world: “I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness.”

Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were Jewish. “El” is a Hebrew word for “God.” The biblical Moses’ mother hid him in a basket in the Nile River to save his life.

Superman Returns director Bryan Singer, who is Jewish,

acknowledges that biblical imagery both messianic and Mosaic have influenced the Superman saga. An adopted only child, picked on in youth, Singer says he's often felt like an outcast.

How does Superman inspire him? "I think most people do believe in that kind of integrity and virtue," Singer observed in a documentary. "They want to see goodness. People have a deep need to believe that it exists out there."

Superhero a real one still needed.

Anyone out there "still stand for truth, justice, all that stuff?" Anyone qualify as "the Light of the world"?

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The Meaning and Practice of Tolerance

Don Closson investigates the ideas surrounding the tolerance controversy and offer principles to communicate to the culture around us why absolute tolerance, or what some call hyper-tolerance, might not be a wise choice.

Introduction

One of the most damaging charges aimed at Christians today is that we and our religion are intolerant. This is an effective insult, not because some Christians are indeed intolerant, but because Christianity itself is judged to be an intolerant (meaning lacking in virtue) faith system. The weight of this

accusation is compounded by the fact that few things are looked down upon more in our culture than a person or group of people who are perceived to be intolerant. Unfortunately, it is also true that there are few words or ideas that are less well defined or understood in our society than the meaning of the word *tolerance*.



Critics of Christianity, especially of conservative Christians, often equate tolerance with moral virtue and intolerance as an unqualified evil. One admittedly liberal Christian commentator writes, “Conservative Christians have adopted the warrior mentality of Onward Christian Soldiers, and intolerance is nothing to be hidden under a white robe and pointed white hood: it’s to be waved proudly as a flag demonstrating Christian rigor and personal rightness.”{1} This author argues that conservative Christians have changed the meaning of the word *tolerance* from that of a virtue to that of a sin. She seems to imply that failure to tolerate any and every behavior or idea is a moral evil and that all intolerance is absolutely wrong, or at least that all conservative Christian intolerance is wrong. Since she is obviously intolerant of conservative right-wing Christian intolerance, we might surmise that some intolerance is morally acceptable some of the time, at least in some cases.

If all this is a little confusing, it might be because of the fog in our culture surrounding the meaning of the terms used when discussing the topic. In this article we will investigate the ideas surrounding the tolerance controversy and try to find principles that might help us to communicate to the culture around us why absolute tolerance, or what some call hyper-tolerance, might not be a wise choice.

You might be thinking that this issue doesn’t really matter.

Who cares if our culture thinks that Christians are intolerant? It matters because we are Christ's ambassadors, and the way that we are perceived by our neighbors can distort the message of reconciliation with God that we offer. There is no reason to add offense to the message of the Bible. Besides, there is an opportunity to help people to better understand the concept of tolerance and thus help to make a better society for all of us to live in.

We shall see that there are good arguments for promoting true tolerance, and that a better society can be built upon a common understanding of the concept.

The Meaning of Tolerance

In his book *True Tolerance*, J. Budziszewski writes, "The specific virtue of true tolerance has to do with the fact that sometimes we put up with things we rightly consider mistaken, wrong, harmful, offensive, or in some other way not worth approval."{2} The word tolerance comes from the Latin *tolerare* which means "to bear" and carries with it the idea of a prudent, long-suffering silence. So what are we to make of a U.N. statement issued during its 1995 "Year of Tolerance" which declared tolerance to be "respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human?"{3} Do you notice what is missing? People think that tolerance includes affirmation. But affirmation is not tolerance. When you affirm or accept something, you do not need to tolerate it. Tolerance can only occur when you disagree with something.

Our current confusion has occurred because tolerance has been elevated to a place above all other virtues. Again, Budziszewski writes,

> Our most gifted thinkers no longer treat tolerance as a queenly virtue to be guarded among many others equally

> precious, but as a shrewish virtue that excludes all the rest. For now we are told that the meaning of tolerance is *ethical neutrality*neutrality about which things are worth the love of human beings and which traits of character are worth praising.{4}

Because many in our culture have become skeptical about knowing the difference between what is good and what is evil, they argue that we are left with only two options when it comes to tolerance. We can either be ethically neutral, choosing to value equally all ideas and actions, or be a religious fanatic who claims to have perfect moral knowledge and who tries to impose absolute moral virtues on everyone else.

Actually, ethical neutrality is an impossible and irrational position to defend. Holding the position assumes that one has answered the question, "Why should I be ethically neutral?" Yet the construction of any answer violates the very neutrality being defended.

Another problem with moral skepticism is that the act of tolerance is dependent on some concept of what is morally good. One tolerates behavior or beliefs he or she disagrees with because of a higher or more important good. For instance, even though we believe that Christianity is true and that Christ is the only answer to mankind's problems, we encourage freedom of religion because it is only by freely choosing to believe, and not by force or coercion, that someone comes to true faith. Religious intolerance and coercion can actually cause someone to claim faith in Christ when none exists.

We argue that there is a third option, what we will call "true tolerance." How does this traditional view of tolerance work?

True Tolerance

Budziszewski argues that ethical neutrality based on moral skepticism is not a reasonable option. He writes, "If a skeptic finds reasons for tolerance, he finds it not by reason of the things he is skeptical about, but by reasons of the things he is not skeptical about."{5} In other words, one is tolerant because one is not ethically neutral. Someone cannot be neutral about everything and still have a reason to be tolerant because they would be neutral about tolerance as well.

Is there another alternative? There is, what might be called the *traditional* view of tolerance, or what we will call *true tolerance*. Rather than ethical neutrality or a blind appeal to religious authority, true tolerance has to do with making judgments based on a concept of what is "good."

Again Budziszewski writes,

> True tolerance is not the art of tolerating; it is the art of knowing when and how to tolerate. It is not the forbearance from judgment, but the fruit of judgment. We may disapprove something for the love of some moral good—yet we may be moved to put up with it from still deeper intuitions about the same moral good or other moral goods, and on such deeper intuitions the discipline of tolerance is based.{6}

His point is that real tolerance always depends on judgment regarding what one values. It is never the result of moral skepticism. The act of tolerating something is not the heart of the issue. The key to understanding tolerance is to appreciate the process of weighing the different goals or moral ends that might be involved. These moral ends are often separated into three groups. The lowest order of ends includes health, happiness in the generic sense, good repute, peace, beauty and companionship. Next comes what can be called intrinsic goods like virtue and truth. Finally, the highest

order good is the unconditional commitment to one's ultimate concerns or worldview. The confusion surrounding this topic today might be so acute because we have turned this list of moral goods on its head; our society seems to value personal happiness and peace over virtue, truth, and commitment to a faith or worldview.

Even when we do decide to put up with behavior that we disapprove of, we can do so for good or bad reasons. At worst, we might tolerate boorish behavior due to cowardice, at best because of concern for an individual's eternal well-being.

The Tolerant Society

What are some benefits that a society that has learned the virtue of true tolerance enjoys?

