Why Christian? Why Catholic?

Faith and Reason Series

Where Do We Begin?

How do we know there is a God?

Because we have FAITH. Faith is believing in something you can't prove.

- Using the example of a can of beans. How do you know there are beans in the can?
    1. Because the label says so. An atheist will say, "I don't believe anything I can't prove." When he goes to buy a can of beans at the store, there is no way to "prove" there are beans in the can unless it is opened. So even the atheist has "faith" that there are beans in the can.
    2. What if the label was wrong? Then you can't prove it, unless you open the can and see or taste the beans. But then it ceases to be faith. The moment you see it, it is no longer faith. The moment you have "proof" it is no longer faith.
- But . . . We must have a reason for what you believe. I am not here to give you proofs – I am here to give you reasons to have faith and believe in the Christian faith.
    1. To believe without a reason is like buying a can without a label and "believing" there are beans in there because you have faith. That's stupid. Let's say you went to the store and all the labels were off the cans and you were supposed to get beans, corn and tomatoes. You then said, "I believe this can is corn, these are beans . . . Why would you believe that you are correct in your assumption if the cans had no labels? If you answer, "because I want it to be," that is unreasonable. That is no reason to be believe that a can without a label is corn, for example.
    2. But if I show you a can with a label that says, "corn," then you can answer, "I believe that is a can of corn because the label says so." You had your reason to believe – not your proof. I have never opened a can of corn that did not have corn in it. That is a very good reason to believe the label.
    3. The same applies with God. You need to have a reason for believing in God, not proof. All we can give are reasons for believing in God, not proofs.
- An atheist also has faith. They believe in something they can't prove. An atheist may ask a believer, "Prove to me there is a God and I'll believe." All we can say is, "I can't prove it." They will laugh at you and ask, "you believe in something you can prove?" Say, "yes." Then ask them, "prove to me that there is no God." They can't. They believe in something they can't prove. They have faith that there is no God.
- Both have faith. Who is right? If the atheist is right, he'll never know because they are dead and there is no afterlife since there is no God, heaven, hell or judgement. How will they know if they were right? They can't . . . and the believer will not know if there is a God either. But if the believer is right then the atheist is going to know for eternity in

hell that they were wrong. The atheist has everything to lose and nothing to gain. The believer has everything to gain and nothing to lose.

- Which of these 2 faiths make more sense? This is called Pascal's Wager. The atheist loses both ways if they are wrong or right. Why have faith in something you have nothing to gain in?

We talk about God believers, but there are all kinds of God believers – Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus all believe in some notion of "God."

In America, approximately 83% of the population believe in God, but only 25% worship him. 58% say, "I know you're there God, but I am going to ignore you." Do you think God would do something about it?

When people believe is some kind of deity or God, they take action. They form religions like the Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jew and Christian. Which one should we belong to?

What is your REASON for Picking One Religion over the Other?

If you were to line up all the religious leaders of the world religions, Buddha, Mohammed, Dalai Lama, Confucius and Jesus Christ and ask them the following questions, only ONE of them would be able to stand in the end.

- Which of you was prophesied hundreds of years before your birth regarding where you would be born, where you would live and how you would die?
- Prophesied that you would be born of a virgin, how you would suffer and be rejected by your own people, and betrayed for 30 pieces of silver?
- Which of you claimed to be Divine?

Why be a Christian?

Only Jesus Christ would remain standing . . . all others are inferior.

What does it mean to be a Christian and what do they believe?

I am going to it keep simple and give you a 4 answers, not all answers, to what Christians should believe.

1. You have to believe that Jesus was both human and divine – fully God and fully man. We call this the hypostatic union. The union of two natures – His human and divine natures. He became a man like us in all things except sin (Heb 4:15) and he was also God from the very beginning (1 Jn 1ff, Jn 1ff). How did his humanity and divinity not interfere with one another . . . it is a mystery.
2. You need to believe that he suffered and died on the cross for the sins of the human race. That we were "bought for a price." We were redeemed by the cross.

What is my reason for believing he was God and man and that he paid for the sins of the world? The answer is, the resurrection. I can't "prove" the resurrection, but I can give you reasons to believe in the resurrection.

a. An empty tomb – this is the common sense reason. Guards were posted to prevent the theft of the body of Jesus. If the tomb was not empty, then all that anyone needed to do to disprove the resurrection is to produce and display the dead body. But they didn't. We have the remains of every world leader known to man, except Jesus. Why? Because he rose from the dead. His tomb was empty, that is my reason to believe he rose from the dead. None of the other world religion leaders said that they would rise from the dead, much less actually do it.

b. Many eye witnesses to the resurrection. We are told that he appeared to all his Apostles and hundreds of fellow believers. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

c. The third reason is the conversion of Saul the pharisee. Ask yourself, "what would it take to convert an anti-Catholic person?" The answer is, "an intervention of God . . . in other words, a miracle." Or someone in the KKK to join a black organization . . . a miracle. A miracle changed Saul. He was struck blind on the road to Damascus. A voice calls out and says, "Saul, Why do you persecute me?" "Who are you?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." If that did not happen, how does one account for his conversion? He became an apostle to the Gentiles, suffered, was imprisoned and beheaded! All for a Christ that did not appear to him?! No! It really happened.

d. The martyrdom of the Apostles and early Christians. These believers died for Christ. They refused to deny Christ, because they believed that Christ rose from the dead and is the savior of the world. Would you die for something that was a lie? I wouldn't. I find it hard to die for the truth!

