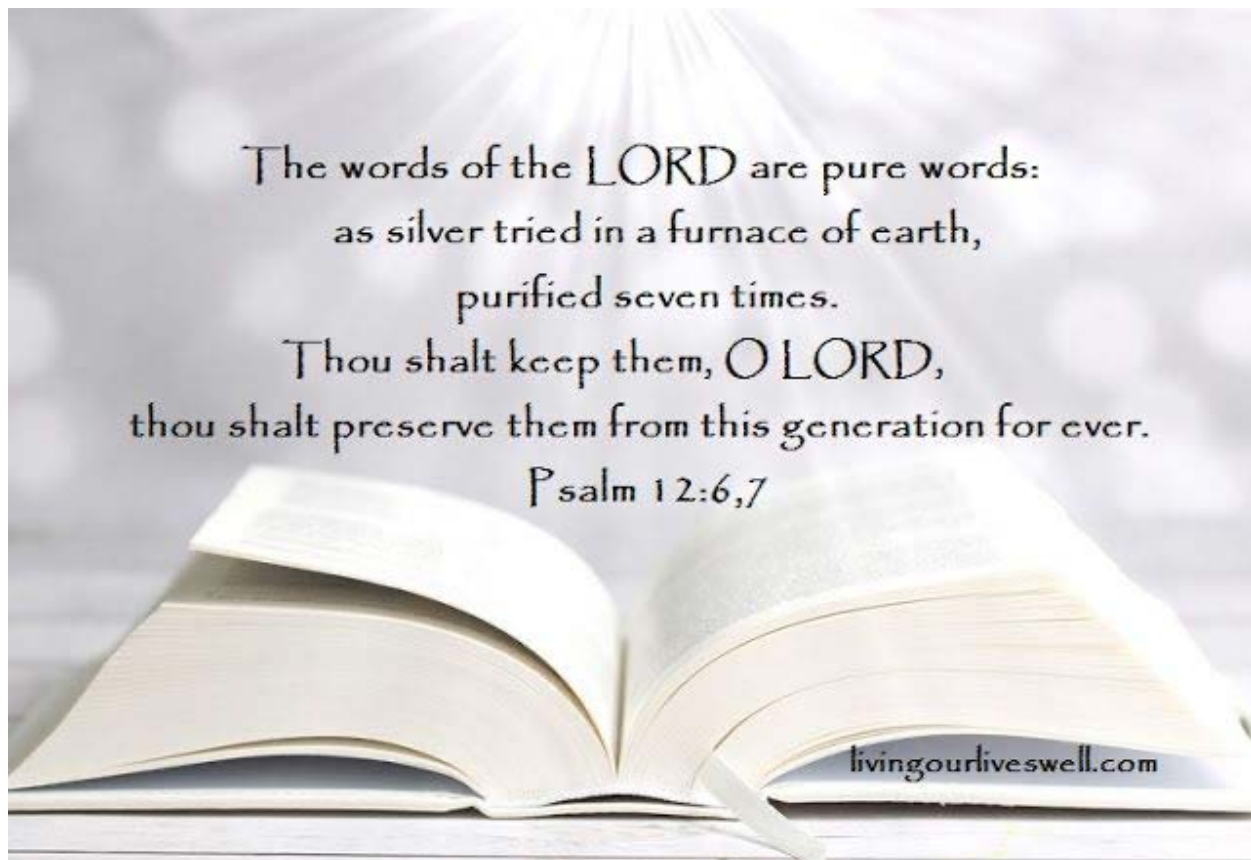


REASON IN THE SERVICE
OF FAITH
LET GOD BE TRUE (4)



Reason is a reliable tool for helping others come to know the truth of God.

T. M. MOORE

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Reason in the Service of Faith
Let God Be True (4)
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Welcome to *Reason in the Service of Faith*

People who are committed to following lies rather than God do not cease to be reasoning beings. They still want their minds to make sense, and they tend to think logically, most of the time.

But starting at a point of wrong-belief, their reasoning is always going to go askew.

Reason, however, is a gift of God. Reason won't save anyone, but it can create a path of fresh insight and understanding along which the grace of God can travel as it pleases Him. Thus we need to learn how to use reason in the service of faith, and what we might expect as we do.

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Open to Reason?