First, true tolerance understands that there are always limits to what should be tolerated, and that moral judgment is involved in setting these limits. Even those who endorse moral skepticism, arguing that there is no such thing as moral truth, seem to agree that society must not tolerate everything. They are quick to note their intolerance of slavery, genocide, and other violations of human rights. It is common sense that if tolerance is in fact unlimited, it becomes self-defeating. It would fail to limit the actions of those who are devoted to the destruction of tolerance itself. Muslims who insist on using the tolerance of Western nations to impose Sharia or Islamic law are an example. The defense of a tolerant society requires that it not tolerate certain behaviors, that it learns when to be intolerant.

It has become commonplace in America to label people as intolerant for simply having strongly held beliefs and for defending them against those who hold to contrary opinions. Actually, the "person [who] never disagrees with anyone about anything even when they know that the other person is being

incoherent or dishonest or simply false is not being tolerant but instead is a coward."{7} When we confront people who are dishonest or merely wrong, especially when we do so with gentleness and respect, it shows that we take them and their ideas seriously. It also recognizes that they have real moral agency and that individuals should be held responsible for reasonable moral behavior and for the ideas that they endorse. In their book *The Truth About Tolerance*, Stetson and Conti write, "Confronting people with their own destructive behavior is not a sign of intolerance but is the sign of true compassion."{8} The same can be said for confronting ideas that are false and perhaps even dangerous to society.

While true tolerance encourages open debate, it expects people to defend their views within certain guidelines. Each person is encouraged to defend his or her beliefs about what is good for humanity by using rational arguments; true tolerance expects people to try to persuade others that their views are true. However, that doesn't mean that others are expected to accept their understandings as true prior to being convinced by their arguments.

Finally, democratic governments allow or tolerate a broad spectrum of behaviors and self-determination rather than imposing totalitarian control. They tend to encourage the open debate of public policy issues like abortion and euthanasia, even by those who hold deep religious convictions about the topic. However, democratic governments are also clear about the behaviors that they do not tolerate by establishing clear legal codes and punishments that correspond with illegal behavior.

Is There a Christian Foundation for True Tolerance?

True tolerance is built into the very fabric of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although it is popular to believe that tolerance

is a modern secular concept, perhaps original to the Enlightenment thinker John Locke, political philosopher J. Budziszewski argues that it is a Christian innovation. Even though Christians are not always obedient or even aware of their heritage, the Christian tradition represents "the source of the very standard by which their intolerant acts could be judged wrong."{9}

As we mentioned above, true tolerance depends on positive beliefs, not moral skepticism in order to function and make sense. Does Christianity provide a foundation for true tolerance? Actually, it provides the necessary beliefs on a number of levels.

First, Christians are called to imitate the model that Christ Himself gave us. God incarnate came to earth as a humble child giving us the perfect picture of love and tolerance on God's behalf. The perfect and holy God who created the universe stepped into time and space among sinful and rebellious humans to show His love and to win theirs. Both believers and unbelievers have been moved by the humility and mercy Jesus displayed towards others. His instruction to love your neighbor as yourself and the fact that He offered God's love to those considered sinful and not worthy of forgiveness sets Him apart from other religious teachers. Jesus didn't demand moral perfection to gain God's approval; He offered reconciliation based on His perfect sacrifice. Biblical Christianity recognizes the persistent human aptitude for self-centered behavior, and calls mature believers to battle against it. Paul writes, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."{10}

Secondly, Christianity offers a universal message to every tribe and nation. No distinction is made based on gender, race, or ethnicity. God is calling all people to accept His gift of salvation, and the church should reflect that

multicultural reality. The Judeo-Christian tradition teaches that all people are made in the image of God and are not only important to Him but are redeemable through Christ's blood.

Finally, Christians can be tolerant of both the actions and beliefs of their neighbors because of their worldview or ultimate concerns. The task given to us by God is not to enforce a set of laws or style of worship, but to offer the message of reconciliation in Christ. Instead of separating from the sinful and dangerous culture that God has placed us into, we are sent into the world by Christ to be salt and light so that many might hear the good news and respond to the offer of grace and forgiveness by trusting in Christ's payment for sin.

Notes

1. Teresa Whitehurst, "The Intolerance of Christian Conservatives," *CounterPunch*, www.counterpunch.org/whitehurst01252005.html.
2. *True Tolerance: Liberalism and the Necessity of Judgment*, J. Budziszewski (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 7.
3. *The Truth About Tolerance*, Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 141.
4. Budziszewski, xi.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Ibid., 7.
7. Stetson and Conti, 144.
8. Ibid., 145.
9. Ibid., 39.
10. Philippians 2:3-4

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7 Questions Skeptics Ask – Radio Transcript

Rusty Wright considers some common questions skeptics ask about our belief in Christianity. He shows us how to answer these questions from an informed biblical worldview.

Questions of Faith

Picture the scene. You're discussing your faith with a coworker or neighbor, perhaps over lunch or coffee. You explain your beliefs but your friend has questions:

> *How could a loving God allow evil and suffering? The Bible is full of contradictions. What about people who've never heard of Jesus?*

How do you feel about these questions and objections? Anxious? Confused? Defensive? Combative?

Sensitively and appropriately answering questions that skeptics ask you can be an important part of helping them to consider Jesus. Peter told us, "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."{1} This series looks at seven common questions skeptics ask and gives you some pointers on how to respond. Consider first a story.

As the flight from Chicago to Dallas climbed in the sky, I became engrossed in conversation with the passenger to my left. "Aimee," a French businesswoman, asked me about my work. On learning I was a Christian communicator, she related that a professing Christian had signed a contract with her, attempted to lead her to Christ, then later deceitfully undercut her. "How could a Christian do such a thing?" she asked.

I told her that Christians weren't perfect, that some fail miserably, that many are honest and caring, but that it is Jesus we ultimately trust. Aimee asked question after question: How can you believe the Bible? Why do Christians say there is only one way to God? How does one become a Christian?

I tried to answer her concerns tactfully and explained the message of grace as clearly as I could. Stories I told of personal pain seemed to open her up to consider God's love for her. She did not come to Christ in that encounter, but she seemed to leave it with a new understanding.

Hurting people everywhere need God. Many are open to considering Him, but they often have questions they want answered before they are willing to accept Christ. As Christian communicators seek to blend grace with truth,{2} an increasing number of skeptics may give an ear and become seekers or believers.

As you interact with skeptics, compliment them where you can. Jesus complimented the skeptical Nathanael for his pursuit of truth.{3} Listen to their concerns. Your listening ear speaks volumes. It may surprise you to learn that your attitude can be just as important as what you know.

Dealing with Objections

How do you deal with questions and objections to faith that your friends may pose?

When I was a skeptical student, my sometimes-relentless questions gave my Campus Crusade for Christ friends at Duke University plenty of practice! I wanted to know if Christianity was true. After trusting Christ as Savior, I still had questions.

Bob Prall, the local Campus Crusade director, took interest in me. At first his answers irritated me, but as I thought them through they began to make sense. For two years I followed him

around campus, watching him interact. Today, as I am privileged to encounter inquisitive people around the globe, much of my speech and manner derive from my mentor.

