

WRONG REASON

WHY CHRISTIANS HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR
FROM UNBELIEF

How shall we respond to those who adamantly deny Christ?



The Fellowship of Ailbe

A ReVision Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Wrong Reason
Why We Need Not Fear Unbelief
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Wrong Reason*

Welcome to *Wrong Reason*, a brief study investigating the limits of human reasoning, with some guidelines for using reason to reach others for Christ. *Wrong Reason* is one of our *ReVision* studies in Biblical worldview. A complete listing of available studies is provided at the end of this study.

As in Jesus' own day, the faith of those who believe in Him is under attack. Indeed, as many have observed, it seems to be open field on all things Christian. Our views are denied and denounced. Our Scriptures are scorned. Our rights as believers are threatened. And our communities are feeling the effects of all this in declining membership and influence.

But Christians have nothing to fear from the rants and raging of unbelievers. We need to remember that, for all their credentials and visibility, those who deny the truth of Scripture and the reality of our salvation are simply wrong. Our task, motivated by love, is to help them see how this is so. And as we do so, we will find our own faith strengthened and renewed.

Even though the heat of an unbelieving age may only continue to rise.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to subscribe to our free instructional newsletters, including *ReVision*, *Scriptorium*, and *The Week*, and *Crosfjell*, featuring insights from Scripture and our Celtic Christian forebears.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Reasonable, but Mistaken

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. Matthew 22.29

Why are these people upset?

In our day, rational, respectable people from just about every quarter are lashing out at Christians and the Christian faith.

Prominent scientists, literary critics, politicians, academicians, bloggers, pundits, and everyday Joes are whacking away at the faith in books, seminars, films, TV programs, and everyday conversations. Public officials seem unperturbed that their policies threaten the liberties of the followers of Jesus Christ. Those who believe the Gospel are held up to ridicule as bigoted, narrow-minded, and out of touch with reality. And the numbers of those who hold such views appear to be growing.

Those leading the pack in this endeavor argue cogently and effectively for their views and against the teachings of Scripture. So compelling is their logic that many have been persuaded, and are jumping on the bandwagon to bash the faith.

Why are these perfectly rational people so completely irritated with Jesus and the Gospel? Why are they working so hard to persuade others to join them in their unbelief?

The short answer is simple: They're simply mistaken.

These folks who object to the Gospel, even to the point of seeking to curtail the liberties of those who hold it dear, are not, for the most part, wild-eyed crazies, shouting and yelling and ranting like madmen. They're perfectly reasonable people. They make clear points as they work their way through carefully reasoned arguments designed to justify their concerns about Christianity and the Christian worldview. They make perfectly good sense to themselves and others who agree with them.

Wrong then, wrong now

But they're mistaken, just like the religious leaders who confronted Jesus so long ago.

Listen to the problem posed by the leading intellectuals of Jesus' day: "The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also"" (Matt. 22.23-27).

Now that situation may have been a bit far-fetched. But they were simply exaggerating to make a point. The technique is called *argumentum ad absurdum*. The situation they posed may have been absurd, but it *could* have happened, whether or not it really did.

So far their argument is perfectly logical. The Bible says this, here's what happened, everything seems to have gone along just like the Bible said it should. But there was a problem, at least as these intellectuals saw it. But the problem was not with the Bible, and certainly not, as they saw it, with their *view* of the Bible. The problem was with Jesus and His understanding of the Bible.

Here was their objection: "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her"" (v. 28). Now that seems like a fair question, no? It certainly follows *rationally* from their *premises* and

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logic. They expected Jesus to answer that question, but they were quite confident He could not. They would finally have Him at last, trapped in His own silly words about some “resurrection from the dead,” when even the simplest problem of logic could show why such a thing cannot be.

But Jesus was unfazed. He didn’t falter for a second, nor did He think twice about *reframing the debate* in order to demonstrate the *faulty* premises and *wrong* reasoning of His detractors. These intellectuals were mistaken. They were simply wrong, and Jesus was prepared to spell out for them why this was so.

