

## I Just Don't Believe

**C**hristianity, in my opinion, is the most rational, objective, and logical religion on Earth. I use the analogy of “religion” simply for comparison purposes, but in fact I do not consider Christianity a religion, which I regard as man’s attempt to reach an unknown god, often of his own making, to gain his/it’s approbation. Christianity, on the other hand, is God’s attempt to reach His creation. Religions often require that man die for his gods, while Christianity is the antithesis – divine Jesus died for mankind. This discussion, however, is not about the rationality, objectiveness, or logical character of Christianity; rather, I would like to explore why people don’t come to a belief in Christ as Lord and Savior, or, more specifically stated: why they “WILL NOT” believe.

As a basis for this discussion, let us allow that Christianity is rational, objective, and logical – far exceeding other world religions - for the attempt to demonstrate otherwise is nothing less than the vain and feckless exercise of a sophist.

So, why don’t more people come to accept the tenants of Christianity - primarily the divinity of Jesus and salvation through His substitutional atonement on the cross? Why? I believe that there are several reasons attributing to the purposeful rejection of Christ and His salvific grace. In a general, categorical sense, people don’t accept Christ as Savior due to a) insufficient reasons, or b) deep personal causes.

People who hold to unbelief due to reasons are in the minority of unbelievers. The “reason-seekers” simply need further rational argument. They need to make sense of it all, sort of tying all the metaphysical ends together. They are open to both questions and answers. They are generally not defensive and are willing to openly discuss the issues, and, if justified, change their minds. The “reason-seekers” do not respond to

prosaic legalism, or unbridled emotionalism. They are pensive in nature and desirous of rational argumentation. These people, if honestly inquiring, will generally come to a belief in Christ due to the excellent evidence available. It is a mistake, however, to assume that most unbelievers fall into this category – they do not.

Most unbelievers, in my opinion, fall into the general category of refusing to believe due to causes – deep, personal, burning, hurting, often repressed causes. Ceaselessly bombarding “cause-unbelievers” with reasons and rational argumentation will serve no positive purpose. They can often be extremely defensive, disputatious, and choleric in temperament. Their minds are already made up and rational discussion seems unable to penetrate the titanium shield around their hearts. When approached with the Lordship of Jesus, they bite back with stinging rhetoric or simply withdraw with a dismissing shrug that seems to say: “That may be true for you, but not for me.”

Perhaps the two principal causes for a refusal to believe are shame and guilt. It is part of the human condition to sin. This sin nature became part of the human DNA at the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve committed the first sin against God - disobedience (i.e.: my judgment trumps God’s commands). From that point on, human beings come into the world with a sin nature. We sin and we know it when we sin. Sin can come adorned in all sorts of regalia: the “spoken type” – hateful speech, lying about the character of others, gossip, a filthy tongue, negativity, seeking to destroy the dreams of another with perfidious invectives meant to sap hope from the heart. Sin can be the “thought type” – wishing someone dead, desiring another’s spouse, planning evil, hating, jealousy, lust, hedonism, greedily desiring our neighbor’s possessions, haughtiness, and on and on. It is in the mind that we break each of the Ten Commandments, repeatedly. Sin can be the “committed type” – doing bodily or emotional harm, menda-

ciousness, stealing, committing adultery, the exercise of pride, and a thousand times a thousand other crimes against God, to include, by the way, the purposeful rejection of Christ. These sins have an effect – shame and its first cousin, guilt. Shame and guilt are the natural result of sin, just as breathing out is the natural result of breathing in – it just happens; it is the inexorable result of sin.

Just as natural is the nearly implacable urge to repress the shame. To the unbeliever, the only known (or sub-consciously known) way to suppress the exceedingly painful feelings of shame is to suppress the sin itself. The best way to do that is to obliterate the source of the shame and guilt – God. No God, no sin. No sin, no guilt. There in lies the perfect formula for living happily according to the Gospel of Me. Some people hurt so deeply, due to grievous sin and painful mistakes, that they consciously or sub-consciously repress the very One who took that sin on to Himself and paid the price for it once and for all. However, they cannot even consider the possibility of God, for then they would have to deal with the sin, the shame, and the guilt.