Consider some guidelines. Pray for wisdom, for His love for inquirers{4} and for your questioner's heart. If appropriate, briefly share the gospel first. The Holy Spirit may draw your friends to Christ. Don't push, though. It may be best to answer their questions first.

Some questions may be intellectual smokescreens. Once a Georgia Tech philosophy professor peppered me with questions, which I answered as best I could.

Then I asked him, If I could answer all your questions to your satisfaction, would you put your life in Jesus' hands? His reply: "[Expletive deleted] no!"

Okay. This first objection is one you might have heard:

1. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

I once gave a speech arguing *for* this proposition. Later, I reconsidered. In the 1960s, many women took the drug thalidomide seeking easier pregnancies. Often they delivered deformed babies. Sincerely swallowing two white pills may cure your headache if the pills are aspirin. If they are roach poison, results may differ.

After discussing this point, a widely respected psychologist told me, "I guess a person could be sincere in what he or she believed, but be sincerely wrong." Ultimately faith is only as valid as its object. Jesus demonstrated by His life, death and resurrection that He is a worthy object for faith.{5}

Focus on Jesus. Bob Prall taught me to say, "I don't have answers to every question. But if my conclusion about Jesus is wrong, I have a bigger problem. What do I do with the evidence

for His resurrection, His deity and the prophecies He fulfilled? And what do I do with changed lives, including my own?”

I don’t have complete answers to every concern you will encounter, but in what follows I’ll outline some short responses that might be useful.

The second question is:

2. Why is there evil and suffering?

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed incongruent with natural disasters and human evil.

God, though sovereign, gave us freedom to follow Him or to disobey Him. Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis estimated that eighty percent of human suffering stems from human choice. Lewis called pain “God’s megaphone” that alerts us to our need for Him.{6} This response does not answer all concerns (because God sometimes does intervene to thwart evil) but it suggests that the problem of evil is not as great an intellectual obstacle to belief as some imagine.

Pain’s emotional barrier to belief, however, remains formidable. When I see God, items on my long list of questions for Him will include a painful and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, and all sorts of disappointing human behavior and natural disasters. Yet in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection{7} I have seen enough to trust Him when He says He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”{8}

3. What about those who never hear of Jesus?

Moses said, “The secret things belong to the LORD.{9} Some issues may remain mysteries. Gods perfect love and justice far

exceed our own. Whatever He decides will be loving and fair. One can make a case that God will make the necessary information available to someone who wants to know Him. An example: Cornelius, a devout military official. The New Testament records that God assigned Peter to tell him about Jesus.{10}

A friend once told me that many asking this question seek a personal loophole, a way so they wont need to believe in Christ. That statement angered me, but it also described me. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, "If you are worried about the people outside [of faith in Christ], the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself."{11} If Christianity is true, the most logical behavior for someone concerned about those without Christ's message would be to trust Christ and go tell them about Him.

Here's a tip: When someone asks you a difficult question, if you don't know the answer, admit it. Many skeptics appreciate honesty. Don't bluff. It's dishonest and often detectable.

4. What about all the contradictions in the Bible?

Ask your questioner for specific examples of contradictions. Often people have none, but rely on hearsay. If there is a specific example, consider these guidelines as you respond.

Omission does not necessarily create contradiction. Luke, for example, writes of two angels at Jesus' tomb after the Resurrection.{12} Matthew mentions "an angel."{13} Is this a contradiction? If Matthew stated that only one angel was present, the accounts would be dissonant. As it stands, they can be harmonized.

Differing accounts aren't necessarily contradictory. Matthew and Luke, for example, differ in their accounts of Jesus' birth. Luke records Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth, traveling to Bethlehem (Jesus' birthplace), and returning to Nazareth.{14} Matthew starts with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem,

relates the family's journey to Egypt to escape King Herod's rage, and recounts their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.{15} The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records. Biographers must be selective. The accounts seem complementary, not contradictory.

Time precludes more complex examples here. But time and again, supposed biblical problems fade in light of logic, history, and archaeology. The Bible's track record under scrutiny argues for its trustworthiness.

5. Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

My mentor Bob Prall has often said, "If Christianity is a psychological crutch, then Jesus Christ came because there was an epidemic of broken legs." Christianity claims to meet real human needs such as those for forgiveness, love, identity and self-acceptance. We might describe Jesus not as a crutch but an iron lung, essential for life itself.

Christian faith and its benefits can be described in psychological terms but that does not negate its validity. "Does it work?" is not the same question as, "Is it true?" Evidence supports Christianity's truthfulness, so we would expect it to work in individual lives, as millions attest.

A caution as you answer questions: Don't offer "proof" but rather evidences for faith. "Proof" can imply an airtight case, which you don't have. Aim for certainty "beyond a reasonable doubt," just as an attorney might in court.

Don't quarrel. Lovingly and intelligently present evidence to willing listeners, not to win arguments but to share good news. Be kind and gentle.{16} Your life and friendship can communicate powerfully.

6. How can Jesus be the only way to God?

When I was in secondary school, a recent alumnus visited,

saying he had found Christ at Harvard. I respected his character and tact and listened intently. But I could not stomach Jesus' claim that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."{17} That seemed way too narrow.

Two years later, my spiritual and intellectual journey had changed my view. The logic that drew me (reluctantly) to his position involves three questions:

- *If God exists, could there be only one way to reach Him? To be open-minded, I had to admit this possibility.*

- *Why consider Jesus as a candidate for that possible one way? He claimed it. His plan of rescuing humans "by grace…through faith… not…works"{18} was distinct from those requiring works, as many other religions do. These two kinds of systems were mutually exclusive. Both could be false or either could be true, but both could not be true.*

- *Was Jesus' plan true? Historical evidence for His resurrection, fulfilled prophecy{19} and deity, and for the reliability of the New Testament{20} convinced me I could trust His words.*

One more common objection:

7. I could never take the blind leap of faith that believing in Christ requires.

We exercise faith every day. Few of us comprehend everything about electricity or aerodynamics, but we have evidence of their validity. Whenever we use electric lights or airplanes, we exercise faith not blind faith, but faith based on evidence. Christians act similarly. The evidence for Jesus is compelling, so one can trust Him on that basis.

As you respond to inquirers, realize that many barriers to faith are emotional rather than merely intellectual.

As a teenager, I nearly was expelled from secondary school for some problems I helped create. In my pain and anger I wondered, “Why would God allow this to happen?” I was mad at God! In retrospect, I realize I was blaming Him for my own bad choices. My personal anguish at the time kept me from seeing that.

Your questioners may be turned off because Christians haven’t acted like Jesus. Maybe they’re angry at God because of personal illness, a broken relationship, a loved one’s death, or personal pain. Ask God for patience and love as you seek to blend grace with truth. He may use you to help skeptics become seekers and seekers become His children. I hope He does.

Notes

1. 1 Peter 3:15 NIV.

2. John 1:14.

3. John 1:45-47.

4. Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.

5. For useful discussions of evidences regarding Jesus, visit www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.

6. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 89-103 ff. The Problem of Pain was first published in 1940.

7. A short summary of Resurrection evidences is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, “Who’s Got the Body?” 1976, www.probe.org/whos-got-the-body/.

