

Doubting God's Existence Part 1

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Doubting God Series
Romans 1:18-23

I have mentioned on many occasions that I grew up in a conservative Jewish family in New York. For several years in elementary school I attended a Jewish parochial school where we spent half the day on general subjects that we called “English” which included Math, Social Studies and Science. And we spent half a day on what we called “Hebrew” which included learning the Hebrew language as well as studying the Hebrew Bible and other religious education. When my parents eventually switched me to public school, I continued to attend an after-school Hebrew school and Hebrew high school until I was 14.

Because I was a good student, I actually won a beautiful Jewish prayer book for doing well in Hebrew school. In addition, at age 13, like most Jewish boys, I was bar mitzvah which is a rite of passage in which Jewish boys and (in my generation for the first time) Jewish girls get up in front of the synagogue to read from the Bible in Hebrew.

However, with all of this religious education, certainly more than many Jewish people receive, by age 10 or 11, I was definitely an atheist. The whole notion of God seemed to me to be a medieval holdover, a belief from an earlier age when people thought that the earth was flat, a time when people kept slaves and oppressed women. I do not know why, but in my circle in New York, belief in God and certainly talking about belief in God, seemed ignorant. To a significant majority, it seemed incredibly unscientific and backward. I did not know anyone who took God seriously. I am sure there were many people at my synagogue, maybe the Rabbi, I do not know, who believed that God existed.

But I never met anyone growing up who said to me, “You know, Rich, here is the difference that God has made in my life.”

The synagogue that I attended taught about Jewish holidays and Jewish rituals and ethics that amounted to teaching us how to be a good person. But discussion about God was significant because of its utter absence.

And none of the authors that I read in junior high or high school, none of the people I respected, took God seriously. I guess without even thinking about it, I was socialized into not believing in God.

Now, there is a very small percentage of Americans who identify themselves as atheists and agnostics. It is definitely down in the single digits, just a few percent, although 50% of self-identified Jews in America identify themselves as

atheist or agnostics. Of course the levels of atheism vary by regions of the country – higher in the Northeast and the West Coast; and lower in the middle of the country like here in Ohio, or in the Southeast or Southwest. And the rates of atheism and agnosticism are far higher among university faculty than it is among the general public.

The other day I sent out a tweet to those that follow me on twitter. I asked the question: What do you believe is the single top reason that people you know do not believe in God?

Here are some of the answers I received back:

- People are too focused on themselves.
- Most theists I've met believe based on upbringing, community or personal experience. Atheists tend to find that unconvincing.
- People don't believe because they live with a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately syndrome. They forgot they woke up this morning.
- God's poor showing on their fairness test.
- There are so many opinions about who he/she is or is not. How do you know which one is correct?
- Some of my friends do not believe because they do not think that God makes any difference in life.
- Unanswered prayer
- Bad things happening to good people
- Contradictions in the Bible
- The messy history of Old Testament rules
- The extinction of species
- They've never met him or they like him, but not his people

Finally, one person wrote to me and said, "Because their personal ethics demand that they are true to themselves." They have no option other than unbelief.

While there are not a huge percentage of folks who self-identify as atheist or agnostic, at least here in the US there are an increasing number of books and articles written by the so-called atheist. New Atheists, people like Richard Dawkins, who used to teach at Oxford and the late Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris – the striking thing about these New Atheists is not that they are coming up with new arguments against God. What is most striking about the New Atheists is how angry they are. They say, "Religion poisons everything." One of the New Atheists said, "We can think of absolutely nothing good that religion has ever produced in the history of mankind." One person said that the God of the Bible is a moral monster.

Tom Wright, who is an Anglican Bishop in England and a first-rate Bible scholar, said that part of the anger of the New Atheists springs from their huge

disappointment that the predicted collapse of religion across the world has not happened.

100 years ago, 50 years ago, 20 years ago people said that as a result of modernity and the enlightenment, religion would just fade away. Moreover, we would enter into a bold new world where human beings would be our own god. However, the fading away of religion has not happened. Instead, we see the rise of fundamentalism in the Islamic world and very surprisingly, the rise of evangelical faith not only in the 2/3 world in Africa, Asia and Latin America, but on Ivy League campuses, among philosophy professors and in the most posh districts in London among investment bankers and British Members of Parliament.

Any objective look at the data today in Western Europe and in the United States would suggest that there is a rise of religious faith in the Western world along with a rise of distancing from religious faith and connection to religious institutions. More people are disconnected from church today than in the past, *and* there is deeper commitment to faith than in the past. Both trends are going on at the same time in the Western world.