3. You have to believe in the Trinity.

a. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Three persons in one God. How can you explain it? By analogy only. For example, I am a father, a husband and a son, but I am only one person. The relationship of the father and son is not the same and neither is the relationship between the husband and son. Mathematically speaking, we could use the example of multiplying 1x1x1 = 1. Ultimately, we accept that this is a great mystery, how God can be one yet three. We believe it because God revealed it to be so.

4. You must be baptized.

a. Some Christians say all you need is the faith and the Bible, but the Bible says that you need to be baptized.

> **Mk 16:15** *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved"*
>
> **1 Pt 3:20** *"Baptism . . . now saves you"*

The early Church Fathers all acknowledged that baptism is the entry into the family of God and that it opens the gates of salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ. This is how we are "born again." (Jn 3:3, 5ff)

Why be a Catholic Christian?

If I have accepted Jesus Christ as the Son of God, I have to look around this world and say, "Somewhere in the world is Jesus' Church."

I am a Christian first and foremost because I believe in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross to redeem and save us. But as a Christian, I want to belong to the Church that Christ founded, mentioned in . . .

> **Mat 16:18***ff – " You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*

He said, I will build my Church, singular, not churches. So his Church must have existed for the last 2000 years otherwise Jesus is a liar and His Church was overcome by "the gates of Hades."

The Catholic Church makes the claim that she has been around for 2000 years since Jesus started it. It is one of the largest religions in the world at 1.4 billion members and the office of the Pope traces itself back to St. Peter in an unbroken line of succession.

What is my reason for being Catholic, not just Christian? There is only one reason for being Catholic . . . the office of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. If you don't accept the Pope, there is no point in being Catholic. No other Christians, except for Catholics, believe that Pope Leo XIV is the 267th bishop of Rome and successor of St. Peter. No one else makes this claim and we can prove it historically. Check online and you will see the list of popes in an unbroken line of succession from Peter the Apostle to Pope Leo XIV. What makes Peter so special?

The Church was founded upon Peter, the Rock.

Let's unpack this a bit. Some say that Jesus founded the Church upon himself and not Peter, but the grammar does not allow for that.

Secondly, some say that the name of Peter (or Petros in Greek) means "little rock" and the word "rock" or "Petra" in the Bible verse means "Massive Rock." The problem with this argument is that there is a Greek word for "little rock," that is "lithos." We see this used when the Bible says that people picked up "rocks" or "lithoi" to stone someone. Or that we are "living stones" in 1Pt 2:5. The explanation for the 2 different words, Petros and Petra, is that in Greek, Petra is a

feminine term for a large rock. Since Jesus wanted to name Simon, “rock,” he had to create a new word in the masculine form to give to Simon . . . “Petros.”

To further substantiate this explanation, we see that in Jn 1:42, Jesus tells Simon, “You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).” Simon’s new name Cephas or “Kepha” is the Aramaic word for “rock.” Aramaic is the language that Jesus spoke. It is a more modern form of Hebrew. Kepha means “rock” and is gender neutral so there is no mistaking the word. Speaking Aramaic, Jesus could have said, “you are Kepha and upon this Kepha, I will build my Church.”

Peter as the Prime Minister of the Household of God

Some others may also say, “Peter was just another Apostle. There was nothing that made him more special than the others.” The Catholic Church teaches that the Pope is the successor of Peter, the head of the Church and is the universal shepherd of Christ’s Church. The Pope acts with the authority of Christ on matters of faith and morals. The word “pope” does not appear in the NT, because it is derived from the Italian word, “papa,” which means “father.”

Let’s dig a little deeper into this concept that Peter and by extension, his successors, are the head of the Church and is he the “father figure” of the Church.

We go back to

> **Mt 16:18-19** *you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

. . . and to the verse that gives Peter the “keys of the kingdom” and also the authority to “bind and loose.” All reputable scholars, Catholic and non-Catholic agree that is quote is from

> **Is 22:19-23** *I will thrust you [Shebna] from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your belt on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father’s house.*

This position is the steward or prime minister of the household in the Davidic Kingdom. The fact that it is an “office” shows succession. Note that he is to be a “father” to the household of God. This steward is the one that holds the “keys of the kingdom.” He was in charge of the household of God when the King was away and rules with the authority of the King.