8. Romans 8:28 NASB.

For more complete treatment of this subject, see Rick Rood, “The Problem of Evil,” 1996, www.probe.org/the-problem-of-evil/ ; Dr. Ray Bohlin, “Where

Was God on September 11?" 2002, www.probe.org/where-was-god-on-sept-11-the-problem-of-evil/.

9. Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB.

10. Acts 10.

11. C.S. Lewis, "The Case for Christianity," reprinted from *Mere Christianity*; in *The Best of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 449. The Case for Christianity is copyright 1947 by The Macmillan Company.

12. Luke 24:1-9.

13. Matthew 28:1-8.

14. Luke 1:26-2:40.

15. Matthew 1:18-2:23.

16. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

17. John 14:6 NASB.

18. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB.

19. A summary of some of the prophesies Jesus fulfilled is at Rusty Wright, "Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?" 2004, www.probe.org/are-you-listening-do-you-hear-what-i-hear/.

20. A summary of evidences for New Testament reliability is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "The New Testament: Can I Trust It?" 1976, www.probe.org/the-new-testament-can-i-trust-it/.

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“Why Is There So Much Acceptance of the Idea That Truth is Relative?”

Thanks for your question about truth. The current pseudo-relativist mindset makes apologetics and evangelism difficult, for the non-Christian is often very happy for us to be Christians . . . as long as we don’t insist or even suggest that what we believe is true for everyone. I call it pseudo-relativism because no one is a thoroughgoing relativist. We ALL have our absolutes. (For more on this you might want to look at William Watkins’ book The New Absolutes. Or for a shorter treatment see my article with the same title on our web site.)

Why is it so widely accepted? There are a few reasons, I think.

> *1. The influx of Eastern religions in the ’60s introduced a “both/and” mindset with respect to truth. In the West we have recognized the reality of the “either/or” nature of the universe: e.g., either the earth revolves around the sun or it doesn’t. It can’t be “both the earth revolves around the sun and it doesn’t.” Which is it? This is simply how the universe is. This reality is represented in logic as the law of non-contradiction. We presuppose it in our speech constantly. When the doctor says, “Take this medicine; it will help you get well,” he doesn’t also mean “Take this medicine; it will not help you get better.” Eastern philosophies and religions often have a pantheistic view of reality which means that everything is of one nature, and everything is divine. If all is one, then those things which*

appear to be opposites to us really aren't.

2. Social realities—Plurality of beliefs: How can all these sincere people be wrong? we ask.

3. Democratic ideal—One person, one vote. Knowledge becomes democratic; everyone's opinion is equally valid.

4. Science—Quantum theory: Paul Davies said that "Uncertainty is the fundamental ingredient of the quantum theory" (this theory, by the way, is a very significant one in science today). Some people think that if scientists can't even be certain about empirical matters, why do we think we can know about spiritual matters with any certainty?

5. Religion—No one knows ultimate reality, people think, so one god is as good as another. Some tell us it's our responsibility to create reality; some say we are gods ourselves.

6. Philosophy—Rationalism has faded away; political power is our basic category of understanding rather than truth.

I think, then, that there are several factors which figure into our postmodern frame of mind. This is the hallmark of postmodernism: a loss of confidence in our ability to know objective truth. Our job is to restore confidence in it, grounded in Jesus, the creator of the universe.

Thanks again for writing.

Rick Wade
Probe Ministries

7 Questions Skeptics Ask About the Validity of Christianity

Rusty Wright considers some common questions skeptics ask about our belief in Christianity. He shows us how to answer these questions from an informed biblical worldview.

Questions of Faith

Picture the scene. You're discussing your faith with a coworker or neighbor, perhaps over lunch or coffee. You explain your beliefs but your friend questions:

> *How could a loving God allow evil and suffering? The Bible is full of contradictions. What about people who've never heard of Jesus?*

How do you feel about these questions and objections? Anxious? Confused? Defensive? Combative?

Sensitively and appropriately answering questions that skeptics ask you can be an important part of helping them to consider Jesus. Peter told us, "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."{1} This series looks at seven common questions skeptics ask and gives you some pointers on how to respond. Consider first a story.

As the flight from Chicago to Dallas climbed in the sky, I became engrossed in conversation with the passenger to my left. "Aimee," a French businesswoman, asked me about my work. On learning I was a Christian communicator, she related that a professing Christian had signed a contract with her, attempted to lead her to Christ, then later deceitfully undercut her.

“How could a Christian do such a thing?” she asked.

I told her that Christians weren’t perfect, that some fail miserably, that many are honest and caring, but that it is Jesus we ultimately trust. Aimee asked question after question: “How can you believe the Bible?” “Why do Christians say there is only one way to God?” “How does one become a Christian?”

I tried to answer her concerns tactfully and explained the message of grace as clearly as I could. Stories I told of personal pain seemed to open her up to consider God’s love for her. She did not come to Christ in that encounter, but she seemed to leave it with a new understanding.

Hurting people everywhere need God. Many are open to considering Him, but they often have questions they want answered before they are willing to accept Christ. As Christian communicators seek to blend grace with truth,{2} an increasing number of skeptics may give an ear and become seekers or believers.

As you interact with skeptics, compliment them where you can. Jesus complimented the skeptical Nathanael for his pursuit of truth.{3} Listen to their concerns. Your listening ear speaks volumes. It may surprise you to learn that your attitude can be just as important as what you know.

Dealing with Objections

How do you deal with questions and objections to faith that your friends may pose?

When I was a skeptical student, my sometimes-relentless questions gave my Campus Crusade for Christ friends at Duke University plenty of practice! I wanted to know if Christianity was true. After trusting Christ as Savior, I still had questions.

Bob Prall, the local Campus Crusade director, took interest in me. At first his answers irritated me, but as I thought them through they began to make sense. For two years I followed him around campus, watching him interact. Today, as I am privileged to encounter inquisitive people around the globe, much of my speech and manner derive from my mentor.

Consider some guidelines. Pray for wisdom, for His love for inquirers{4} and for your questioner's heart. If appropriate, briefly share the gospel first. The Holy Spirit may draw your friends to Christ. Don't push, though. It may be best to answer their questions first.

Some questions may be intellectual smokescreens. Once a Georgia Tech philosophy professor peppered me with questions, which I answered as best I could.

Then I asked him, "If I could answer all your questions to your satisfaction, would you put your life in Jesus' hands?" His reply: "[Expletive deleted] no!"

Okay. This first objection is one you might have heard:

1. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

I once gave a speech arguing *for* this proposition. Later, I reconsidered. In the 1960s, many women took the drug thalidomide seeking easier pregnancies. Often they delivered deformed babies. Sincerely swallowing two white pills may cure your headache if the pills are aspirin. If they are roach poison, results may differ.

After discussing this point, a widely respected psychologist told me, "I guess a person could be sincere in what he or she believed, but be sincerely wrong." Ultimately faith is only as valid as its object. Jesus demonstrated by His life, death and resurrection that He is a worthy object for faith.{5}

Focus on Jesus. Bob Prall taught me to say, “I don’t have answers to every question. But if my conclusion about Jesus is wrong, I have a bigger problem. What do I do with the evidence for His resurrection, His deity and the prophecies He fulfilled? And what do I do with changed lives, including my own?”