Today I am going to start a series that I have titled *Doubting God*. I am going to do a two-part message today and next week titled *Doubting God's Existence*. Let us pray.

Romans 1:18-23

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 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 people are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

Because this whole series is on doubt, let me first offer you a definition of doubt.

The meaning of doubt

What does it mean to doubt? The English word “doubt” comes from a Latin word “dubitare” which is rooted in a word meaning “two.”

dubitare = two

To “believe” is to be of one mind or to accept and trust something as true. To “disbelieve” is also to be of one mind or to reject something. To “doubt” is to waiver between faith and unbelief or to be of two minds. The heart of doubt is double-mindedness or to have a divided heart. We use many different metaphors to express this divided heart. We talk about having a foot in both camps. The Chinese talk about having a foot in two boats. In the Old Testament the prophet Elijah confronted the Israelites on Mt. Carmel and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions?”

The great illustration of this suspension between faith and unbelief is in the gospel of Mark. Jesus is asked by a father of a young boy to free the young boy from demonic bondage that was causing seizures for the boy. This man said to Jesus, “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” Here is what we read in Mark 9:23-24:

Mark 9:23-24

23 “If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

24 Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

You see the same double-mindedness referred to in the book of James where James writes:

James 1:6-8

6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 Those who doubt should not think they will receive anything from the Lord; 8 they are double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Today I am going to be talking about both doubts that erode our faith as well as unbelief. Many of the book recommendations along the way will be applicable to both. It is the double-mindedness, the feeling of being cut in two that creates in us the unease, the dis-ease, of doubt.

Troubled by doubt

We say, “What’s the matter with me? Here I am; I’m sitting in church and I still doubt...” Perhaps you have said, “I’ve given my life to Christ; I’m trying to obey God; but, I feel like I’m eaten away by doubt.” Some of you might say, “I feel like I’m overwhelmed by doubt in God’s existence sometimes; I believe, help my unbelief.”

I read an illustration years ago in an old book by Os Guinness. The book was called *In Two Minds: The Dilemma of Doubt and How to Resolve It*. Sadly, the book is no longer in print. Guinness wrote about a man in a Latin American

country who had loaded up his donkey with an enormously heavy load and was leading the donkey up a very steep mountain path. The donkey was laboring to carry this enormous load up this steep path when he finally collapsed exhausted under the weight of the load.

Well, the man began to beat the donkey and kick it and invoked all kinds of curses on the donkey. Guinness wrote that this is often the way that we treat our faith when doubt loads it down. We beat ourselves up. We say, “What is the matter with me. I just need to give my faith a good kick in the rear; that will help me to believe more.”

Let me change the illustration for a moment. The other day I was driving my granddaughter home from soccer practice. As I often do, I said to her, “Tell me, what was the best thing that happened today? What was your best moment today at school?”

She thought about it and said, “Math class.”

I said, “Really? Why math?”

Naomi replied, “Well, the teacher is so funny and she’s so nice.”

I said, “What was your worst moment in school?”

She said, “Definitely art.”

I said, “Art? You love art. You always draw at home. Why didn’t you like art today?”

“Oh, the teacher just screams at everyone.”

I said, “Did she scream at you?”

“No, but she screams at everyone all the time.”

So I said to my granddaughter, “You know, I never liked teachers like that. I had a Spanish teacher in high school, who if she said once to the class, ‘You’re going to get a zero right now,’ she said it a thousand times. Her basic way to motivate learning in her class was to scream at people all the time and threaten them with another zero. She always had her red pen out. ‘You’re going to get a zero.’”

That is the way we often treat our faith. You are going to get a zero. Instead of feeding our faith and encouraging our faith and building our faith – when we doubt, we scream, “you’re going to get a zero.”

Now, I do need to clear up one point regarding faith because there is the mistake that many of us have that causes us to beat ourselves up. Having faith does not mean that you never have any doubts. Faith is not the absence of doubts any more than courage is the absence of fears. A courageous soldier who bravely goes into battle is not a soldier who feels no fear. The courageous soldier who goes into battle is the person who is not dominated by their fears; they are able to bring their fears under control and move forward in spite of the fear. The person who believes is not someone who never asks questions, never has any doubts. However, they are not controlled by their doubts. They are able to move forward in the faith and live in accordance with faith.

Answering our doubts

There is no such thing as absolute certainty. Sometimes atheists will intimidate thoughtful Christians with a demand that we Christians produce an airtight, absolute knockout argument for the existence of God or the truth of Christianity.