The fact of the matter is that people today who oppose the Gospel are simply mistaken. They are *sincere* in their unbelief, and their arguments make perfect sense *to them*. But they’re mistaken, and part of our calling in this age in flight from God is to graciously, unflinchingly, and clearly demonstrate why this is so.

On the side of reason

Does this require of us that we become something *other* than reasonable in our response? Not at all. If you want to help people see where they’ve gone wrong in their thinking, it will hardly help you to respond irrationally or without good reasons to support your view.

God has called us to engage the thoughts, opinions, and worldviews of our contemporaries with the mind of Christ (2 Cor. 10.3-5), and we must remember that Christ is the *Logos* – the *Reason*, the *Explanation* – of God and all things. It would hardly suit our purposes or His to be anything other than *completely rational* in trying to help others see why their reasons and their views are wrong.

Which is precisely what Jesus did, and what we must learn to do as well.

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by “wrong reason”? How does reason go wrong?
2. What is the role of reason in helping others to understand the Christian faith and Christian worldview?
3. How qualified do you feel to engage in a reasoned discussion about the Christian worldview with an unbeliever? Why?

Next steps – Conversation: Is it possible that unbelievers who object to the Christian faith could be wrong? That they could be living and hoping in something other than the truth? Why not ask some of your Christian friends the following questions: “What’s wrong about not believing in the Gospel? How could people be so sincere and yet so wrong?” This should make for an interesting conversation with your Christian friends.

2 The Limits of Reason

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”* Isaiah 55.8, 9

Do animals reason?

Reason is a wonderful tool for sorting things out, understanding mysteries, and making our lives make sense – both to ourselves and to others. We need reason, *sound* reason, in order to make our way in this complex and wonderful world.

Human beings are not the only creatures that reason. Our dog Cu, for example, demonstrates a keen ability to reason, at least about certain things. Let’s suppose, for example, that he suddenly gets a craving for a treat. What can he do? In his little brain he knows that if he can go outside and at least appear to do his business, when I let him back in, there will be a treat waiting. So he thinks to himself, in whatever manner dogs think, “How can I get this old guy to give me a treat?” Here’s what he does. First, he goes to the door, sits down, and whimpers pathetically. Then he waits. If that doesn’t rouse me, he’ll come and sit down in front of me and stare at me. If that doesn’t work, he starts woofing and feinting toward the door, as if to say, “C’mon Dad, let’s go.”

All this is highly sophisticated reasoning on his part. He knows that the easiest way to get what he wants is to follow this protocol. But if that fails, he has back-up strategies, which he pursues until I let him out, then let him back in and give him his treat.

So it seems clear to me that animals reason. But the level at which *humans* reason, and the things about which they engage in logical thought, are much higher than anything we see in animals.

Just because Cu knows how to get me to give him a treat doesn’t mean I’m going to ask him to come up with topics for my columns for the week to come. He’s capable of reasoning, but his ability to reason is *bounded* by his experience, his knowledge of the world, and his imagination. Cu is able to imagine going outside to come back in and get a treat. Moreover, that’s consonant with his experience in the world. He knows what it takes to realize that objective, and he’s really good at achieving it.

But he is *not* – by reason of *being and experience* – able to envision a word processor or the ideas it encodes.

Reason, experience, knowledge, imagination

Because Cu cannot know in the way that I know, he cannot experience the world the way I do. That lack of knowledge and experience also limits his ability to imagine what might be *possible* in the world. He’s a dog, for crying out loud, and no one would expect him to think like a human.

At the same time, for all he knows – and this is confirmed by his experience – human beings think just like he does. Because when he whimpers at that door, I let him out, so that I can let him back in and give him a treat. He doesn’t realize that my thoughts and ideas are far more advanced, expansive, and elevated than his. What’s more, he probably doesn’t care. He shows no interest whatsoever in reading anything I’ve written.