I don’t have complete answers to every concern you will encounter, but in what follows I’ll outline some short responses that might be useful.

The second question is:

2. Why is there evil and suffering?

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed incongruent with natural disasters and human evil.

God, though sovereign, gave us freedom to follow Him or to disobey Him. Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis estimated that eighty percent of human suffering stems from human choice. Lewis called pain “God’s megaphone” that alerts us to our need for Him.{6} This response does not answer all concerns (because God sometimes does intervene to thwart evil) but it suggests that the problem of evil is not as great an intellectual obstacle to belief as some imagine.

Pain’s emotional barrier to belief, however, remains formidable. When I see God, items on my long list of questions for Him will include a painful and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, and all sorts of disappointing human behavior and natural disasters. Yet in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection{7} I have seen enough to trust Him when He says He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”{8}

3. What about those who never hear of Jesus?

Moses said, "The secret things belong to the LORD."{9} Some issues may remain mysteries. God's perfect love and justice far exceed our own. Whatever He decides will be loving and fair. One can make a case that God will make the necessary information available to someone who wants to know Him. An example: Cornelius, a devout military official. The New Testament records that God assigned Peter to tell him about Jesus.{10}

A friend once told me that many asking this question seek a personal loophole, a way so they won't need to believe in Christ. That statement angered me, but it also described me. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, "If you are worried about the people outside [of faith in Christ], the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself."{11} If Christianity is true, the most logical behavior for someone concerned about those without Christ's message would be to trust Christ and go tell them about Him.

Here's a tip: When someone asks you a difficult question, if you don't know the answer, admit it. Many skeptics appreciate honesty. Don't bluff. It's dishonest and often detectable.

4. What about all the contradictions in the Bible?

Ask your questioner for specific examples of contradictions. Often people have none, but rely on hearsay. If there is a specific example, consider these guidelines as you respond.

Omission does not necessarily create contradiction. Luke, for example, writes of two angels at Jesus' tomb after the Resurrection.{12} Matthew mentions "an angel."{13} Is this a contradiction? If Matthew stated that only one angel was present, the accounts would be dissonant. As it stands, they can be harmonized.

Differing accounts aren't necessarily contradictory. Matthew and Luke, for example, differ in their accounts of Jesus' birth. Luke records Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth,

traveling to Bethlehem (Jesus' birthplace), and returning to Nazareth.{14} Matthew starts with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, relates the family's journey to Egypt to escape King Herod's rage, and recounts their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.{15} The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records. Biographers must be selective. The accounts seem complementary, not contradictory.

Time precludes more complex examples here. But time and again, supposed biblical problems fade in light of logic, history, and archaeology. The Bible's track record under scrutiny argues for its trustworthiness.

5. Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

My mentor Bob Prall has often said, "If Christianity is a psychological crutch, then Jesus Christ came because there was an epidemic of broken legs." Christianity claims to meet real human needs such as those for forgiveness, love, identity and self-acceptance. We might describe Jesus not as a crutch but an iron lung, essential for life itself.

Christian faith and its benefits can be described in psychological terms but that does not negate its validity. "Does it work?" is not the same question as, "Is it true?" Evidence supports Christianity's truthfulness, so we would expect it to work in individual lives, as millions attest.

A caution as you answer questions: Don't offer "proof" but rather evidences for faith. "Proof" can imply an airtight case, which you don't have. Aim for certainty "beyond a reasonable doubt," just as an attorney might in court.

Don't quarrel. Lovingly and intelligently present evidence to willing listeners, not to win arguments but to share good news. Be kind and gentle.{16} Your life and friendship can communicate powerfully.

6. How can Jesus be the only way to God?

When I was in secondary school, a recent alumnus visited, saying he had found Christ at Harvard. I respected his character and tact and listened intently. But I could not stomach Jesus' claim that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."{17} That seemed way too narrow.

Two years later, my spiritual and intellectual journey had changed my view. The logic that drew me (reluctantly) to his position involves three questions:

- *If God exists, could there be only one way to reach Him?* To be open-minded, I had to admit this possibility.

- *Why consider Jesus as a candidate for that possible one way?* He claimed it. His plan of rescuing humans – "by grace…through faith…not…works"{18} was distinct from those requiring works, as many other religions do. These two kinds of systems were mutually exclusive. Both could be false or either could be true, but both could not be true.

- *Was Jesus' plan true?* Historical evidence for His resurrection, fulfilled prophecy{19} and deity, and for the reliability of the New Testament{20} convinced me I could trust His words.

One more common objection:

7. I could never take the blind leap of faith that believing in Christ requires.

We exercise faith every day. Few of us comprehend everything about electricity or aerodynamics, but we have evidence of their validity. Whenever we use electric lights or airplanes, we exercise faith – not blind faith, but faith based on evidence. Christians act similarly. The evidence for Jesus is compelling, so one can trust Him on that basis.

As you respond to inquirers, realize that many barriers to

faith are emotional rather than merely intellectual.

As a teenager, I nearly was expelled from secondary school for some problems I helped create. In my pain and anger I wondered, “Why would God allow this to happen?” I was mad at God! In retrospect, I realize I was blaming Him for my own bad choices. My personal anguish at the time kept me from seeing that.

Your questioners may be turned off because Christians haven’t acted like Jesus. Maybe they’re angry at God because of personal illness, a broken relationship, a loved one’s death, or personal pain. Ask God for patience and love as you seek to blend grace with truth. He may use you to help skeptics become seekers and seekers become His children. I hope He does.

Notes

1. 1 Peter 3:15 NIV.
2. John 1:14.
3. John 1:45-47.
4. Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.
5. For useful discussions of evidences regarding Jesus, visit www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.
6. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 89-103 ff. The Problem of Pain was first published in 1940.
7. A short summary of Resurrection evidences is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, “Who’s Got the Body?” 1976, www.probe.org/whos-got-the-body/.
8. Romans 8:28 NASB.

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9. Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB.
10. Acts 10.
11. C.S. Lewis, “The Case for Christianity,” reprinted from

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12. Luke 24:1-9.
13. Matthew 28:1-8.
14. Luke 1:26-2:40.
15. Matthew 1:18-2:23.
16. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.
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The Doctrine of Revelation: How God Reveals His Nature and His Will

Rick Wade considers how God reveals his nature and his will to mankind. He finds that God clearly speaks to us through His creation and through His thoughts communicated in special

revelation (includes His spoken word, His written word, and His Son).

Revelation and the God Who Speaks

Some years ago the pastor of the church I attended was on a nationally syndicated radio program with another pastor of a more liberal bent. They were discussing differences of understanding about Christianity, one of which was the nature of the Bible. My pastor asserted that Scripture is the inspired, revealed Word of God. The other pastor disagreed, saying that the Bible is a collection of the religious reflections of a particular group of people. Since it was a call-in program, I phoned at that point and asked the question, "If the Bible is just the religious ideas of a group of people and isn't from God, how can we know whether what *we* think is true Christianity is what *God* thinks it is?" The pastor said something about how we have other ways of knowing truth, and the program ended. Not a very satisfying answer.