Then the Christian is troubled because they cannot come up with an airtight set of proofs regarding God's existence. We cannot be absolutely certain. How do we respond?

The philosopher, Aristotle, said:

We can only prove things according to the nature of the thing to be proved.

For example, we cannot prove with absolute mathematical certainty that the pilot who is flying the plane I am getting on has been trained properly and knows how to take off and land. Yet, I trust my life to that pilot when I get on the plane. When we go into surgery, we cannot prove with absolute certainty that the physician that is treating us or the anesthesiologist who puts us under has been properly trained. Yet, we put our lives in the hands of physicians and anesthesiologists.

If you think about it, there are very few things in life that you can prove with absolute certainty. Yet, we move forward with trust.

When my wife, Marlene, gives me a cup of coffee in the morning, I cannot prove that she will not fill the cup with strychnine. When I make her coffee every morning, she cannot be certain that I have not put poison in her coffee. All we really have is the accumulated evidence of living together for 37 years.

The truth is that the demand that we have for absolute certainty before we can believe in God is based upon a faith assumption itself.

Tim Keller, in a great book titled *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* says that he talked with a young man who examined various arguments for God's existence. Even though he thought that many of the arguments had a great deal of merit, nevertheless, he found that every one of them was rationally avoidable at some point. Every one of them had some major weakness. The man was very troubled by this. He said, "I cannot believe unless I find at least one absolutely airtight proof of God."

Pastor Tim Keller pointed out to him that he was assuming "strong rationalism," a philosophy that says that we should not believe in anything unless there were airtight proofs. Tim Keller said to him that there is no airtight proof for doing life based on strong rationalism. The man was greatly relieved as he began to think not about proofs, but about clues, pointers to God. I am going to talk about these pointers to God next week. There are literally dozens of pointers to God. Today, I want to talk about doubt.

It is helpful to examine our doubt. We can do a little bit of archeology on doubt, to dig into it and ask why we doubt.

The truth about doubt

Romans 1:18-20

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 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 people are without excuse.

In response to my tweet the other day in which I asked those who follow me on Twitter, "Name the single top reasons why people don't believe in God," one self-identified atheist wrote this back to me:

- The complete and total lack of evidence whatsoever to support the notion of the existence of any kind of supernatural agent.

WOW! No evidence, whatsoever...not a scintilla, not a shred of evidence for the belief in anything supernatural, whatever you call it. Evidently, this person is in the privileged position of being able to see what well over 90% of the people on our planet do not see. There are seven billion people, roughly six and a half billion people on our planet who believe in the existence of the supernatural and who are utterly irrational concerning the most fundamental issue in this world: Does God exist?

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 1 that the issue of doubt and unbelief must be read with a deep understanding that we fallen human beings are biased as we look at evidence for and against God. Are you, friend, in touch with the fact that you look at life in a heavily biased way?

The *Atlantic Magazine*, back in December, published an article “I Was Wrong and So Are You.” It was subtitled, “A Libertarian Economist Retracts A Swipe At The Left.” The article is by Daniel Klein. Let me read to you from the magazine:

Back in 2010 I published a Wall Street Journal op-ed arguing that the American Left is unenlightened, by and large, as to economic matters. Responding to a survey question that tested people’s real-world understanding of basic economic principles, self-identified progressives and liberals did much worse than conservatives and libertarians, I reported. To sharpen the ax, the Journal titled the piece, “Are You Smarter Than A 5th Grader?” – the implication being that people on the left were not.

The survey essentially asked people to self-identify, are you a liberal or progressive? Are you a centrist? Are you conservative? Are you Libertarian? Then it asked a set of basic economic questions. For example, “Does mandatory licensing of professional services, the requirement that lawyers and doctors be licensed, raise the cost of those services or not?” Conservatives said that of course licensing raises the cost. Liberals wrongly said no it does not.

Does rent control lead to housing shortages? Conservatives said yes, it does; liberals and progressives again wrongly said that it does not.

This economist concluded that liberals and progressives do not know anything about economics. They are living in a dream world of their own making.

Well, then this Libertarian economist got hold of some recent psychological research on bias and it made him and his colleague look at the questions and ask whether the questions themselves were biased. What would the responses be if we asked different questions? They then put out a new survey and made statements like this:

Agree or Disagree: A dollar means more to a poor person than to a rich person.