Now the only way *not* to apply this little analogy to God is to assume that God does not exist. For if God *does* exist, and if He is a reasoning Being like we *human* beings are, then it only makes sense that He’s going to

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know more, that His *experience* is going to be vaster and more expansive than ours, and that He is probably capable of *imagining things* that *He* could make happen, even though we can't.

So, for many people, the best way to preclude having to reason with God – as, indeed, He invites human beings to do (Is. 1.18) – is to *deny that He exists*. That way, all us human beings are on the same level, and we can make arguments about this, that, and the other, so that, the more persuasive we seem to be, the more we can convince ourselves and others that we don't have to believe in Jesus or follow any of His teachings.

We know what we know

The problem, of course, is that there are bunches of folks in the world who actually do *know* God and who, *knowing Him*, have come into *more* knowledge and a *broader range of experiences* than those who do not. Presumably, that company includes you and me.

We are quite capable of imagining things that others, limited as they are by merely human and God-denying reason, are not able to imagine. And we *know* that what we know is *right*; therefore, those who assail and deny the truth as we know it, and who try so passionately to persuade others of the *rightness* of their views, are actually mistaken. They may be reasonable and respected, but they're wrong, and we know it.

And it's our duty to help them see this.

For reflection or discussion

1. What's the point of the little story about Cu? Do you think it's a valid argument?
2. How did you come to know God? What does it mean for you to know Him? Is knowing God a matter of *reason* alone? Explain.
3. How would you explain to someone what it means to know God and how he can come to know Him?

Next steps – Conversation: Human beings can “out-reason” animals – well, most of the time. Does it make sense that God can “out-reason” human beings? Here's something you can try with an unbelieving friend: Share your own version of my story about Cu and how animals reason. Then ask, “Does it make sense, if there is a God, that He might know more, have more experience, and be able to imagine more possibilities than we can?” Follow the conversation from there.

3 The Fatal “If”

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 1 Corinthians 15:12-14

The protocols of reason

Sound reason works according to a well-known formula: Given a *premise* and certain *facts*, one uses *reason* to work toward a *conclusion* that follows *logically*.

Paul demonstrates this “if/then” protocol of reason in his argument for the resurrection to the Christians in Corinth. Apparently the influence of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection before the Lord Jesus, was still operating in Paul’s day. False theologians followed him around wherever he went, seeking to corrupt his pure teaching of the Gospel by one or another form of Jewish or philosophical heresy. In Corinth they had been trying to make the faith of Jesus a purely “this world” matter, saying that there was no resurrection and throwing the churches in Corinth into confusion.

So notice Paul’s response: “If” there is no resurrection, “then” Christ is not raised. “If” Christ is not raised, “then” our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. He goes further: “If” it is true that the dead are not raised, “then” we who have preached the resurrection have been misrepresenting God. For, as he writes in verses 16 and 17, “For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!” And it gets worse: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (v. 19).

The secularist’s mistake

And that’s approximately where many in the secular world see believers today – except, of course, for the pitying part.

The secular *premise* is that people do not rise from the dead; thus, to stake your life on such a belief is to be naïve or a fool. The reason secularists cannot accept the resurrection of Christ is because of an even more fundamental premise, namely, that there is no spiritual realm, no God or angels, at least, not any that we must contend with or will be held accountable to, whether in this life or the next. They’re happy for the Bible to be a good book, and important book, and even a useful book, as long as you leave out the part about God, spirits, and rising from the dead.

And here is the secularist’s problem, at precisely the same place of the Jewish heretics of Paul’s day: They have mistaken their fundamental *premise* for a proven *fact*.

What do I mean? Well, in a logical formula, “if” is a *conditional* statement which may or may not be true. We can only arrive at a reliable “then” *conclusion* after all the facts have been weighed. “If” we mistake our conditional premise – the “if” component – for an established fact, rather than a premise awaiting proof, “then” we are going to select our *facts* accordingly and skewer the “then” component of our argument.