*“Come now, and let us reason together,”
Says the LORD... Isaiah 1.18*

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear... 1 Peter 3.15

A reason for hope

The apostle Peter, following the encouragement of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, commands the followers of Jesus Christ to be always ready to give a *reason* for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3.15). This is not an option, and it's not a calling reserved for some apologetical storm trooper. Every believer is in contact with people whose lives are being consumed by the lies of our day. Our calling, as citizens of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, is to represent Jesus as His ambassadors and witnesses so that others will see in us a hope they do not possess and will be open to learning about the source of this. At such times, we must be prepared with an explanation, which we will present as reasonably and lovingly as we can.

A “reason” – the Greek is ἀπολογία, *apologia*, “defense” or “reason” – is simply an answer to an inquiry, an explanation, laid out simply and logically, the purpose of which is to account for the hope others see in our lives. Both Jesus and Paul understood the need to employ reasoning skills in presenting the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Reason is the means whereby we may hope to break through the layers of ignorance, misunderstanding, misinformation, deceit, and lies with which many people's minds are clouded, to help them get a good, clear look at the truth of the Gospel. Reason won't save anyone. But reason can pave the way for grace to enter the heart via the Word and Spirit of God.

But are people in our day really open to reasoning about religion?

Making sense of things

As many may see it, our generation has become so mired in self and whatever wrong-believing rationalizations may be required to sustain a lifestyle of indulgence and sensuality, that it's just no longer possible – or, at least, highly unlikely – to discuss calmly, intelligently, and rationally anything that might call into question their preferred manner of life.

And that may be true for many of the people we will encounter. Many, but not all.

The fact is, people today still function rationally; they still depend on their ability to reason to make sense out of their lives and to make it through each day. The problem is not that people today are immune to reason; it's that their *ability* to reason is trapped in an “under the sun” paradigm which maintains a closed roof against spiritual truth. They are prisoners to the lie. They're still reasoning, they're just reasoning within a closed universe and ignoring the larger reality of God and His will.

What we as believers and witnesses must do is learn to use reason, not to batter a hole in that ceiling, but to lead our unbelieving friends to remove some of the roof tiles, so that they might glimpse the larger reality that has thus far lay beyond their purview.

Reason can help them accomplish this important task, just as it helped Nicodemus, for example, begin thinking in a new way about what it means to live unto the Lord (Jn. 3.1-17).

Beyond reach?

Still, even if we succeed in getting our friends to peer into the opened roof of their own worldview then beyond to the larger, brighter, purer realm of the Gospel, can we really expect to make this wonderful Good

News make sense to them?

After all, the proponents of an atheistic, materialistic, and hedonistic worldview are so many! Their voices assault our generation through the media, pop culture, political speech, and everyday conversations. They have been aggressive and outspoken; and the entire drift of the social, moral, and cultural spirit of the age is contrary to the Gospel in so many ways. As David lamented in Psalm 12, we are awash with lies. Lies have become *de rigueur* for this generation, and the effect is to corrupt reason and obscure truth. We might be tempted to think that our contemporaries are simply beyond the reach of any explanation of Jesus and His work.

And, indeed, our age can be so given to passion and whim that any *reasoned* attempt to make sense of the Gospel could be rebuffed as boring, irrelevant, or simply absurd. That's the risk we run.

Our responsibility is not to *convince* others of the truth of the Gospel, only to *represent that truth* in a reasoned and loving manner, to use reason to create a handrail for leading our friends along an unfamiliar path, one that will both show them some problems with their own worldview – problems they have not yet noticed – and which will insist that the Gospel is the truth our friends really need to make their lives make sense.

As in every age, not everyone will be agreeable to such a reasoned explanation of the Gospel. However, *some* will. And, if only for the sake of the “some,” we need to be ready with a *reasonable* explanation of the Good News for every opportunity the Lord might place before us.

Our calling is not merely to stop the progress of lies. It is to advance the truth that is in Jesus Christ through our lives and witness. And to this end, we must be faithfully in daily obedience and always ready to explain the hope that radiates from us in everything we do.

For reflection

1. Why must we be ready to explain the hope that is within us?
2. What do you think is involved in getting ready to do that?
3. Reason won't save anyone. But what can reason do, if we learn to use it faithfully, carefully, and lovingly?

Next steps – Preparation: What does hope look like? How do you express the hope you have in Jesus in your daily life?

2 God Who Reasons

“Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD...” Isaiah 1.18

In the beginning was the Word...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... John 1.1, 14

The reasonableness of God

The Scriptures charge us with the responsibility of giving a reason for the hope that is within us. The light of Christ radiating in and through us will take observable forms – peace, joy, encouragement, kindness, helpfulness, and hope. People will see such things, and some will want to know how we can be this way in a world rife with so much selfishness, uncertainty, and anxiousness. We need to be ready to explain, to give reasons for the hope that is within us, for as we do, Jesus Whom we set apart in our hearts will make Himself known to the people God sends us to day by day.

