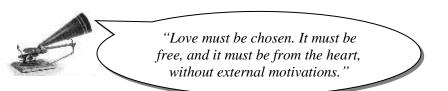
Letters From a Skeptic Lesson 9: The Difficulties of Faith

"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified..."

1 Cor 1:22-23



Correspondence 18: "Why does God make believing in Him so difficult?"

Father <pp. 144-146—Warning: Bad language >

- 1. Begins with a bit of "Why does God allow bad things happen?" talk
- 2. Says the arguments for the resurrection and divinity of Jesus are "very persuasive"
- 3. Arguments are so good, in fact, he's upset by them! Asks several related questions:
 - a. "I can't refute them, but...I'd have to stretch myself beyond what I'm capable of to believe them. Why is this?"
 - b. "Why does God put us into a position where we have to try to believe in Him?"
 - c. "Why do people have to believe things and accept stories that they'd never accept under ordinary circumstances in order to be saved?"
 - d. "What's so great about faith?"
- 4. Also says that if God would just give him a clear sign, "I'd be on my knees!"
- 5. Jesus had answers for such questions:

"An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet."

Matt 12:39

"...anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Mark 10:15

<mark>Son <pp. 146-152</mark> >

- 1. Agrees that Saddam Hussein is a bad guy, but says that's not God's fault a. *"[God is] on the side of righteousness, justice, and peace."*
- 2. Encourages his father to be this zealous for God
 - a. Says "I'd love to see you get as angry at Satan as you get at God."
- 3. Reminds his father that change is tough
 - a. "The mind, and even the heart, is torn in two directions at once."
 - b. He calls this psychological dilemma "cognitive dissonance"
 - c. The Bible addresses this, too:

"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Prov 16:25

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding."

Prov 3:5

d. Paul indicates that assurance is produced by faith in Jesus

"...we have boldness and confident access [to God] through faith in Him (Christ)."

Eph 3:12

- 4. Many examples that faith begins small. (Father of mute son: "*I do believe; help my unbelief!*"—Mark 9:24)
- 5. Bible says faith is "credited as righteousness" (Rom 4:5)
- 6. Son says he struggles with his faith, too (especially when children are harmed)
- 7. Points out that "Christianity isn't a giant 'answer machine" but says we live in a world of "questions and contradictory conclusions."
- 8. Addresses Dad's desire for a **clear sign** from God
 - a. Stupendous events rarely have a permanent effect on people
 - b. Almost everything can be explained in more than one way
 - c. Divine things aren't as clear in our fallen world as they might otherwise be
 - d. Evidence that "direct approach" fails (parting the Red Sea, speaking from clouds, etc.)
- 9. Says God really wants **love**, love has to be **chosen**, and choice is based in **faith**. a. *"Love requires both evidence and hiddenness."*
- 10. Asks dad to **postpone** his questions about "*all the bizarre stories in the Bible*" and focus on his need for **salvation**
 - a. Again, see 1 Cor 1:22-23
 - b. He says (paraphrasing): "*Dad, you need a savior—Jesus Christ*" and reminds him that a **decision** must be made.

Correspondence 19: "Why do you think the Bible is inspired?"

Father <pg. 153 >

- 1. Dad doesn't buy into postponing his questions about the Bible's "unbelievable" stories
 - a. "You can't ask me only to consider your strong arguments and bypass your embarrassing material."
 - b. "Problems with the book are therefore problems with the Savior."
- 2. Asks again: How can you believe a serpent talked, a man was swallowed by a whale, an ax head floated (see 2 Kings 6:1-7), a giant sea parted, and a man grew stronger the longer his hair got?
- 3. Says these disturbed him in his Catholic days, too, "even when I was trying to believe."

<mark>Son <pp. 154-158></mark>

- 1. Son says that Jesus clearly believed the Old Testament was God's Word, and states that <u>if we</u> believe in Jesus, we have to believe in what He believed in.
- 2. Says we may not understand everything in the Bible, but we're not the standard-God is!
- 3. Cites many fulfilled prophesies about Jesus—His **birth**, His **birthplace**, His **lineage**, His **forerunner** (John the Baptist), His **crucifixion**, His **suffering**, His **execution** with common criminals, His **death**, His **divinity**, and His **resurrection**.
- 4. Mentions other prophesies, specifically the fall of Tyre prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezek 26)
- 5. Ends with some personal testimony about his faith in Jesus and the Resurrection, and encourages his father to start **reading** the Bible and **talking** to its Author. Good advise!

"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ."

Rom 10:17

Homework: Read Correspondence 20 and Correspondence 22.