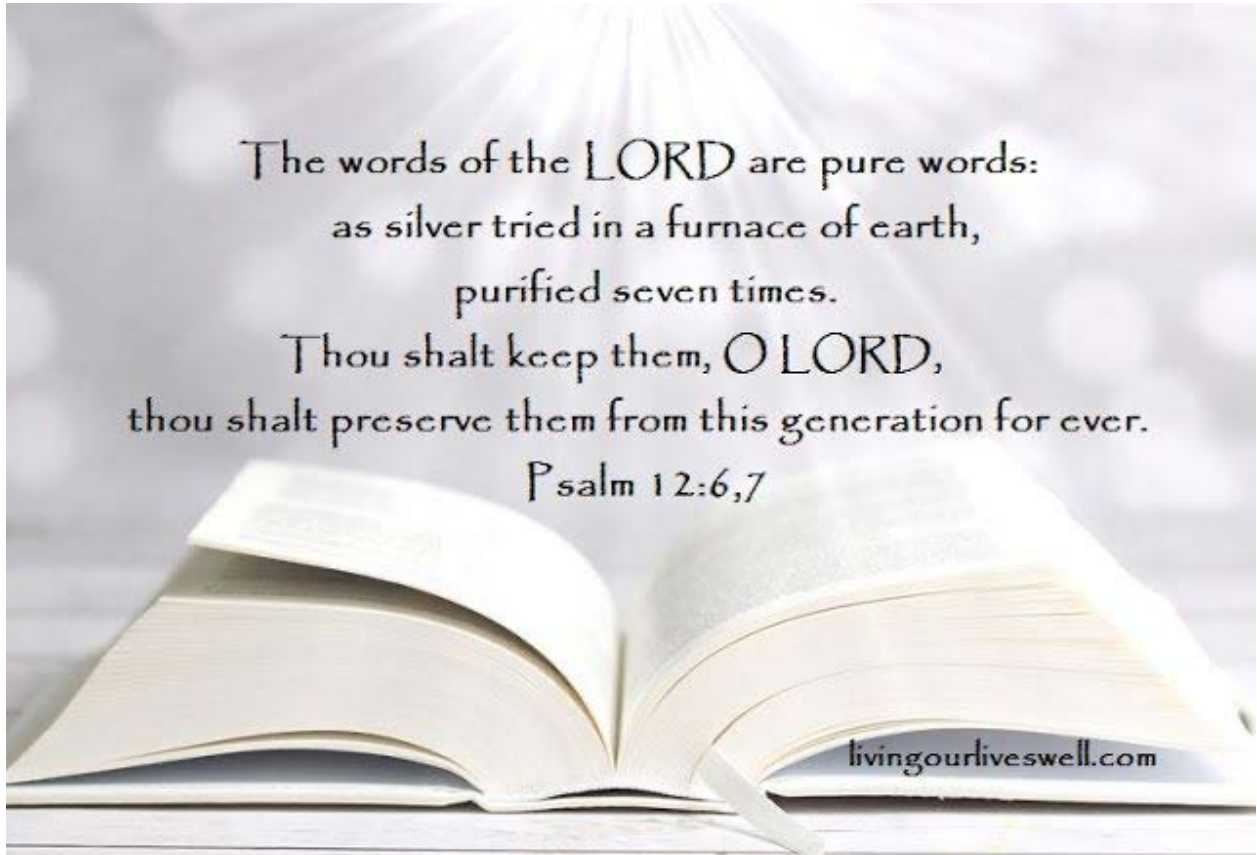


# WRONG REASON

LET GOD BE TRUE (5)



The good tool of reason can be wrongly used.

T. M. MOORE

*A ReVision Study from*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Wrong Reason*

Wrong Reason  
Let God Be True (5)  
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*Wrong Reason*

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*Wrong Reason*

Welcome to *Wrong Reason*

Reason is a gift of God, and it can be a powerful tool in helping us to know, love, and serve Him.

But reason employed by those who do not know the Lord – and do not wish to know Him – can go quickly and fatally awry.

Jesus had to deal with wrong reason throughout the course of His ministry. We can learn to recognize wrong reason and to answer it with the grace and truth of God, and that's what we'll be focusing in this part of our *ReVision* series, "Let God Be True."

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Reasonable, but Wrong

*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, activists, and everyday Joes are whacking away at the faith in books, seminars, films, TV programs, and everyday conversations. Some have even resorted to violence. 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, racist, 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 seemingly 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: 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 appear to be intelligent and reasonable people. They make clear points as they work their way through carefully reasoned arguments designed to justify their concerns about and objections to 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. Having rejected God, they have embraced the lie that says we can make sense of our lives apart from God.

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 seems 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 with their *view* of the Bible. The problem was with Jesus and His understanding of the Bible. In particular, the idea of a resurrection from the dead. To the Sadducees of Jesus' day, this idea made no sense whatsoever; and they were sure they could support their rejection of this view with logic and reason.