Liberals and progressives agreed with that common sense statement that a dollar means more to someone who only has \$10 than it would mean to a person who has \$1 million. Conservatives and Libertarians absolutely disagreed with the statement. After looking at the new findings, the economist wrote a paper saying there are many biases out there and college professors should have been smart enough to know that we ourselves are biased. Sorry.

If you want to have an example of bias, just look at the recent flap regarding the Supreme Court and the coming ruling about the Federal Healthcare Law. President Obama, a progressive, has argued that the court ought to show judicial restraint and deference to the Democratic re-elected Congress, who is entrusted to pass our laws. The conservative right is saying, "Praise God for the courts where our rights do not get stampeded by the majority."

You step back from this and ask, "What world are we living in? Liberals are arguing for judicial deference and conservatives are arguing for judicial activism – isn't that the opposite of where we usually go?"

The Apostle Paul says that we fallen human beings are biased down to every cell in our bodies. Most importantly Paul says, we are biased against God. We claim that we are looking at the evidence objectively for and against God. In fact, we have our thumb on the scale. We have predetermined where we want to end up and we head in that direction. We do not make our decisions about faith in a psychological vacuum. We do not make them in a sociological vacuum.

I grew up in a little bubble in New York City surrounded by people who did not believe in God. Therefore, I did not believe in God. I never met a thoughtful person who took God seriously. Of course, on the other hand, many people in the Midwest and the South have never met a thoughtful atheist.

The point is that we are not neutral observers. We all are standing in some place having a certain vantage point. Even the words of unbelievers betray bias. We talk about having honest doubts and believers having blind faith. Why do we not talk about dishonest doubts, convenient doubts, and self-serving doubts? Why do we not speak of reasonable faith, thoughtful faith, and well-considered faith?

Why do we doubt? Why do we have so much unbelief?

I cannot possibly tackle everything today. That is why I'm going to do a series on doubt. In a few weeks I am going to talk about doubt that springs from personal pain and suffering. A source of doubt in God is because of pain. Maybe someone we love has suffered through a dreadful accident, has been murdered, or experienced sexual or physical abuse. Maybe we have experienced this type of suffering and tragedy personally. On a global scale, the suffering that occurs because of famines, earthquakes and genocide is difficult to fathom. How do we believe in a good God in the face of all of this suffering? I will be tackling that in two weeks. Doubt in the goodness of God.

Next week I am going to build a positive case for God. By the way, if you want to be in an environment where you can ask questions and mix it up regarding issues that you have with faith, or questions that you have, we are offering the Alpha Course. Alpha is a safe and friendly environment where you are able to

explore the deep questions of God, faith, and life with others who are asking similar questions.

So why do we doubt?

The sources of doubt

We doubt because of immorality and self-interest

Again, let us look at Romans 1:8-20:

Romans 1:18-20

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 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 people are without excuse.

Paul is saying that atheism is not the result of objective weighing of evidence. Atheism is the result of stubborn disobedience. It does not arise from the careful application of reason. It arises from willful rebellion. He is saying that sin is the mother of unbelief.

Some of you say, "Rich, that's really unfair. You are suggesting that for some people they just do not want there to be a God, therefore, they do not believe in God."

But is it unfair in all cases to say that at least some unbelief, among some unbelievers is the result of a private interest that will be threatened if God, at least the God who revealed himself in the Bible, actually exists?

Imagine if I had a conversation with Hugh Hefner and we debated back and forth the relative merits of the Playboy philosophy versus the Christian faith. There is Hugh, sitting in his silk smoking jacket, smoking his pipe. After several hours of conversation, let us say Hugh Hefner agreed that my arguments for the Christian faith were stronger than his arguments against it.

I am sitting there thinking, "This is incredible! I'm convincing Hugh Hefner of the truth of the Christian faith."

Then Mr. Hefner has one last question for me. He says, "Rich, if I adopt your Christian philosophy, your Christian way of life, will I still be able to have sex with any beautiful woman that I want?"

I say, “Well, no one’s ever asked me that question before, Mr. Hefner. But, no. If you become a follower of Jesus, you have to commit yourself to monogamy, to having sex only with one person, and that is with the woman who is your wife.”

What do you think Hugh Hefner would say to me? I suspect he might say, “Well, thank you for a very interesting conversation. My butler will show you to the door now.”

Aldous Huxley, the famous author of *The Brave New World*, honestly admitted that his objections to Christianity were not primarily intellectual. Here is a quote from Aldous Huxley. He said:

I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning: consequently, I assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in metaphysics; he’s also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do what he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way they find most advantageous to themselves...for myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political.