The issue being dealt with was the nature of Scripture. Is it the religious reflection of sincere people expressing truth about God the best they can? Or is it the revealed word of God?

In another article I dealt with the matter of the inspiration of Scripture. In this article I want to look at the doctrine of revelation. Not the *book*, Revelation, at the end of the New Testament, but the *doctrine* of revelation.

Revelation: What makes the Bible more than just religious writings

What *is* revelation? New Testament scholar Leon Morris quotes *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.* Revelation, it says, is "'The disclosure of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency', and secondly, 'Something disclosed or

made known by divine or supernatural means.'" Says Morris:

> *Theologians might hesitate over this concentration on knowledge, for some of them would certainly prefer to define revelation in terms of the disclosure of a person. But the point on which we fasten our attention is the word 'disclosure'. Revelation is not concerned with knowledge we once had but have forgotten for the time being. Nor does it refer to the kind of knowledge that we might attain by diligent research. It is knowledge that comes to us from outside ourselves and beyond our own ability to discover.*[{1}]

Thus, revelation is knowledge we can have no other way than by being told.

Here one might ask the question, Does it make sense to think God might reveal Himself? What we see in Scripture is a God Who speaks. God walked and talked with Adam in the "cool of the day" (Gen. 2:8ff). Later, He spoke to Abraham and then to the prophets of Israel. In the Incarnation of Christ He spoke directly, as man to man, face to face. Along the way He inspired His prophets and apostles to write His words to man.

This makes perfect sense. First, we know things in keeping with their nature. So, for example, we know the color of something by looking at it. We know distances by measuring. We know love by the good it produces. Along the same lines, we know persons by what they reveal about themselves. God is a Person, and there are things we can only know about Him if He tells us Himself. Second, God is transcendent, high above us. We cannot know Him unless He condescends to speak to us. Third, since God created rational, communicative beings, the idea that He would communicate with them in a rational way is not unreasonable.

Today, people look here and there for answers to the big questions of life—some consciously looking for God, some just looking for any truth on which they can depend. The doctrine

of revelation teaches us that rather than wait for us to find God, God has found us. And He has revealed Himself to us in words we can understand.

General Revelation

Revelation comes to us in two basic forms: general or natural revelation, and special revelation. Let's look at the first of these.

Through what has been made

General revelation is God's Word given through the created order. Everyone is exposed to general revelation just by virtue of living in and being part of creation. In Psalm 19 we read, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (vv. 1–4). This idea is reiterated in Romans 1 where Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (v. 20). Says Leon Morris, "A reverent contemplation of the physical universe with its order and design and beauty tells us not only that God is but also that God is a certain kind of God."{2}

If God can be known through creation in general, then it's reasonable to think He can be known through man himself in particular as part of the created order. God has left His imprint on those made in His image. Theologian Bruce Demarest follows John Calvin in his belief that we all have an immediate knowledge of God based on our being made in His image and on common grace.{3} Our own characteristics of personality, rationality and morality say something about God.

What can be known through general revelation

What do we know about God through general revelation? Demarest says that through nature we know that God is uncreated (Acts 17:24), the Creator (Acts 14:15), the Sustainer (Acts 14:16; 17:25), the universal Lord (Acts 17:24), self-sufficient (Acts 17:25), transcendent (Acts 17:24), immanent (Acts 17:26–27), eternal (Ps. 93:2), great (Ps. 8:3–4), majestic (Ps. 29:4), powerful (Ps. 29:4; Rom. 1:20), wise (Ps. 104:24), good (Acts 14:17), and righteous (Rom. 1:32); He has a sovereign will (Acts 17:26), has standards of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15), and should be worshiped (Acts 14:15;17:23).{4} Furthermore, we all have some knowledge of God's morality through nature (Rom. 2:15).

Other religions

It is because of general revelation that other religions often contain some truth about God. Remember that Paul said everyone knows God exists through what He has made, but that this knowledge is suppressed by our unrighteousness. They "exchanged the truth of God for a lie," he said, "and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1: 25). Nonetheless, snippets of truth can be detected in non-Christian religions. "For example," writes Bruce Demarest, "the Yoruba people of Nigeria have a name for God, 'Osanobwa,' that means 'he who blesses and sustains the world.' The Taro people, also of Nigeria, after a time of barrenness often call a baby girl 'Nyambien,' meaning 'God is good.' The Ibo people of Nigeria denote God as 'Eze-elu,' or 'the King above.' And the Mende people of Liberia designate God as the Chief, the King of all Kings.{5} The Gogo people of West Africa believe that Mulungu governs 'the destiny of man sending rain and storm, well-being and famine, health or disease, peace or war. He is the Healer.'{6} The Yoruba people say that in the afterlife the person-soul, the Oli, will give account of itself before Olodumare the supreme God. Since, as anthropologists testify, these convictions appear to have been

arrived at apart from Christian or Muslim teaching, they must derive from God's universal general revelation in nature, providence, and the implanted moral law."{7}

What can't be known

If all this *can* be known through nature, is there anything that *can't*? Yes there is. Although through nature we can know some things *about* God, we cannot know how to get to *know* God personally, how to find redemption and reconciliation. This is why there had to be *special* revelation.

Special Revelation

As I have noted, God has revealed Himself through nature, but through nature we cannot know how to be reconciled to God. God had to speak in a special way to tell us how we may be redeemed. "Special revelation is redemptive revelation," says Carl Henry. "It publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself (OT) and that he has now fulfilled that promise in the gift of his Son in whom all men are called to believe (NT). The gospel is news that the incarnate Logos has borne the sins of doomed men, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification. This is the fixed center of special redemptive revelation."{8}

Personal

What is the nature of special revelation? First we should note that it is the communication of one Person to other persons. It isn't simply a series of propositions setting forth a theological system. This is why special revelation finds its culmination in Jesus, for in Him we are confronted with the Person of God. We'll talk more about this later.

Verbal and Propositional

It has been the understanding of the church historically that

God has spoken verbally to His creatures. Words have been exchanged; rational ideas have been put forward in understandable sentences. Not *all* revelation is easy to understand, of course. Meaning is sometimes shrouded in mystery. But important truths are made clear.

That God would reveal Himself through verbal revelation isn't surprising. First, He is a *Person*, and persons communicate with other persons with a desire to extend and receive information. Second, His clear desire is to make friends with us. He wants to restore us to a proper relationship with Him. It's hard to imagine a friendship between two people who don't communicate clearly with one another.

Implicit in this understanding of revelation is the belief that it contains propositional truths; that is, statements that are informative and have truth value.

This isn't to say the Bible is only propositions. Douglas Groothuis notes that it also contains questions, imperatives, requests, and exclamations. However, in the words of Carl Henry: "Regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these [biblical] writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false."{9} So when Jeremiah says that God "has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm!" (32:17), we know that the image of God's "arm" speaks of His power active in His creation. The truth "God acts with power in His creation" is behind the imagery.