The Sadducees who came to Jesus with their little logic game did not come with an “if/then” formula to be considered. They *accepted* their fundamental premise *as a fact* so that they were not saying, “*If* there is no resurrection...” but “*Since* there is no resurrection...”, as much as if to say, “Since it’s true and everybody knows that there is no resurrection...” Jesus’ approach was to expose the folly of that fatal “if” by pointing out that they had not considered all the *facts* that should have gone into their conclusion.

And we who *know* that God exists, that there is a spiritual realm, and that human beings, made in the image of God are spiritual *and* reasoning creatures, and that a day of resurrection is *surely* coming, understand that our unbelieving contemporaries have made the fatal logical mistake of taking their *premise* as a *fact* before they've carefully considered *all* the relevant facts in the matter.

Setting forth the facts

Paul did the same thing at Corinth. The heretics there were saying “In fact, since there is no resurrection from the dead...” to which Paul answered, in verse 20, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead...” He simply reminded his readers that the view of his opponents was mistaken, and they knew it.

Secularism is wrong in its view of spiritual realities, for it takes as a widely-accepted *fact* what should be regarded merely as a *premise*, that there is no spiritual realm, no God of any consequence, no angels, and no resurrection. Nothing in the secular arsenal of reason, logic, science, philosophy, or hocus-pocus can *prove* that premise so that it should be regarded as a fact.

Thus, to accept it as a fact, while, at the same time, disregarding *abundant evidence to the contrary*, well, that's simply wrong reason.

For reflection or discussion

1. What's the difference between a “premise” and a “fact”? Give some examples:
2. What's the role of evidence in moving from a premise to a conclusion, or, a fact? What do we mean by “evidence”? What evidence would you point to concerning the existence of God, a spiritual realm, and the hope of resurrection?
3. Are “Christian facts” different from “other facts”? Explain:

Next steps – Conversation: Have you ever tried to discover the underlying premises behind the worldview of your unbelieving friends? Try talking to some unbelievers in your [Personal Mission Field](#). Ask them what they believe, for example, about spiritual things – about God and heaven and the resurrection. Then ask them whether they hold these views as facts or as premises awaiting further facts before they reach a conclusion. Talk with some Christian friends about what you discover.

4 Perfect Reason, Perfectly Wrong

One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Titus 1.12, 13

Can you believe it?

When Paul said, "This testimony is true" he was not *confirming* the ludicrous assertion of the Cretan philosopher Epimenides. He was really saying something more like, "I know, that's completely ridiculous, but I'm not kidding, some people are teaching this, and many are lapping it up. No joke."

Why was Paul so astounded that such views should receive a hearing within the household of faith, in the house churches on the island of Crete? Because this view, as we shall see, is completely *nonsensical*. It is mistaken, and the reason supporting it is wrong. It can provide no meaningful guidance for how we ought to live; indeed, it can't even be made to make sense within itself.

It sounds cool, and maybe even persuasive, but it's dead wrong.

Wrong reason in the churches

In the churches today many are listening to reasoned and persuasive arguments which are, in the end, simply wrong. Some Christian pastors are making a reasoned and persuasive case for the idea that the Gospel is mainly about finding happiness and prosperity here and now. Yes, we'll go to heaven when we die; but God's main concern is that we should be healthy and wealthy in this life. If we're not, it can only be because we have a faith too small.

That's very appealing, but it's just wrong.

Other pastors make a case for a kind of Christianity without doctrine. Christianity is about relationships, not doctrines. It's about accepting one another, making room for lots of different interpretations of what it means to be a Christian, and not judging one another just because our views of this, that, or something else are not the same. Christianity, these preachers insist, is a process of becoming one with Jesus, and we have to accept all kinds of human foibles, follies, and differences in the process, being content to leave the sorting out to God.

Yeah. No.

Now I know that preachers who make these arguments can sound *very reasonable*. This is why people flock to their churches, publishers sell their books by the millions, and their devotees defend them passionately. They may be very persuasive, but the *premises* of their teaching are informed more by the unbelieving spirit of the age than the unchanging Spirit of God. And because they have taken their particular *premise* as an established *fact*, they select their teaching topics accordingly and keep arriving at the same conclusion week-in and week-out.