## Wrong Reason

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 appears to follow *rationally* from their *premises* and *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* 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.

Consider the boldness of Jesus’ response: Here He was, an uncredentialed itinerate teacher, brought up in a carpenter’s home, telling the most learned and rational people of His day that their thinking was mistaken and they were wrong. And the situation in which we find ourselves is the same as this. God is true. His Word is true. And all who differ from or oppose Him are liars, to one degree or another.

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. Reason is working in them, but because their starting point is wrong – denying God and His Word – their conclusions must be wrong as well.

### *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, insultingly, or without good reasons to support our view (1 Pet. 3.15).

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 views are wrong.

Which is precisely what Jesus did, and what we must learn to do as well (Prov. 26.4, 5).

### *For reflection*

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 – Preparation: Can you think of some ways that the reasoning and conclusions of the thought leaders of our time are simply wrong? What makes them wrong?*

## 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, 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, looks back at me, 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 take him out, then bring 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, his imagination, and, frankly, his biology. Cu can imagine going outside to get a treat. Moreover, that’s consonant with his experience in the world. He knows what it takes to fulfill 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. His creatureliness sets boundaries for how well and how far his reason can work.

*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 take him out, so that I can bring 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 since God *does* exist, and since He is a reasoning Being like we *human* beings are, then it only makes sense that He’s going

### *Wrong Reason*

to *know* more, that His *experience* is going to be vaster and more expansive than ours, and that He is 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 of 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.

Others may not completely dispense with the idea of God – such as the Sadducees who confronted Jesus – but they have decided that God must be just like them, and thus He must think like they do and exist according to their preferred ideas about Him.

That, too, is an error in reasoning that can lead to disaster (Ps. 50.16-22).

#### *We know what we know*

The problem, of course, is that there are bunches of folks in the world who actually *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. Knowing God and Jesus Christ, we possess the gift of eternal life. We see the world more deeply, more clearly, and more truly than those who deny God His proper place in their thinking.

So 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*, for our experience and that of countless multitudes of others from every age, tribe, and tongue proves it to be so. 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 mistaken. They may appear reasonable and be widely respected, but they're wrong, and we know it.

And it's our duty, like Jesus with those cocksure Sadducees, to help them see this.

#### *For reflection*

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, too?

*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*

#### *A resurrection premise*

We had just finished a very cordial dinner in our home, and I asked our visiting theologian for a few moments of conversation before he retired.

Our guest was a well-known and widely respected historian and theologian. He had come at our invitation to deliver a lecture at our church. The day of his arrival, I finished reading his newest book. I was shocked to see that, in that book, our guest denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, explaining it was more of a psychological phenomenon. I, and several other of my colleagues, had read many other of this man’s works before we invited him to speak, and this view had never surfaced in any of them.

After dinner I went right to the point. I read the passage from his book, then asked, “Do I understand correctly that you are saying Jesus did not rise bodily from the grave?” He answered with a chortle, “Well, of course. Dead people do not rise physically to life again.”

#### *How reason works*

Sound reason works according to a well-known formula: Given a *premise* and certain *facts*, one uses *reason* to establish *evidence* on which you work toward a *conclusion* that follows *logically*. This “if/then” formula has proven useful in reasoning about a great many matters.

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 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, an important book, and even a useful book, as long as you leave out the part about God, spirits, and rising from the dead.

## Wrong Reason

And here is the secular believer'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 evidence has 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* and *evidence* accordingly, and thus we will skew the "then" component to support our mistaken premise.

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 – namely, the teaching of Scripture.

And we who *know* that God exists – that there is a spiritual realm, 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 evidence 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 an 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. Yet 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*, is simply wrong reason. A fatal *if* leads to a mistaken *then*.

The morning after my conversation with the visiting theologian, I explained to him that he would not be allowed to speak at the church because his views on the resurrection were contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture. He understood and thanked me for my frankness and consideration. I gave him his honorarium and put him on a plane for home.

### *For reflection*

1. What's the difference between a *premise* and a *fact*? Give an example.
2. What's the role of *evidence* in moving from a *premise* to a *conclusion*? What do we mean by *evidence*? In the case of Jesus' resurrection, what evidence would you present to support His having risen from the dead?
3. Are Christian *facts* and *evidence* different from other facts and evidence? Explain.

*Next steps – Conversation: Have you ever tried to discover the underlying premises behind the worldview of your unbelieving friends? What are some questions you might ask to discover the various premises which underlie their thinking?*

## 4 Persuasive Reason, but 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 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."