Modern ideas

In recent centuries, however, as confidence in man's reason overshadowed confidence in God's ability to communicate, the understanding of revelation has undergone change. Some hold that revelation is to be understood in terms of *personal encounter,* of God encountering people so as to leave them with

a “liberating assurance. . . .This assurance – ‘openness to the future’, Bultmann called it – was equated with faith.”{10} Such an encounter can come as a result of reading Scripture, but Scripture itself isn’t the verbal revelation of God. Even in evangelical churches where the Bible is preached as God’s Word written, people sometimes put more faith in their “relationship” with God than in what God has said. “Don’t worry me with doctrine,” is the attitude. “I just want to have a relationship with Jesus.” It’s fine to have a relationship with Jesus. But try to imagine a relationship between two people here on earth in which no information is exchanged.

Those who hold this view draw a line between the personal and the propositional as if they cannot mix. In his evaluation, J.I. Packer says that this is an absurd idea.

> *“Revelation is certainly more than the giving of theological information, but it is not and cannot be less. Personal friendship between God and man grows just as human friendships do – namely, through talking; and talking means making informative statements, and informative statements are propositions. . . . To say that revelation is non-propositional is actually to depersonalize it. . . . To maintain that we may know God without God actually speaking to us in words is really to deny that God is personal, or at any rate that knowing Him is a truly personal relationship.”{11}*

Another idea about the Bible in particular which has become commonplace in liberal theology is that the Bible is the product of the inspired ideas of men (a “quickening of conscience”{12}) rather than truths inspired by God. If this were the case, however, one might expect the Bible to give hints that it is just the religious reflections of men. But the witness of Scripture throughout is that it is the message of God *from* God. Here we don’t see men simply reflecting on life and the world and drawing conclusions about God. Rather,

we're confronted by a God who steps into people's lives, speaking words of instruction or promise or condemnation.

Modes of Special Revelation

Special revelation has taken different forms: the spoken Word, the written Word, and the Word made flesh.

Spoken Word

In the Garden of Eden, God spoke to Adam directly. (Gen. 3:8ff) He spoke to Abraham (e.g. Gen. 12:1–3), to Moses (Ex. 3:4ff), and to many prophets of the nation of Israel following that. Amos said that God did nothing "without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. . . . The Lord has spoken," he said. "Who can but prophesy?" (3:7–8) Prophets were primarily forth-tellers, relaying God's Word to those for whom it was intended.{13}

Written word

God also had His prophets write down what He said. The writings of Moses were kept in the Tabernacle (Dt. 31:24–26), read in the hearing of the Israelites (Dt. 31:11), and kept as references by future kings of Israel (Dt. 17:18ff). They are quoted throughout the OT (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; Mal.4:4). Joshua put his teachings of God's ordinances with "the book of the law of God" (Josh. 24:26), and Samuel did the same (1 Sam. 10:25). The writer of Chronicles spoke of those earlier writings (1 Chron. 29:29), and later, Daniel referred to these books (Dan. 9:2,6,11). Solomon's proverbs and songs are mentioned in 1 Kings 4:32. The writing of the New Testament took a much shorter time than the Old Testament, so we don't see generations down the line referring back to the writings of their fathers. But we do see Peter speaking of the writings of Paul (2 Pe. 3:15–16), and Paul referring (it appears) to Luke's writings in 1 Tim. 5:18.

Word made flesh

So God has spoken, and His words have been written down. The third mode is the Word made flesh. The writer of Hebrews says that, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . ." (1:1-2a) All God's will wasn't given at once; it came in portions at various times. J.I. Packer says, "Then, in New Testament times, just as all roads were said to lead to Rome, so all the diverse and seemingly divergent strands of Old Testament revelation were found to lead to Jesus Christ."{14}

Jesus has been the mediator of revelation since the beginning. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27) Peter says it was the Spirit of Christ who spoke through the Old Testament prophets. (1 Pe. 1:11) But these were God's words given through men. In the Incarnation we received the fullest expression of His word directly. Jesus was and is the Word made flesh. (John 1:1,14)

Jesus is the supreme revelation because He is one with the Father: He is God speaking. He spoke the words the Father taught Him. (John 12:49; 14:10), and He summed up his ministry with the phrase "I have given them your word." (John 17:14) Abraham Kuyper summed it up beautifully: "Christ does not argue, he *declares;* he does not demonstrate, he *shows* and *illustrates*; he does not analyze, but with enrapturing symbolism *unveils* the truth."{15}

But Jesus doesn't reveal God just in His words but also in His person – in His character and the way He lived. Says the late Bernard Ramm: "The attitudes, action, and dispositions of Christ so mirrored the divine nature that to have seen such in Christ is to have seen the reflection of the divine nature." He continues:

> *Christ's attitudes mirror the Father's attitudes; Christ's affections mirror the Father's affections; Christ's love*

> *mirrors the Father's love. Christ's impatience with unbelief is the divine impatience with unbelief. Christ's wrath upon hypocrisy is the divine wrath upon hypocrisy. Christ's tears over Jerusalem is the divine compassion over Jerusalem. Christ's judgment upon Jerusalem or upon the Pharisees is the divine judgment upon such hardness of heart and spiritual wickedness.{16}*

As the Son spoke the Word of the Father so clearly because He knows perfectly the mind of the Father, so He also reflected the character of the Father being of the same nature.

In Christ, also, we see revelation as *event.* He carried out the will of the Father, thus revealing things about the Father. The cross not only accomplished our redemption; it also demonstrated the love of God. Jesus revealed God's glory in changing the water to wine in Cana (John 2:11) and in His resurrection (Rom. 6:4).

The total redeeming work of Christ, therefore, revealed the Father in word, in character, and in deed.

Modern Hurdles

There are a couple of ways modern thought has served to undermine our confidence in the Bible as the written revelation of God. One way has to do with the knowability of historical events; another with the final authority for truth.

First, the matter of history and knowledge. In the Enlightenment era, philosophers such as Ren Descartes taught that only those ideas that could be held without doubt could count as knowledge. This created a problem for Scripture, for its major doctrines were revealed through *historical events*, and the knowledge of history is open to doubt logically speaking. History is constantly changing. Because of such change, the different contexts of those living long ago and of the historian negatively affects the historian's ability to

truly comprehend the past. At best, historical knowledge can only be probable. Religious ideas, on the other hand, seemed to be eternal; they are fixed and unchanging. It was believed that they could be known through reason better than through historical accounts. The classic statement of this position was made by the eighteenth century German, Gotthold Lessing, when he said, "The accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."{17} ("Accidental" means just the opposite of necessary; such things didn't logically have to happen as they did.)

Thus, biblical teachings were put on the side of probability, of opinion, rather than on the side of *knowledge*. Since it was thought that religious truths *ought* to be on the side of logical *certainty* and *knowledge*, people began to wonder whether the Bible could truly be the revelation of God.

The fact is, however, that we *can* know truth through historical texts; we find it there all the time. I *know* I was born in December of 1955 and that George Washington was our first president – even though these truths aren't what we call logically *necessary*, such as with mathematical equations. Although historical knowledge as such doesn't give the rational certainty our Enlightenment forebears might have wanted, it doesn't have to in order to be counted as knowledge.{18} Knowledge doesn't *have* to be logically *necessary* in order to be *trustworthy*.{19} There is no reason God cannot make Himself known through the lives of people and nations, or that the historical records of that revelation cannot convey objective truth to subsequent generations.