Only when someone points out the folly and *irrationality* of their positions are they – and their myriad followers – likely to wake up to the truth.

The folly of Epimenides

Like the people on Crete: Some believers there were actually beginning to accept the glib but absurd teachings of Epimenides, which were finding their way somehow into the teaching ministry of the churches and causing great upset.

Paul was astounded because even the barest analysis of such teaching reveals its folly. Since Epimenides, a Cretan himself, was saying that *all* Cretans are liars, then that must mean he's a liar, too. And if so, then that means he was lying about Cretans being liars, and all Cretans are, therefore, truth-tellers. Because if they are, if all Cretans, including Epimenides, are *truth-tellers*, then he's not mistaken about all Cretans being liars. They're all truth-telling liars.

Obviously, such a view is absurd, mistaken, and untrue.

The subsequent confusion which arose from this admixture of Christian teaching and secular philosophy cast doubt on the authority of Cretan elders to govern the churches of that island or to insist on anything as final and unchanging truth. Which is why Paul's solution to this confusing situation was to exhort the elders to stand on the *facts* of God's truth and to refute the wrong reason of those who were seeking to undermine their authority and their teaching.

And the same thing is happening today. Today's false teachers blend Christian theology with secular worldviews – whether materialism or postmodern relativism – and, in the process, they confuse the faithful, cast doubt on the grand tradition of Christian doctrine, and rob thousands of the genuine article of the Gospel of the Kingdom. They are very reasonable and persuasive in their arguments – not to mention oh so winsome, personable, and glib. But though their *reasoning* may be perfect, their *premises* are false and their *conclusions* are wrong. They are mistaken about Christianity, just as they are mistaken about their unbelief.

And as Paul would say, they must be confronted, exposed, and silenced (Titus 1.11).

For reflection or discussion

1. In what ways have secular worldviews invaded the teaching and ministries of today's churches?
2. Why do you suppose, generation after generation, Christians continue to give in to the allure of unbelieving worldviews, and try to patch them into their Christian faith?
3. How might Christians guard themselves against this tendency? How can they help one another?

Next steps – Conversation: Take a few minutes to jot down the “basics” of your own Christian faith. Share these with a Christian friend, and invite your friend to add to the list. Then, together, document each of those beliefs using Scripture alone. Now ask yourself: Is my Biblical case for what I believe adequate? And how do I know whether or not I've included in my basic beliefs everything that should be there?

5 Reason beyond Reasons

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2.14-16

Don't despair!

Paul's statement about the limits of “natural” reason might cause us to despair of ever being able to explain our Christian worldview to our unbelieving friends, much less to help them see the mistaken ways of unbelief.

If they can't understand spiritual things, how can they ever understand the Gospel? How can we make our worldview make sense to them if they're trapped in the limitations of wrong reason and can't make sense of spiritual things?

Paul offers in these verses not an invitation to despair but a *strategy* for success in making the Good News of Jesus known to the people around us. That strategy consists of four components.

The Christian's strategy

First, we Christians need to *stop fretting and fussing* about what non-Christians think of us. Unbelieving people can't understand spiritual things, so what would we *expect* them to think about us?

They insist we are uneducated, anti-science, hypocritical, naïve, and fools. Big deal. Paul says we're not accountable to them. We only have to worry about what *God* thinks about us, and to bend our lives toward pleasing and honoring Him in all we do.

So if you're afraid of or irritated about what others might think or say about you, as you try to engage them in a conversation about spiritual matters, get over it! Such efforts might raise the scorn or sneers of men, but they gain the favor of God.

Second, we need to *develop the mind of Christ*, which is our unique possession as His followers.