As we begin preparing to reason about our faith with the people to whom God sends us, we need to make sure we have confidence in the *power* of reason to open a way for the Gospel through the “closed ceiling” of a wrong-believing worldview. One reason we can be confident in the power of reason is that God Himself relies on reason. Indeed, He is a most reasonable Deity.

The reasonableness of God is evident in Scripture in three ways. First, He reveals Himself as a God who carefully *considers and takes counsel* with Himself with respect to His purposes (cf. Gen. 1.26; Ps. 33.11; Prov. 8.12-22). God makes and executes plans (Is. 55.8, 9; Jer. 29.11; Acts 2.23), and His plans all fit together, work together, and come together in redemptive ways, all the parts and developments in His plan falling neatly into place according to His eternally reasonable design.

God is not a capricious Deity. He does not act in ways that make it difficult to know Him or His will. His purposes are carefully considered and prudentially engaged, and in such a way that human beings can understand what He is about.

Reasonable revelation

Second, God shows us that He Himself is reasonable in that He makes known Himself and His will in a wide range of rational ways – through types and symbols and teachings and verbal exchanges of many different sorts. Anyone who takes the time to read the Bible can understand it. Its stories are stories about people like us. The teachings of Scripture are not shrouded in arcane or mystical language. What God has done and what God requires can be clearly discerned by any reasonable person, because God reveals Himself and His will in terms amenable and accessible to reason.

God engages the minds of people in communicating His revelation and will (2 Pet.1.21), using their thoughts and words as vehicles for His own. Granted, we cannot fully understand the reasons, purposes, and thoughts of God (Is. 55.8, 9; Ps.139.17, 18; Eccl. 3.11); nevertheless, He makes Himself known in Scripture and throughout creation such that people can know Him and, as it were, think His thoughts after Him (Rom. 1.18-20). God makes Himself known, together with His purposes and will, *by reasonable means* in His Word.

Further, the Bible employs a wide range of literary genre, addresses a broad spectrum of subjects, and engages an array of writers from different places and times; yet it tells a single, coherent story in language even a child can understand. Its sentences are readily intelligible, and its meanings are clear.

While there is much that is spiritually profound in the Scriptures, requiring much earnest study and contemplation, the essential teachings of the Bible can be easily understood by even the humblest human mind. God reasons, and He uses reasonable means to make Himself known; and this should encourage us in our use of reason as well.

Reason incarnate

Finally, the reasonableness of God can be observed in the fact that, when He came among us in the form of a human being, He came as the *Logos* – the “reason” or “explanation” or “declaration” or “rationale” of God. He came in the form of a thinking, logical, teaching Person, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was hailed by those who heard Him as a wise master Teacher. His teaching left people puzzling at times, but mainly because of the shock of what they understood Him to be saying. Those who admired Him marveled at His words, while those who hated Him despised them.

But they all understood His teachings and claims; and, indeed, it was precisely because Jesus was *so* clear in His preaching that He was ultimately put to death. His enemies and all the people were not unclear in their minds about what Jesus was teaching. They were simply opposed to it, and Him, as not in line with their own worldview and selfish ambitions.

Had Jesus come speaking irrational sentences or spinning mystifying yarns and declaring disconnected doctrines, the people of His day would have pitied Him as either a madman or a mystic. They would not have understood Him, and so they would have had no reason either to follow or persecute Him. They simply would have left Him alone.

But Jesus did not come this way. He spoke reasonably and clear, and He forced His opponents to face up to the *un*reasonableness of their wrong-believing views. It was because Jesus was *so* reasonable that multitudes of ordinary folk thronged to be near Him while the smug and threatened elites plotted His death.

God is a reasoning Being. His reason is always perfect, holy, just, and good. We should expect, therefore, that such a Being would invest us, His ambassadors, with a message that could be clearly understood by reasoning beings, when we freely and gladly share reasons for the hope that is within us.

For reflection

1. Why is it important to understand that God makes use of reason in making Himself known?
2. Can you think of a way that Jesus appealed to the reason of the people who heard Him?
3. Jesus used questions to get people thinking – to engage their reason. What are some questions you might use to start a conversation with someone today?

Next steps – Preparation: Make sure you understand the Gospel. How would you explain the Gospel of the Kingdom to someone who asked you about it?