Jesus, our King is no longer on earth so he leaves a steward or prime minister to govern in his place and he is to be a “father” to the household of God. Whatever he shuts (binds) no one opens (unbinds) . . . he has the full authority given to him by the King. And this is the crux of the issue . . . that of AUTHORITY. Who has the authority to tell us what is true and what is false. Yes, the Bible is certainly the World of God and 100% true, but who decides what it means and how it is to be interpreted? Each individual? Where has that gotten us?

Who Do You Believe?

Which church is telling the right things . . . which one has the fulness of truth? All religions have partial truth to varying degrees . . . Who do you believe? There are thousands of different Christian churches . . . which one is right? They don’t all teach the same thing and they all claim to have the truth from the Bible.

Let me ask you this . . . What if a person joins a prayer group of 3 or more people to agree on something. Then they extend that to a larger group, and then include some people from every country in the world. And they all prayed, not for a few hours, but for several years and they all unanimously agreed on many things. They prayed to the Holy Spirit, read the Bible and all accepted the conclusions. Would that be the truth? “Yes, of course, no one would doubt that.” But many don’t believe it . . . this is what the council of Vatican II did. In all, 21 times, all the Bishops from all over the world gathered in one spot as a council, prayed to the Holy Spirit and were unanimous in their decisions.

That is how we as Catholics guarantee our doctrines are in harmony with the Bible and Jesus’ teachings. Why are they authentic? Because they are in union with the successor of Peter, who “binds and loosens.” Why is this important? Because there are divisions inside the Church now. Who do you listen to?. . . The Shepherd of the Flock. You need a shepherd when the sheep are straying.

People say, “Why do you listen to the Pope? He is only a man.” Well, so was Moses and Abraham! Every Christian believes what Moses said. Was Moses God? “No, he was chosen by God,” they’ll say.

“But there were some popes that were grave sinners.” So was King David. He committed adultery and murder, but Jesus is still called the Son of David. It has nothing to do with their sinfulness. Peter denied Jesus, but he forgave Peter. Whatever you say about the Pope, you could have said about David, Moses, or Peter. They weren’t God, but they spoke with the voice and authority of God, because God gave them that authority.

So too, is our current Pope chosen by God through the invocation of the Holy Spirit. In all of OT history, one man led God’s people, Abraham, Moses, David . . . they were chosen by God. Those that disobeyed Moses, disobeyed God. Jesus, who is God, said to Simon Peter that he would

build the Church on him and he gave him the keys of the kingdom and power to loose and bind. He also made Peter the shepherd of His sheep . . . let's see how Jesus did that . . .

> **Jn 10:14**,*16 "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me . . . And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.*

> **Jn 21:15-17** *Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs" . . . tend (shepherd) my sheep . . . feed my sheep."*

I want to belong to the community I know is Christ's Church. Not one that I think might be Christ's Church. But there cannot be in any Catholic a sense of superiority over non- Catholics. There are many who are not Catholic and put most of Catholics to shame with regards to their love of God, their faith, holiness and their love of neighbor. The Catholic Church teaches at if a person does not know, through no fault of their own, that they should be in the Catholic Church, they can be saved. Not that they will be saved, just like not all who profess to be Catholic will be saved either. God will judge every one of us accordingly and justly.

This is why the "unity" of all Christians is one of the main focuses of the Catholic Church. Jesus prayed to his heavenly father . . .

> **John 17:11** *. . . Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

The Lord Jesus desires there be . . .

> **Eoh 4:4-6** *". . . one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all." Let us all strive to build that unity that Jesus prayed for.*

Let us close in prayer . . .

Heavenly Father,

We come before You with humble hearts, grateful for the gift of faith and the love that binds us together as followers of Christ. We praise You for the unity we share through the sacrifice of Your Son, who prayed that we might all be one, as You and He are one.

Lord, we ask for the outpouring of Your Holy Spirit upon all Christians, that we may be filled with love, understanding, and compassion for one another. Help us to transcend our differences, to see the face of Christ in every brother and sister, and to work tirelessly towards the unity of all believers.

Empower us to be instruments of Your peace, to sow seeds of love where there is division, and to shine the light of Your truth in every corner of the world. May our unity and love for one another bear witness to Your love for all humanity, drawing others closer to You.

We also pray for those who have not yet come to know You, Lord. Open their hearts to the message of the Gospel, and grant them the grace of conversion. May they encounter Your love through our words and actions, and find their true home in the embrace of Your Church.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, we ask for the courage and wisdom to be effective witnesses of Your love, bringing the light of Christ to every heart and soul.

We ask this through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.