As we've seen, Jesus didn't shy away from the arguments and worldviews of His unbelieving contemporaries. He listened politely while they proposed their views, then He took their views apart by exposing their false premises, which they were mistaking as facts, and pointing to *other facts* which led to conclusions that supported *His* teaching rather than *theirs*. We have the mind of Christ! We must learn to think like Jesus about the world around us and the people who oppose us. We should get busy making the most of the mind of Christ, learning to listen, analyze, think, and reason like Jesus did.

Third, we need to *believe that God intends to use our words to bring others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ*. No matter that they can't understand spiritual things. Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life” (Jn. 6.63), and when the Spirit is ready to give life to someone – no matter how fervent they may be in opposing the Gospel – there's simply nothing they can do but believe. Ask Saul of Tarsus.

So we need to be prepared, at the right time, to bring the Word of the Gospel to the attention of our unbelieving friends, leaving the work of convicting and converting them to the Spirit of God.

But, fourth, because our unbelieving friends worship at the altar of reason, because they have invested all their wellbeing in the belief that they can figure life out – they can make sense out of their experience, they are reasonable and rational and logical human beings who know what's best for them – because they believe all this, the kindest thing we can do is to *take them at their word and begin to engage them* in conversations designed

to tease out the content of their “reasoned” beliefs and to help them see the ways that wrong reason is robbing them of full and abundant life.

We’ll need to be able to identify the *premises* of their worldviews and to help them see the difference between these and *facts*. We’ll have to be ready with *facts* that support our own premises – facts from Scripture, history, culture, and our own experience. We’ll need to learn how to spot inconsistencies and contradictions in their reasons for believing what they do, and show them that such thinking just doesn’t make sense.

We understand that those who reject the *facts* of Scripture and the Christian faith will replace those *facts* with *premises* more agreeable to how they wish to live. But that doesn’t change the facts, and it is our duty, at every opportunity, to challenge the wrong reason of our unbelieving friends and colleagues, and to invite them to consider *facts* which point to different *premises* and thus lead to better *conclusions*.

Always be ready

Study the conversations of Jesus with the religious leaders of His day. Learn to listen like Jesus and to reason like Jesus. Stand firm in your Biblical convictions and be prepared to present evidence that supports your Christian worldview. Be winsome, but be firm. Be loving, but be in earnest.

Above all, be ready to give a reason for why this Biblical worldview gives you such *hope* (1 Pet. 3.15).

God can use us to break through the limits of wrong reason if we, employing the mind of Christ, will simply go as Jesus did to the unbelieving world around us.

For reflection or discussion

1. Review the four steps of the strategy for reaching unbelievers with the Gospel outlined in this lesson. The first is, Don’t be afraid of what others think. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself in this matter? Why?
2. The second step is, Learn to think with the mind of Christ. How would you rate yourself in this?
3. The third step is, Be ready with God’s Word when the Spirit is ready to use it. How would you rate yourself in this?
4. The fourth step is, Use sound reason to expose wrong reason. How would you rate yourself in this?

Next steps – Preparation: Spend the next few days getting to know some of the unbelievers in your Personal Mission Field. Find out their names. See what you can learn about their backgrounds, hopes, desires, and sense of purpose. Be genuinely interested and pay careful attention. Start praying for your unbelieving friends and acquaintances. And as you pray, ask God to quicken the mind of Christ within you, so that you will know how to take the next step in every situation.

6 More Facts

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. Matthew 22.29

The secularist's mistakes

The mistake many secular people make, as they think about Christianity, is the same the Sadducees made when they confronted Jesus with what they hoped would be a snare of logic to trap Him in His own teaching.

The mistake is twofold: First, they begin by assuming that their basic *premise* – no God, no spiritual realm, no resurrection from the dead – is instead an *established fact*. We've dealt with this part of the problem already. We've seen that nothing in the secular worldview can enable it to establish as a *proven fact* that there is no God, no spiritual world, and no rising from the dead. The protocols and limits of the secular worldview simply do not equip it to establish their view of such matters as *fact*.

This means that their premise is still just a premise, just as the Sadducees' premise about there being no resurrection was just a premise.