3 Reasoning Creatures

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Acts 17.16, 17

Made like God

We can have confidence in our ability, through reason, to help our unbelieving friends examine their wrong-believing lives and consider the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. God Himself is reasonable, and He commends the use of reason in making Himself and His will known to men.

A second cause for having confidence in reason is because human beings are *made in the image and likeness* of God (Gen. 1.26-28) and are therefore also reasonable beings. This is true of every human being. Because we are humans we think, plan, consider, compare, analyze, conclude, evaluate, and all the other cognitive functions common to reasoning beings. Reasoning is an important means for coming to know anything, and that can include our own misguided thinking and the truth that is in Jesus.

To be sure, human reason does not function on the same level as God's, and it is negatively affected by sin in our heart; nevertheless, enough of reason still functions in men that the apostle Paul employed it in talking with Jews, Greek philosophers, and people in the street.

Further, it's likely that most of the people to whom we hope to give a reason for the hope that is within us will not agree with us that they are the image-bearers of God. However, their denial of what Scripture clearly asserts in no way nullifies what God has revealed. Indeed, let God be true (Rom. 3.3, 4).

Reasonable like God

Like God, people make plans, take counsel, and communicate in reasonable language. They want to be understood, and so they work hard to make their meanings clear. Reason, as exercised by human beings, is *analogous* to God's reason; it follows the pattern of the way God Himself uses reason. Our reasoning is not exactly like His, because He is *reason itself*, while human reason is practiced by finite and fallen creatures in a world awash in lies (Is. 55.8, 9; Rom. 1.18-32). But the reasoning of people is sufficiently *like* God's way of thinking that, as we have seen, He can make known Himself and His will by various means to human minds.

Because human beings are reasoning beings, and because they are made in God's image to know Him (Jn. 17.3), God expects and, indeed, the history of the Gospel abundantly shows, that human beings can make sense out of the Lord's will and plan, even to the point of agreeing with it and embracing it as their own.

Let me say again that human beings are made in the image of God whether or not they think so or agree with us on this matter. They are who they are, as God has made them. They may rail against the prospect of it and deny any affinity with God whatsoever, but this does not change who they are or how we must approach them, as beings who reason, in seeking to make God's Good News make sense.

Do we know better? Yes we do!

In truth, and in all humility, we know more about the people with whom we would reason about the Gospel than they know about themselves. We know that, as reasoning creatures, they are amenable to God's reason – His *Logos*. But they must be helped to discover a way through the ceiling of false and faulty reasoning under which they have chosen to dwell, so that the clear light of truth can illuminate new and more reasonable accommodations for their souls.

We can also see that people are reasoning beings because each one of them has chosen a way of life that *seems right* to them (Prov. 14.12). The life they're living, lies and all, makes sense to them. They have values, make

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decisions, pursue vocations, make and spend money, and everything else they do according to a few basic ideas about what's really important in life. Their approach seems to work well for them. But this may be only because they have not seriously examined their beliefs or considered the long-term ramifications of their views.

It's true that, for many people today, this way of living is not critically considered and embraced; they haven't reasoned very carefully about their chosen way of life. They have merely imbibed it from their upbringing, social environment, and the surrounding culture. Many – perhaps most – people whose orientation to life is merely “under the sun” have not made a *reasoned examination* of the way of life they've chosen to pursue.

Part of our task will be to help them undertake this effort, using reason in the service of faith.

Right reason

Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, we do not ask people to put reason aside in considering the Gospel. Rather, we hope to lead them, through patient questioning and conversation, to learn how to *use reason aright*, as God intended when He made them in His image. By giving a reason for the hope that is within us, we can help people to examine their own beliefs more carefully and to confront any problems in their views and practices that may not sit well with a reasoned approach to life.

But again, even should we succeed in demonstrating the *unreasonableness* of their wrong beliefs, this is no guarantee they will repent of their views and turn to Jesus Christ. Reason cannot accomplish this. Only grace can. But reason, by leading to closer examination of worldviews, can lead to greater awareness and even a note of unsettledness which may, in time, lead a wrong-believer to seek God as He intends.

We can have confidence, therefore, that, by the gracious and prudent use of reason in communicating the Gospel of the Kingdom, those we are seeking to reach can *understand* the message we are urgent to convey, and can compare it to their own views with perhaps greater objectivity. They may not like what they hear or learn, or they may disagree with it, or receive it; but they will be able to *understand* it, and this is all we, as God's witnesses, are responsible to achieve.

For reflection

1. Why is it important to understand that people are reasoning creatures?
2. What do we mean by saying we know more about our wrong-believing friends than they do?
3. We do not trust in reason to convert someone to Jesus Christ. We trust in God and His grace. What can you do to bring that grace into your conversations with others?