In other words, Aldous Huxley is very honestly and very forthrightly saying, “I adopted the negative stance I did toward the Christian faith because I had a prior commitment that was more important to me than faith in God. I had a prior political commitment and more importantly I had a prior sexual commitment.”

Let me ask you. Do you or someone that you care about, do you or they have a prior commitment that is more important to you than a relationship with Christ? We can talk all day about evidence, but if you say there is something that you want more than you want God – your relationship with your boyfriend, or your kids, or being popular, or making money - then that’s going to bias you against God. At least Huxley was honest about his private interests.

Why do we doubt?

We doubt because of ingratitude

Here is what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:21:

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Let me describe a typical spiritual journey of someone who drifts away from God. At some point in a person's life they are desperate. They really need help outside of themselves. They have reached the end of the rope. Maybe they are going in for heart surgery. Maybe their marriages are collapsing and they are looking at a future in which the most important person in their life is not there. Something has made the person desperate and they cry out for God's help. Maybe they even say that they are committing their lives to Christ. Perhaps they get God's help. Perhaps they get up from the operating table; their spouse does not divorce them; their child does not die; and here is what often happens. Over a period of time, they forget the help they have received. They do not feel as desperate as they did when they called out to God before. Because of their contentment, they *do not* return thanks to God for the many blessings in their life.

Repeatedly the Bible tells us to remember God and to return thanks to him. Gratitude is a basic building block of faith. Instead of beating up your doubts, have you ever thanked your way into faith? Have you ever counted your blessings and taken five, ten, or twenty minutes to say thank you God for all the good in your life? Here is what we read in Nehemiah 9:25-26:

Nehemiah 9:25-26

25 They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness. 26 "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies.

Here is what we read in Hosea 13:6:

Hosea 13:6

When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.

Here is what the Apostle Paul asked in 1 Corinthians 4:7:

1 Corinthians 4:7

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Colossians 2:6-7

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Unless you see that you do not have anything that you have received; it is all a gift, and the proper response to a gift is gratitude, your faith can be undermined.

Why do we doubt?

We doubt because of inadequate foundations

There are so many people that I meet who used to believe or went through a Christian phase in their lives, especially in childhood or high school or college. Again, let me describe a very typical journey that many young people undergo.

In high school, imagine the Christian young woman or man, who is super excited about Jesus. He or she is in youth group and they are going forward and crying. They are having amazing experiences at summer camp. They know that they believe. However, they never actually have taken the time to ask the question: Why do I believe? They have never built strong foundations under their faith. They pack up, head off to college, and are living on a secular university campus in another city. Suddenly, they have all the props that used to support their faith pulled away. They no longer have their Christian youth group. They are no longer being encouraged by their Christian mom or dad. They are no longer around their Christian friends and their Bible study group. They are no longer getting the encouragement of their home church.

In their first semester in college they take an intro to anthropology in which they discover there are so many different belief systems and all of these beliefs are purely the result of culture. Not one of the beliefs could ever be asserted to be true. They go to biology class and they learn about how life began as the result of purely naturalistic evolution. This Christian young man or woman begins to feel lonely. Everyone else is going to parties but he or she refrains because of their faith in Christ.

It is not just important to know what you believe, or that you believe. It is really important, if you are ever going to engage someone intelligent, or if you are ever going to face a real crisis in your life – the crisis of cancer, the crisis of the loss of a loved one – it is really important that you find out why you believe, that you have a foundation for your faith that will carry you along during hard times when the props are pulled away.

The Apostle Peter said this in 1 Peter 3:15:

1 Pete 3:15

But in your hearts revere 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,

Do you know why you believe?

I came to faith in college during my freshman year. I had an amazing experience of God. I knew I was born again by God's Spirit and that God's Spirit had come into my life. After that experience, I cried for month every night in my dorm room as God was healing me from past hurts. I became a religion and history major; I took philosophy classes. All of my religion classes were taught by very bright professors who essentially believed that the Bible was nothing other than the collection of the ancient myths of the Israelite people. I remember that I had a particular neighbor, who was getting his Ph.D. in philosophy. He had been raised in a Christian family and he liked nothing better than to come over in the evening and pound on me regarding the absurdity of my faith. Because he had been raised in the Christian faith, he knew all of the simple arguments regarding Christianity and how to dismantle them.