The teaching of Epimenides was only one of many wrong-believing notions that were finding a home in the churches on Crete (v. 10). 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? First, because they were creating upheaval and division. And second, as we will see in the view of Epimenides, because they were *nonsensical*. These false ideas came from the pens of philosophers and pop culture mavens, doused with the aroma of rationality. They had been embraced and celebrated by bright young people and were the talk of the town throughout Crete and beyond. So, just as in our day, when church leaders seem to pant after every new idea or cultural form, it was perhaps inevitable that such nonsense should find some receptivity within the churches.

But the view of Epimenides – typical of them all – was mistaken, and the reasoning supporting it was wrong. It could provide no meaningful guidance for how we ought to live; indeed, it could not even be made to make sense within itself.

It sounded cool, sophisticated, and maybe even persuasive, but it was dead wrong. And Paul was determined to expose and expunge it before it wrought havoc and division in the churches of Crete.

*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. No attempt to sanctify the rampant materialism of our wrong-believing age can measure up to the promise and hope of the Gospel.

Other pastors make a case for a kind of Christianity without doctrine. Christianity is about feelings and 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. Christians should be understanding and tolerant, not judgmental and exclusive. Isn't this what we hear everywhere in our postmodern world? Christianity, these preachers insist, is a life of loving like 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 misguided *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 was a liar, too. And if so, then that means he was lying about Cretans being liars, and all Cretans are, rather than liars, reliable truth-tellers. And if they are, if all Cretans, including Epimenides, are *truth-tellers*, then he cannot be mistaken about all Cretans being liars. That would be the truth. All Cretans are truth-telling liars. And all their lies are true.

Obviously, such a view is absurd, mistaken, and untrue. To embrace such a view would be to relegate all truth to the dust bin of thought and to elevate every lie to a place of honor. Any claims to a kind of truth which exposed and excluded lies would be out of place in such a system.

No wonder Paul was concerned about such a view seeping into the life of the churches on Crete.

The subsequent confusion which had arisen from this admixture of Christian teaching and secular philosophy (Tit 1.11) 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 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 undermine Scripture, confuse the faithful, cast doubt on the grand tradition of Christian doctrine, and rob multitudes of the genuine article of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Today's false teachers sound very *au courant*, hip, and on top of things. 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, and they are leading multitudes of like-blinded followers into the ditch of folly.

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

*For reflection*

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 wrong-believing 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 the Christian faith. Then, document each of those beliefs using Scripture alone.*

## 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 the Good News of Jesus and our Christian worldview to our wrong-believing friends, much less to help them see the mistaken ways of wrong belief that have clouded their purview on life.

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, or what they might think of us if we try to tell them about Jesus or take some social or moral stance consistent with our Christian worldview. Wrong-believing people can't understand spiritual things, so what would we *expect* them to think about us?

They will dismiss us as 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. Jesus echoes that view in Luke 12.8, 9: “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” Is it better to be mocked and taunted by men or denied before the angels of God?

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 wrong-believing 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, asking questions that can lead wrong-believers to stop being so smug about what they think they know about us and to look a little more closely about what they may have overlooked concerning their own worldview.

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 or how cruelly they may treat us as witnesses to Jesus – there's simply nothing they can do but believe. Ask

## *Wrong Reason*

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. Make sure you know the Gospel of the Kingdom and that you can proclaim it briefly and clearly.

But, fourth, because our unbelieving friends worship at the altar of reason and 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 engage them* in conversations designed to tease out the content of their “reasoned” beliefs and to help them see the ways that wrong belief has infected them with wrong reason and is robbing them of full and abundant life.

We’ll need to identify the *premises* of their worldviews and to help them understand the difference between *premises* 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, contradictions, and other aspects of wrong reason in their reasons for believing what they do, and ask them to consider whether such thinking makes sense.

### *Always be ready*

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 are based on different *premises* and thus lead to better *conclusions*.

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*

1. Review the four steps of the strategy for reaching unbelievers with the Gospel. 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. What should you do whenever you feel like the fear of man is keeping you from talking about Jesus and spiritual things?
3. What can you do to spend more time studying Jesus’ use of reason against His opponents?

*Next steps – Preparation: How much do you know about the people in your Personal Mission Field who do not know Jesus? Since they don’t believe in Him, what do they believe? Maybe it’s time for some get acquainted conversations.*

## 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 mistake*

As they think about Christianity, the mistake many secular people make is the same the Sadducees made when they confronted Jesus. They thought their facts and logic would overpower His. But they were quite wrong. Their mistake was twofold.

First, they began by assuming that their basic *premise* – no spiritual realm, no resurrection from the dead – was instead an *established fact*. We've already dealt with this part of the problem as it pertains to answering our secular and wrong-believing friends. We've seen that nothing in the secular worldview can enable it to establish as a *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 allow it to establish their view of such matters as *fact*. That which wrong-believing folk accept as a fact is simply a premise, that is, a preferred belief that suits all the other planks of their worldview, at least, as they see it.