Next steps – Preparation: Suppose today you were asked to give a reason for the hope that is within you. What would you say?

4 A Reasonable Tool

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.* Proverbs 26.4, 5

Reason then and now

Believers are commanded always to be ready to give a *reason* for the hope that is within us. We must be able to explain what we believe and to help others examine their own beliefs. Reason is the best tool for this effort. We can have confidence in reason to communicate our hope because God is a reasoning Being and human beings, His image-bearers, are reasoning creatures.

We can also have confidence in reason to explain our hope in Jesus because the Bible uses reason to do precisely that. This suggests that reason itself is a *reasonable tool* for the communication of eternal and spiritual truths.

All the writers of Scripture present their material in carefully reasoned ways, with clear logic and precisely crafted arguments or story lines. All the people in the Bible who were called to the work of proclaiming God's will – prophets, preachers, apostles, and everyday believers – made use of sound reason to get their message across. The people of their day were no more attune to such disciplines as logic, argumentation, and the like than the people of our own. But every human being understands certain of the basics of reason, and they make use of reason every day of their lives. Thus, we have every reason to believe that what worked as a tool for the writers and preachers of Scripture can work for us yet today.

We do not look to reason to convert anyone to faith in Jesus Christ. Reason can, however, set the stage for grace to accompany the proclamation of the Good News and bring a new heart and a new life as God is pleased to do.

Reason as a tool

As a tool, reason works according to certain rules and procedures. We know these intuitively, so much so, in fact, that we can sense when someone is beginning to be “unreasonable” in a discussion or an argument, or when the logic of their views doesn't make sense.

In general, reason proceeds as follows: First, discover or declare the facts and claims to be considered. Next, entertain contrary facts and claims. Third, weigh all facts and claims against available evidence. And finally, follow the weight of the evidence to achieve an appropriate commitment.

This is a very simplistic outline, I know, and there are various pitfalls and traps to be avoided in the use of reason. Nevertheless, for our purposes, this brief outline can help to keep us focused on the task at hand, that of providing a *reasonable* explanation of why the Gospel gives us such hope.

So we have many good reasons to expect that, if we can learn to use reason as a tool for making the Gospel make sense to our generation, many will hear the truth for the first time, and some of those who hear will actually believe (Acts 17.32-34). We cannot bypass reason in making the Good News known; we must not substitute appeals to emotion, offers of relief from pressing difficulties or fears, or anything less than the clear exposition of truth in working to win the hearts of lost men and women for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

We must proclaim the Gospel to our generation, just as believers in every generation before us. And we must rely on sound reason as a valuable tool for making God's Good News make sense. The Gospel is reasonable. It makes sense – we know it does.

The challenge we must be willing to take up is to make this reasonable Good News make sense to the wrong-believing people around us. And again, while we may become skilled at giving a reason for the hope that is within us, so that those who hear us understand our reasons and explanations, this is no guarantee that those who *understand* will *believe* the Good News we proclaim.

The limits of reason

We must not be naïve about the power of reason. Reason can only do so much. No one can be reasoned into believing the Gospel. That requires a work of the Spirit of God, a work of faith. Reason can clear the way for faith, but it cannot engender it. Only God can do that. Ultimately, we rely on God to make the Gospel make sense to the people to whom He sends us. We plead with Him to have mercy and grace at the ready as we explain the Good News. We urge and seek to persuade, but we know that only God can convert.

After all, there are many hindrances to reason at work within the hearts and minds of our wrong-believing friends – doubts, biases, prejudices, and dumb ideas. Mere reason may not be able to overcome all of these. But we should always remember that we do not rely on mere reason *alone* for bringing the light of truth to our unbelieving age. God's Spirit works with our words, and He can overcome even the most stubborn obstacles to reason, so that people might believe the Good News through the work of God's Spirit.

So, even as we *reason* with our unbelieving friends, using reason as a tool to prepare the way for grace, we must remember that only if God the Spirit works with our words – and if our words are faithful to the Word of God – will our friends come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Reason is a tool, but the Holy Spirit is the power of grace for faith and eternal life.

For reflection

1. What's the danger that comes with believing that reason is a tool for converting others to faith in Jesus?
2. What's the danger in failing to use reason as a way of preparing for the work of God's Spirit in converting others?
3. Why can we rest content, giving thanks and praise to God, whenever we have explained the hope that is within us, regardless of how others respond?