What a premise requires is *more facts*. So, second, when Jesus added more facts to the Sadducees' premise, the premise – that there is no resurrection or spiritual life – was shown to be false. What the secular *premise* requires, besides the reminder that it's just a *premise*, is more facts, and the Christian knows just where to turn in marshaling those facts.

Jesus said the Sadducees were wrong because *they did not know the Scriptures*. They knew the Scriptures, at least, they thought they did. But what Jesus was able to show them was that they did not know how to understand the most basic teaching of the Scriptures. And this meant that their premise, conclusion, and worldview were simply wrong.

Responding with God's Word

Notice how Jesus approached the Word of God in His response. He didn't turn to some arcane passage, hoping this was one the Sadducees had somehow overlooked. No; He appealed to a text which would have been very familiar to them, the account of God's appearing to Moses and calling him to lead Israel out of Egypt.

This text, from Exodus 3, would have been known by every Hebrew child: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3.6). Everybody knows something about the Bible. And almost everybody – including most secular people – will agree with what they know, or what they *choose* to know, about the Bible.

For example, if you ask your secular friend, "Do you believe we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves?" he would undoubtedly agree. Or if you ask, "Do you believe in the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you?" he'll surely affirm that he does.

What Jesus pointed out to the Sadducees was that while they *knew* the Scriptures, they didn't really *know* them at all. Their knowledge of Scripture was superficial at best. If they really read the Scriptures and knew them in their context, they'd see something completely different. Jesus pointed out that God is not the God of the dead; He did not say, "I *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He said, "I *am* their God." Jesus inferred from this that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive somewhere, and this He took as proof of the resurrection.

His response certainly resonated with the crowds, for when they heard it, they immediately grasped the sense of it, and were astonished at His teaching (Matt. 22.33).

On thin ice

The secularist is on thin ice *affirming* anything about Scripture, for the moment he affirms *anything* as true in Scripture he does two things: First, he puts himself in the position of having to consider that a book which contains *any* truth probably contains *more*; and, second, he exposes himself to a charge of *willful ignorance* concerning the fuller content of the Bible, content which, we know, has a direct bearing on his premise about spiritual things.

And if he affirms anything about Scripture to be *false*, he opens himself to the challenge of how he can know that, given that his most fundamental *life premise* precludes his being able to know *anything* about God or spiritual matters, whether they are real or not.

Before, therefore, he embraces any premise concerning spiritual matters as a *fact*, he needs to spend more time consulting this Book of truth which he trusts at one level, fears at another, but of which, at a deeper and more important level, he is completely and willfully ignorant.

And, of course, you'll want to be available to help him make those further explorations into the Word of God.

For reflection or discussion

1. Summarize the mistakes secularists make in denying validity to the Christian worldview:
2. Do you agree that almost everyone will agree with something in the Bible? Give some examples of some things unbelievers might affirm:
3. Outline the argument here for using those affirmations as a way of exposing the secularist's mistake in denying validity to the Christian faith (two thrusts):

Next steps – Conversation: Try this out with an unbelieving friend. Ask your friend whether there is anything in the Bible he considers to be true. Then ask this follow-up question: "Given that you accept the Bible to be true at one level, how can you be sure that it's not true in other ways as well? Do you know enough about the Bible to decide what to accept and what to reject?" Then offer to read the Gospel of John with your friend. Hey, all he can do is say, "No thanks."

7 The Power of God

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. Matthew 22.29

God and matter

There is a second missing component from the secularist's anti-Christian logic, and we need to point this out as well.

Jesus rebuked the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, by saying to them that their mistake lay in not knowing the Scriptures or *the power of God*. As far as the Sadducees could tell, people don't rise from the dead. They die, you embalm them and put them in a tomb, and that's that. They could see no way that dead people could come back to life, and nothing in their experience suggested that such was even a remote possibility.

Dead people stay dead, they believed, and so whatever religion we're going to practice, it will be strictly a here-and-now thing.