Their premise is just that, just as the Sadducees' premise about there being no resurrection was just a premise. As such, the secularist's basic premise is vulnerable to being exposed and dismissed, given sufficient facts to the contrary.

What a faulty premise requires is *more facts*, facts which, second, the Sadducees had conveniently overlooked or neglected. So, when Jesus piled more facts against the Sadducees' premise, the premise – that there is no resurrection or spiritual life – collapsed. What the secular *premise* requires, besides the demonstration 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 were no doubt acquainted with the Scriptures and *thought* they knew them. But Jesus was able to show 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 not only not in line with the Scriptures but simply and altogether 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). Every Jew in Jesus' day would have known this passage. But the deeper meaning of this passage eluded the Sadducees, who were blind to it because of their basic premise.

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. This may not be immediately obvious, so let's look a little more closely.

For example, if you ask your secular friend, "Do you believe we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves?", your friend would most likely agree. Or if you ask, "Do you believe in the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you?" your friend will surely affirm it as well. If you point out to your friend that the Bible teaches the universe is real, orderly, and knowable, and that it is the privilege and duty of people to make good use of its many resources, your friend will undoubtedly find that a fact with which he

### *Wrong Reason*

can agree. The Bible teaches we should care about and seek to help the poor and oppressed. The Bible condemns those who take advantage of the weak and helpless. The Bible encourages a love of beauty and the creation of useful works of culture. The Bible insists that civil magistrates can play a good role in society. All these are facts with which any wrong-believing person will surely agree.

It's not hard to find secular and other wrong-believing people who will agree that the Bible teaches many true and useful things, and that many of the things the Bible teaches have benefited people in a wide variety of ways.

What Jesus pointed out to the Sadducees was that while they *knew and agreed with* some things about the Scriptures, they didn't really *know* the Scriptures at all. Their knowledge of Scripture was selective, superficial, and self-interested. 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.

That would have been news to the Sadducees because their basic premise – no angels, no spirits, no resurrection – had blinded them to what Jesus explained. When He explained it, adding a new fact to the issue on the table, the Sadducees had no response. This new *fact* had undermined their basic premise, revealing it as not a fact at all but merely a point of view.

Jesus' explanation 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*

Although, as we have seen, secularists will undoubtedly affirm many things which are taught in Scripture, they are on thin ice in doing so. For the moment they affirm *anything* as true in Scripture they do two things: First, they put themselves in the position of having to consider that a book which contains *any* truth probably contains *more*; and, second, they expose themselves to a charge of *willful ignorance* concerning the fuller content of the Bible, content which, we know, has a direct bearing on their premise concerning God and spiritual things.

And if they affirm anything about Scripture to be *false*, they open themselves to the challenge of how they can know that, given that their most fundamental *life premise* precludes their being able to know *anything* about God or spiritual matters, whether they are real or not.

We want to respond to those who foolishly deny God and spiritual truth by using reason to demonstrate the folly of such thinking. People cannot know what they will not know. If we can expose the folly of what they consider to be facts, showing them only to be premises or preferences, we may be able to supply more facts for their consideration, facts which can lead them to rethink their false premise and open their minds to the life-changing fact of the Gospel. If they *refuse* to consider such facts, then at least they will know that they are being willfully ignorant of facts that have a serious bearing on their most cherished beliefs.

#### *For reflection*

1. Summarize the mistakes secularists make in denying validity to the Scriptures and the Christian worldview.
2. Do you agree that almost everyone will agree with something in the Bible? Give some examples of some things wrong-believers might affirm.
3. What might you do to help a wrong-believing friend begin to consider the teaching of Scripture more fully?



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*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 wrong-reasoning view of God and Christianity, 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 nor *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 limited by the constraints of space and time and the restrictions of material existence, just 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, but 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 alive.

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 has 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 teaches. And they have not experienced and do not understand the power of God, so they are not able to comment one way or another on that subject.

God, eternal life, resurrection from the dead – these things are beyond the pale and experience of what

## *Wrong Reason*

secular and wrong-believing views of life can fathom or accept. So of course, such people are completely beyond their ken rendering judgments about these matters. It falls to us to explain these things to them, and that may entail our also exposing the faulty premises and wrong reasoning of their own worldview.

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 wrong-believing 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 to keep from seeing the truth that is in Jesus Christ. They do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God, and they are trapped in the faulty premises and lies of their wrong-reasoning worldview.

*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 pray earnestly for the Lord to extend His grace to open the eyes of their heart to the truth that is in Jesus. 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.

We must be ready with sound reason to give a reason for the hope that is within us, that the people to whom God sends us may hear the truth that is in Jesus.

### *For reflection*

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, at the link below. 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.*

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*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by the term “wrong reason”?
2. What causes someone’s reasoning powers to go wrong?
3. How can we help people to see that they are reasoning from faulty premises?
4. What is the role of facts in supporting reason?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.

