

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



“Love must be chosen. It must be free, and it must be from the heart, without external motivations.”

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

Son <pp. 146-152 >

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.*”

Son <pp. 154-158>

1. Son says that Jesus clearly believed the Old Testament was God’s Word, and states that if we 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 prophecies 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 prophecies, 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.