Eventually, I had a crisis of faith. Why do I believe this stuff? Maybe I just had a need. Maybe it is just psychological fulfillment. Maybe I just want this to be true, but it is not true. I remember reading stacks of books regarding the Old Testament in the hopes of trying to learn if this book that I was reading was really inspired by God. I needed to drive pillars down into bedrock to sustain my faith for the long haul – reading, asking questions, listening to the very best thinkers.

I discovered that no one is going to come along and ask you one question, or make the one point that thoughtful Christians have not already asked and answered. Investigate! Ask! Read! Build a foundation for your faith!

Why do we doubt?

We doubt because of identification

Let me make this point really simply. Many folks just do not want to be identified with other Christians. It is not that we have weighed the evidence and it has come up short. It is that I just do not want to identify myself with other Christians because of my prior religious background, because my mother or father will be upset with me, because my grandmother or grandfather, or my friends will make fun of me. It is often that crass. I do not like where most Christians line up regarding this or that political issue.

Let's admit, friends, if the issue is one of association, identification, then the issue is not evidence or truth. If that is your problem, then I encourage you to not allow anything to stand in the way of you connecting with Jesus – not any person, not any institution, not any relationship – you go after Jesus.

Why do we doubt?

We doubt because of ignorance about God

Romans 1:21-22

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

Last summer I went to England and I was to be picked up at the London Heathrow Airport by a man that I never met before. He had never met me and did not know what I looked like. I did not know what he looked like. I looked around the airport and after waiting for a period of time, I decided to simply hail a cab and was taken to where I needed to go by taxi. Well, the man who was to pick me up actually was there. Apparently, however, I looked different than he had expected and so he missed me.

I think that many people miss God because God does not look like, or act like what they expect. We hear people say, “I cannot believe in a God that didn’t answer my prayers for my child,” or “I cannot believe in a God who stands up in heaven looking over the balcony screaming at people telling folks to stop having fun.”

Tom Wright, the Bible scholar I mentioned before, often responds this way to people who say, “I don’t believe in God.” Tom Wright says, “Which God do you not believe in?”

The person will say something like, “Well, I do not believe in a God who prefers one group of people over other groups, or one nation over other nations.” “I do not believe in a God who would support slavery” or “I do not believe in a God who oppresses women.”

Tom Wright says, “I do not believe in that God either.”

Often, we doubt because we have a faulty view of the God of the Bible. Look for God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Finally, why do we doubt?

We doubt because of indifference

For many folks that I talk with who say, “I do not believe,” it is not a hardened opinion. Instead, it is a shrug of the shoulders. “I don’t know; I guess I’ve never been much into religion. I do not care that much. I do not see the need.” Some people think about God the way you might think about the nation of Tajikistan. You may know that it exists somewhere, but so what? It does not really affect your life.

Lee Stroebel, the author of a book titled *The Case for Christ* was one of these people whose doubt was rooted in indifference. Maybe God is there, but big deal. He was an award-winning journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. A legal affairs correspondent, who had many, many articles printed on the front page of this Chicago newspaper. He said his life was going along great. He had a great job, a beautiful wife, and a great house. He described his life this way. He said:

It was as if I was driving my sports car down the road. One arm was around my wife and the other arm I was waving at people and everyone was saying, "Look at the Strobel's. Aren't they amazing? What a beautiful young couple. How successful.

That approach to life in which I was utterly indifferent to God really worked when the road in front of me was straight and true. But when my life hit a curve, I needed someone whose hand was on the steering wheel.

My life hit a curve when my father died. I felt like I was spinning out of control.

Friend, at some point life hits a curve, something unexpected. You find yourself in crisis. The crisis could be an internal one. You have a depression that you cannot seem to overcome. You have an addiction that is too strong for you. You are struggling with anger. The crisis could be a relational crisis. You are going through a divorce or separation. Someone has broken your heart. The crisis could be the loss of a job or financial problems – bankruptcy or legal issues. At some point everyone's life hits a curve. It is when your life hits a curve that the existence of God and whether you can build your life on him becomes terribly relevant. That God exists and that God loves you becomes a matter of life and death.

Doubting God's Existence Part 1

Rich Nathan
April 15, 2012
Doubting God Series
Romans 1:18-23

- I. The meaning of doubt
- II. Troubled by doubt
- III. Answering our doubts
- IV. The truth about doubt
- V. The sources of our doubt
 - A. We doubt because of immorality and self-interest
 - B. We doubt because of ingratitude
 - C. We doubt because of inadequate foundation
 - D. We doubt because of identification
 - E. We doubt because of ignorance about God
 - F. We doubt because of indifference