They didn't understand that the Scriptures teach the resurrection from the dead in many places. Or else their wrong premises prevented them from *seeing* such teaching in the Scriptures. They read the Scriptures faithfully, I suppose; but they were *predisposed against* seeing anything like a resurrection from the dead in their reading because they'd already made up their minds that rising from the dead was not a possibility. Their experience of life, limited as it was, led them to insist that, of course, whatever God there is must also organize His affairs along the same lines.

God, they reckoned, was as limited by space and time and the restrictions of material existence as they were.

Once Jesus had shown them that they didn't know the Scriptures, it was but a short step further to declare that they were also ignorant of the power of God. They did not know God and so they did not understand that His power operated over, through, in, upon, and for all material things, not in subjection to them. Indeed, Jesus spent a good deal of His earthly ministry demonstrating this fact. His miracles were designed to express the power of God to make sick things well, broken things whole, and dead things live.

God's power is neither defined nor limited by familiar material processes or "laws of science." God made and upholds everything that is; His power is the determining force in the existence of all things. He can do with them what He wills, and they must obey His Word.

God's power

So, Jesus explained, if God determined to raise the dead, He certainly had the power to do so. And, as He was about to demonstrate through His own death and resurrection, this is precisely what God intends to do. The resurrection of Jesus would be the final blow to the lie that dead people don't rise. And it would bear powerful and confirming testimony to all the other teachings of Scripture.

So we need to say to our unbelieving friends, when they snort at the idea of God or heaven or rising from the dead, that their faulty premise and wrong reasoning have led them to a wrong conclusion, both because they do not know the Scriptures and are completely unacquainted with the power of God. They do not know the Scriptures and therefore cannot be relied upon to judge what the Bible actually teaches. And they have not experienced and do not understand the power of God, so they are not in a position to comment one way or another on that subject.

Of course we will want to be winsome and respectful as we insist on the wrongheadedness of their reasoning and the silliness of their conclusions about God and the spiritual world. But we're not doing them any favors by simply shrugging our shoulders and saying, "Well, you're entitled to your opinion." After all, the God Who

gave His Son for their redemption and Who will one day preside over the flimsy excuses of every human being, would *never* say anything like that.

The requirements of neighbor-love

Our unbelieving friends and neighbors are lost; they are dead in their trespasses and sins, and they have covered their eyes and filled their lives with lies and half-truths in order to keep from seeing the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

“If” we truly love our neighbors as we love ourselves, “then” we will not sit by while they lie their way to eternal perdition. We will engage them in conversations about spiritual matters, and listen politely and carefully as they proffer their reasons for *not* believing the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will ask questions, seek clarification, point out inconsistencies in their views, and try to show them where they’ve overlooked relevant facts. We will do everything in our power to understand and expose their wrong reasoning, and we will call them to consider Jesus and the Christian worldview as the only workable approach to a full and abundant life.

And we will use as much of the Word of God and the Good News of Jesus as time and circumstances allow, for we know that the Spirit of God wields the power of God for eternal life by means of this effectual, two-edged sword.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why does God not have to abide by the “laws of nature”?
2. How does the resurrection of Jesus demonstrate the power of God over things “everybody knows”?
3. How does His resurrection validate all the other teachings of Scripture?

Next steps: Download the PDF of this series, Wrong Reason. Make copies for some of your Christian friends. Hand them out and invite them to join you in working through this study again and discussing the questions which the PDF provides. Make this a real opportunity to begin reaching out to the people around you with the love of Jesus.

Wrong Reason

For reflection or discussion

1. Why do we insist that secularists are wrong in their conclusions about the Bible, God, and Christian faith?
2. Explain premises, facts, and conclusions and how these relate to what we can confidently claim to know.
3. What *facts* do we need to make sure our unbelieving friends consider carefully?
4. What is the Gospel? What would you say to someone who asked you to give a reason for the hope that is within you?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How will this help you in your witness to the people in your Personal Mission Field?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.