Next steps – Conversation: Today, strike up a conversation with someone in your Personal Mission Field. In the process, share a bit of your testimony about trusting Jesus Christ.

5 Reason and Sin

*“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

Sent and armed

The Gospel is reasonable. That is, it can be understood with no formal training or spiritual experience. Even children can understand the Gospel. Using the simplest logic and care, every believer can share the Good News with any lost person, and any lost person can understand that Good News when it is presented in a reasoned manner. The Gospel is reasonable, most importantly, to God. He devised it and He accomplished it. Now He has commissioned His people to proclaim it to the world, so that all may hear.

People all over the world – and everywhere in our lives – deserve a reasoned explanation of the hope that is within us.

Believers in Jesus Christ, all who know Him as Lord and Savior, are expected to give a reason for why they believe in Jesus to anyone who might ask them. As we have seen, we have many good reasons for believing that reason can be a helpful tool in enabling a wrong-believing friend to consider the claims and promises of the Gospel.

And God has sent us to the wrong-believing world, armed with reason, for precisely this purpose. Reason can bring us to the threshold of a lost person’s soul, but only grace can accomplish a saving entrance. We must do what God has called us to, trusting that He will do what He considers best in every situation where we are giving a reason for the hope that is within us.

Sin and reason

But there is a huge gulf between God’s reasoning, the reasonableness of the Gospel, our reasoned presentation of the hope that is within us, and the reasoning powers of lost human beings. Helping our friends to see the reasonableness of the Gospel could take some time, especially when it is the case that spiritual truths are not presently a part of their worldview. We should expect to have to work a bit to make God’s thinking make sense to the people around us. This will involve building trusting relationships and engaging serious conversations, perhaps over a long period of time.

Compounding this challenge is the problem of sin. As if it weren’t bad enough that human beings – unlike God – are *finite*, add to this the fact that we’re also *fallen*, and you have a real challenge to surmount in using reason as a way of making God’s Good News make sense to the people around you. For, in a very real sense, the *hearts* of people are turned against God, making it difficult for their *minds* to give Him serious consideration.

At the same time, our own hearts are prone to fear and disobedience, which may incline us to disregard or deny our calling to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

This is the result of sin, a condition affecting every human being.

Sin entered the human condition early on, as we read in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve had known communion with God. They’d heard His voice and were enjoying all the blessings of His bounty. They knew what He had commissioned them to do and that He had warned them against eating from a certain tree in the garden, on pain of death should they disobey.

Clearly, they understood God's intent. Nevertheless, Adam and Eve were creatures – just like we are, and just like the people to whom God is sending us with His Good News. As creatures they were not infinitely wise and, hence, were susceptible to being led astray from truth. If, because of lust in their hearts, *their* reason could be clouded by subtle twistings of the truth, vain rationalizations, and false promises and hopes, the same is true for the people to whom we will be trying to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

As well as for us.

The power of sin

Moreover, the effects of sin on every aspect of a person's life are corrupting and confusing.

Paul explains in Romans 3.10-18 that sin turns the thoughts of people away from God, leading them to focus on themselves and what they want out of life. Desire for God is replaced by the lust of the flesh. Knowledge of truth gives way to the embrace of lies. Morality becomes merely self-referential, language is turned into a tool for advancing self-interest, and relationships suffer in a wide variety of ways as sin blackens the hearts and darkens the understanding of people (Eph. 4.17-19).

Reason is still working, to be sure, but it's working on all the wrong premises and toward all the wrong ends.

So we must not be naïve about the powerful effects sin can have on a person's ability to see through the ceiling of unbelief to the clear skies of divine light and truth. We'll need to have patience with the people to whom we're trying to explain our faith. We'll want to pray faithfully for God's Spirit to be at work within them, using our reason to prepare the way for faith. Our unbelieving friends may make light of our views or go on the offensive against what we believe, but we must remain gentle and respectful, patient, loving, and kind. Which is just to say that we must be careful to keep sin from corrupting our witness or our relationships.

At the same time, we must not back down from what we know to be true.

Above all, we must seek to keep the conversation going, trusting in the Lord and His Spirit to use us as chosen vessels of truth to explain the hope of the Gospel to the people in our lives.

Sin will get in the way of a reasoned explanation of the Gospel. But let it not be *our* sin that keeps such explanations from being heard. Sin may well leave wrong-believers blind to the truth that is in Jesus, but it must not get in the way of our continuing to pursue that reasonable explanation as often as we can.