Nonetheless, confidence in Scripture was weakened. Wherein shall our confidence lie, then, with respect to religious matters? If we can't know truth through historical accounts, but must rely on our own reason, our reason becomes supreme over Scripture. The authority for truth lies within us, not in the Bible.

This subjectivity is the second outgrowth of the Enlightenment that affects our understanding of revelation and the Bible. Now it is *I* who have final authority for what is true. For some people it is our *reason* that is supreme. The philosopher, Immanuel Kant, taught that God speaks through our reason, and our worship of Him consists in our proper moral behavior. For others it is our *feelings* that are supreme. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, put the emphasis on our feelings of dependence and of oneness with God. For him, to make Scripture authoritative was to elevate reason above faith, and that was unacceptable. Thus, one camp elevated *reason* and said that historical accounts (such as those in Scripture) cannot provide the certainty we require, while the other camp elevated *feeling* and rejected final confidence in Scripture as too much in keeping with reason. Both ways the Bible lost out.

The turn inward was accentuated by the philosophy of existentialism. This philosophy had an influence on Christian theology. Theologian Rudolph Bultmann was "the outstanding exponent of the amalgamation of theology and existentialism," according to Philip Edgecumbe Hughes. The Bible was stripped of the supernatural, leaving little at all to go by with respect to the person of Jesus. But this didn't matter since Bultmann's existentialism turned the focus inward on our individual experience of the encounter with God.

The influence of this shift is still felt today. For too many of us, our confidence rests in our *own* understanding of things with little regard for establishing a theological foundation by which to measure our experience. On the one hand we get confused by disagreements over doctrines, and on the other our society is telling us to find truth within ourselves. How often do we find Christians making their bottom line in any disagreement over Christian teaching or activity, "I just feel this is true (or right)"? Now, it's true we can focus so much on the propositional, doctrinal content of Christianity that it becomes lifeless. It does indeed engage us on the level of

personal experience. But as one scholar notes, “What is at stake is the actual *truth* of the biblical witness; not in the first place its truth *for me* . . . but its truth as coming *from God.* . . . The objective character of Scripture as truth given by God comes before and validates my subjective experience of its truth.”{20} If we make our individual selves and our experiences normative for our faith, Christianity will have as many different faces as there are Christians! Our personal predilections and interests will become the substance of our faith. Any unity among us will be unity of *experience* rather than unity of the *faith.*

In response to the subjective turn of thinking, we hold that *reason* is insufficient as the source of knowledge of God. We could not know of such doctrines as the Incarnation and the Trinity unless God told us. Likewise, making *feelings* the final authority is death for theology, for there is no way to judge between personal experiences unless there is an objective authority. We have the needed authority in the revealed Word of God. Because we *can* know objective truth about God, we needn’t look within ourselves to discover truth.

One final point. God has revealed Himself for a reason, that we might know Him and His desires and ways. We can have confidence that the Holy Spirit, Who inspired the writing of Scripture, has also been able to preserve it through the centuries so as to provide us with the same truth He provided those in ancient times.

God has spoken, through general revelation and special. We can know Him and His truth.

Notes

1. Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 10-11.
2. Morris, 33.
3. Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and*

Contemporary Issues (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 51.
4. Demarest, 242-243.
5. Warren Lewis, ed., *Global Congress of World Religions* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Unification Theological Seminary, 1978), 126.
6. Bolaji Idowe, *African Traditional Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), 151. Quoted in Demarest, 243.
7. Demarest, 243.
8. Walter, A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), s.v. "Revelation, Special," by Carl F. H. Henry.
9. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 113.
10. J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 87.
11. Packer, 52-53.
12. Packer, 86.
13. Other modes of special revelation which can be categorized as the word spoken were dreams, visions, and theophanies. Cf. Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 44-48.
14. Packer, 81.
15. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 287. Quoted in Bernard Ramm, Special Revelation and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 111.
16. Ramm, 113.
17. Philip E. Hughes, "The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity," in D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 178.
18. See my article "Confident Belief: What Does It Mean To Know Truth?", Probe Ministries, 2001. Available on the Web at www.probe.org/confident-belief/.
19. See the above article.
20. Hughes, 183.

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Romantic Hyperbole: A Humorous Look at Honesty in Love

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

It would be a great way to express my enduring affection for my wife. I would find seven romantic birthday cards and give one to Meg each day for a week, starting on her birthday. It would continue a sweet tradition begun before we married.

Each card would have a simple picture that would tenderly convey our feelings for one another. Inside would be an endearing slogan or affirmation to which I would add a personal expression of my love for her.

I didn't foresee that Day Three would bring an ethical dilemma.

I carefully selected the cards and arranged them in an appropriate sequence. Day One showed a cute puppy with a pink rose. Inside: "You're the one I love."

Day Two featured a picture of a little boy and girl in a meadow with their arms over each other's shoulders. The slogan: "Happy Birthday to my favorite playmate."

Day Three depicted a beautiful tropical sunset: bluish pink sky, vast ocean, silhouetted palm trees. You could almost feel the balmy breeze. Inside: "Paradise is anywhere with you", to which I added personal mention of places holding special

memories for us: an island vacation spot, a North Carolina hotel, our home.

I completed the remaining cards, dated the envelopes, and planned to bestow one card each morning of her birth week. Then reality happened.

You see, I had agreed to go camping with her for Days One and Two. Camping is something Meg thrives on—outdoor living, clean air, hiking, camp fires. It's in her blood. Camping is something I did in Boy Scouts—dust, mosquitoes, noisy campers, smelly latrines. It ranks just below root canals on my list of favorites.

We camped at a state park only fifteen minutes from our home. On her birthday morning, she liked the fluffy puppy. Day Two, the cute kids made her smile. So far, so good.

Meanwhile, I was tolerating camping, doing my best to keep my attitude positive. The food was OK; the bugs were scarce. After two days, I was ready to go home as planned. Meg wanted to stay an extra day. We each got our wish.

Once home and alone, I pulled out Meg's card for "Day Three," the one with the tropical sunset and the "paradise is anywhere with you" slogan.

Should I give her the card? I had chosen to leave the campground. "But," I reasoned with myself, "the slogan was true lots of the time."

I settled on a compromise, a post-it note on the envelope explaining, "You may find that this card contains just a bit of romantic hyperbole."

Might giving it a clever-sounding label defuse my hypocrisy?

The echoes of her laughter still reverberate through our home. I got off easy.

“Speak the truth to each other,” wrote a Jewish sage. “Speak. . . the truth in love,” advocated a first-century biblical writer. Wise advice for just about any relationship.

“Romantic hyperbole” has become a humorous gauge of truthfulness in our relationship, a test for honesty. Neither of us enjoys every location on earth. She feels some sporting events are a waste of time. I can get bored at shopping malls. But as long as we are honest with each other about our feelings, the bond seems to grow stronger.

That’s no hyperbole.

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