For reflection

1. How can you see that sin affects your own thinking about things at times?
2. Remember that the goal of our witness is to enable others to *understand* the Gospel, not necessarily to *believe* it. Explain.
3. Conversations about the Gospel don't just happen. We need to cultivate our conversational skills and look for opportunities to begin conversations that might lead to spiritual matters. What are some ways you might do this?

Next steps – Conversation: Today, share with someone in your Personal Mission Field something God has taught you from His Word of late. Share positively and eagerly, and ask for your friend to respond.

6 Seems Right, but So Wrong

*There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.* Proverbs 14.12

Made for God

Human beings were made for God – to know, enjoy, and glorify Him. We fulfill our purpose in life, our reason for being, when, in every aspect of our lives, all our speech and works, we experience God’s glory and give evidence of the existence of God and of His wisdom, goodness, beauty, truth, and love (Rom. 5.1, 2; 2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31). Knowing, loving, and serving God is our highest calling and the source of our greatest pleasure and joy (Jn. 17.3; Ps. 16.8, 10).

This is what Solomon meant in the book of Ecclesiastes by living “under the heavens” rather than “under the sun” (Eccl. 1.13, 14).

Paul explains that sin causes people to “fall short” of this purpose (Rom. 3.23). Rather than live in such a way as to demonstrate gratitude and give honor to God, people seek to fulfill their own self-interests and to indulge themselves by whatever means gratify their lusts (cf. Rom. 1.18-32).

Having turned away from the truth, people become trapped in a spiritual and moral, downward spiral of sin, disappointment, discouragement, corruption, and death.

Under sail in a sea of lies

To those who are caught in the grip of sin and under the influence of the father of lies, their chosen way of life seems to make perfectly good sense (Prov. 14.12). At least, it *seems* to make sense. They can make their own decisions about what’s most important, how they ought to live, what they owe to others or society, and what they can do with their time, money, and body.

People who live this way for many years come to believe this is simply the way everyone else lives, too. Granted, it may be necessary to make adjustments here and there, to accommodate the wishes of those in power over us – employers, say, or civil magistrates. Even to compromise on certain convictions they used to consider inviolable.

But all such subordinating of their wills to the demands of those in power or the spiritual and moral temper of the times is done in an effort to get what they want. Even if what they want has changed from what they once hoped to achieve. Life becomes pragmatic and morals merely relative when you have shoved off from God and set your sails into the winds of lies and mere self-interest.

The chosen lifestyle of those who are immersed in sin *seems* to be right. It makes sense to them to live as they do, even though they have their share of frustration, disappointment, and defeat. They know struggles and setbacks, but they continue to believe that, if they just stay their chosen course in life – the course that seems right to them – then, sooner or later, everything will work out as it should.

Drifting away

Meanwhile, they continue to drift further and further from God’s purpose for their lives, even though they become more and more convinced that their chosen way of living is right for them.

Such people are still reasoning beings, but they have used reason in a way that runs contrary to God’s thinking and purposes. Their reason has become clouded and confused because they want what *they* want rather than what *God* wants. They have built up around them an edifice of ideas, opinions, and poorly considered beliefs, and have set up shop within that framework, thinking it’s the right kind of

accommodations for them.

They have erected over their heads a roof of wrong belief, and their chosen habitation seems just right for them. All their highest thoughts, hopes, and aspirations rise up to the ceiling of their worldview, but they can go no further. Their thinking and longing will never enable them, on their own, to break through the roof tiles of their wrong-believing worldview to discover the larger vistas of light and truth that lie beyond.

This is where we come in.

As we get to know the people around us and take the time to listen to their stories and views, we will understand more about their chosen worldview – that way of life that seems right to them. And then we can begin looking for ways to focus the light of truth through the cracks and fissures in the ceiling of their thinking – which we will help to create by our patient and reasoned explanation of the hope that is within us.

By asking questions, exploring our friends' views more carefully, and inviting them to explain their own way of thinking, we might be able to help them shift around the ceiling tiles of their worldview just enough to let the light of truth begin to show through.

And, at the same time, we will explain, in the most reasonable terms, how the Gospel of Jesus Christ fills the gaps and buoys the hopes of all who believe in Him.

For reflection

1. Where do wrong-believers get their ideas about what to seek and how to live?
2. Why is it unwise and unloving to sit by and allow people we know to believe whatever they want, whatever seems right to them?
3. What's one question you might use to start a conversation about someone else's worldview?

Next steps – Preparation: Make a list of questions you might begin asking the people in your Personal Mission Field to discover the way of life that seems right to them (1 Cor. 10.12).

7 The Mind of Sin

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2.24-26

What we know in common

Outwardly, the person trapped in the clutches of sin and lies can seem to be doing quite well, thank you.

He has a job, maybe a family, friends, and lots of fun things to do. He seems quite pleased with himself, most of the time, and he doesn't allow the troubles of the world to trouble him too much.

All this outward blandishing of contentment and success may even seem real enough to him, despite occasional unpleasant thoughts about death (Heb. 2.15), assorted pangs of conscience (Rom. 2.14, 15), and the failure to deliver on one after another of his highest hopes (Eph. 2.12). Disappointment, setbacks, and self-centeredness are just the way things are. We have to do the best we can regardless.

This is what passes for life for so many people today.

But people who live this way are dead in their trespasses and sins and caught in the clutches of the devil. And they don't realize it.

At the same time, such people know something else that they may not be willing to admit – indeed, something that they may devote considerable energy in denying during the course of any given day. Because they are made in the image of God (Gen. 1.26-28), they are not the kind of beings they think they are. They accept the evolutionary teaching that man is just a higher form of animal, distinguished by a more efficient brain and nothing more – and that despite the patent foolishness of wishful thinking that props up the evolutionary worldview.

But such people know in their heart that this is not the last word. Made in the image of God they *know* God – know that there is a God and something about what He's like and what He requires (Rom. 1.18-21). In this, our wrong-believing friends are just like us. They may not admit it, but it is true, nonetheless. Moreover, God has written the works of His Law on their hearts (Rom. 2.14, 15), a moral constitution they can never fully escape.

Fighting against the truth

However, because their minds are clouded by sin, they believe that they need to suppress all such nonsensical ideas about God and what He requires – after all, the temper of the times is secular and hedonistic – and so they heap onto their lives beliefs and behaviors designed to distance them from the thought of God and reassure them that that their chosen way not only *seems* right but *is* right.

But this ploy can never satisfy. Apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, people are condemned to lives of merely fleeting and flimsy hope (Eph. 2.12). They will always want something more, and even that, once they've achieved it, will leave them flat.

The mind of sin

Scripture affords some helpful insights to the working of the mind of one who is trapped in sin. His problems aren't really his; someone else is to blame (Gen. 3.7). He takes pride in his accomplishments and doesn't worry about whether he owes anything to God (Ps. 10.4-11). He makes fleeting pleasures and perishable stuff his highest aspirations in life and isn't troubled in the least about the folly of religion (Is. 44.9-18).

He gets his news, opinions, and insights on the world from whatever makes sense to him, according to his chosen way of life and the approval of his friends. He doesn't worry about things like "truth" because he rather suspects that he can make up whatever "truth" he needs (Jn. 8.42-48). He doesn't see any problem with indulging his lusts and passions, and he thinks pursuing spiritual matters quaint but nonessential (Gal. 5.1-21).

His understanding and heart are decorated with the darkness of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and he has become comfortable in the lightless environment of his soul (Eph. 4.17-19). His conscience becomes seared to truth and is molded to accommodate the desires of his heart and the plans of his chosen way, even though they always disappoint (1 Tim. 4.1, 2). He opposes those who claim to have "the truth" because his mind is corrupted to the very idea of truth, and that's just fine with him (2 Tim. 3.1-7). Devoid of the influence of God's Spirit, he is given over to passion, parading as sound reason (Jude 17, 18).

It will take more than reason to reach one whose reason has become detached from God's thoughts and purposes and is careening through life like a Ferris wheel off its axel.

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life" (Jn. 6.63). While, as ambassadors of God and Christ, we must follow our Father's example and invite our sinful generation to come and reason together with us, we are under no illusion that our arguments, no matter how persistent or persuasive, are going to break through the darkness and deadness of sin to bring the light of truth into a lost soul.

This requires a work of God. And God works by His Word and Spirit to penetrate, invade, illuminate, convert, and redeem darkened minds, calloused hearts, and seared consciences with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

And our reasoned explanation of the hope within us can open a path for this work of the Spirit.

For reflection

1. How does turning away from the truth of God affect the way a person thinks and reasons?
2. Why is it important that we understand what's going on in their minds?
3. Are you ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: Pray for the lost people in your Personal Mission Field, asking God for grace to help you be a better neighbor to them all and to be ready to share an explanation for the hope that is within you.

Reason in the Service of Faith

For reflection or discussion

1. What service to faith can reason provide?
2. What is our basis for thinking this is so?
3. Why are people who do not believe in Jesus yet able to think things through (with our help)?
4. What are the limitations of reason as we use it in the service of faith?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