There are other causes; however, for not coming to Christ, chief among them is pride, and its offspring intellectualism. Pride keeps people from surrendering to Him; from submitting to Him; from loving Him; from letting oneself be loved by Him; from giving one's life to Him. After all, you have a professional image to consider. You don't really want to be known as one of those Bible-thumpers. You honestly don't want to be part of the group that you have seen become "saved," as they call it. It all seems so bourgeois, completely throwing one's intellect out as the emotion comes in. What would your co-workers say? And what would you tell your wife and kids. You would lose all credibility; after all, atheism has been your position for years. You would look so ridiculous subscribing to the gratuitous and fatuous emotionalism of the "religious."

Still another cause of people not surrendering to Christ is an unquenchable thirst for control. You want to be in control, not to be controlled, especially by the unseen God of a 2,000 year old book. You have worked hard and achieved success all on your own. You deserve to be in control of your own life. You don't want to be controlled by the dictates of some religion, espousing a bunch of man-made rules. Rules, rules, rules! You know what's right for your life.

But there's more. What about those who "just-don't-want-to" submit to Christ? These people enjoy their lives; they enjoy the activities in which they are involved. They are quite comfortable with their attitudes, mind-set, and ways. This type of person is, at the core, hedonistic and hard-of-heart. He/she is into a life-style that is enjoyable, pleasing, and satisfying. What could possibly be wrong with that? To one such as this, the chief aim in life is pleasure. Pleasure is to be coveted and sought after, like one dying of thirst would seek water. The soul longs for pleasure. The focus is on self; envy and covetousness are the fruits of this mind-set. The spirit is, therefore, lethargic and quenched, knowing nothing of God and desiring Him not. Moreover, they really don't like being in the company of Christians, who are perceived as being boring and self-righteous.

There are others who are simply and thoroughly "turned-off." This group is perhaps the most vocal of all because they once (and probably for a period of time) attended church and were a part of the Christian community, but were "turned-off" by bad experiences, usually in church, and usually, although not always, in their childhood.

These bad experiences came from a variety of sources: over-bearing parents, or pastor; a church that emphasized criticism and all the "don'ts" of life; being the recipient of rigid and harsh judgments; not being loved by family, or pastor, or church congrega-

tion, or the horror of being sexually or emotionally abused by one who professed Christianity. A common thread running through the “turned-off” group is a hatred of legalism. Unfortunately, the church can be a powerful dispenser of legalism, which comes in many forms: you must go to church three times a week; you must speak Christianese; you must read only this or that version of the Bible; you must not drink, smoke, dance, have too much fun, gamble, divorce, question the Bible or any tenant of the faith; you must (or must not) speak in tongues; you must (or must not) believe in miraculous healings; you must (or must not) read from a certain prayer book; you must go to confession; you must not go to confession; you must be in a prayer group; you must read the Bible daily; you must not associate with...well, a whole “bunch” of different types of people. And the list goes on.

Finally, we come to a deep and convoluted cause for rejecting Christ. This group is so imbued with the language, signs, and practices of religiosity that it can easily be missed. These are the “deceived-Christianizers.” The “deceived-Christianizers” go to church regularly; they speak the language of the religious; they go through all the various forms of public worship, just as they were taught: baptism, communion, confession, public prayer, committee membership, attend or teach Sunday School, attend Bible studies, and all the rest. This is the way they were raised, and somewhere along the way they came to believe that their salvation is assured as a result of doing all these things. All their lives have been an example of walking with Christ, doing the things they should be doing and avoiding all the rest. Their actions represent their lives. It’s the doing that matters. The “deceived-Christianizers” are fully engaged in a life-style that engenders religious activity and speech. Now, this group would be incredulous at the suggestion that their spiritual life or commitment to Christ is lacking. They would immediately turn

on you with great loquaciousness and begin offering proof of their commitment, which, of course, is found in a never-ending list of religious activities. It doesn't occur to this group that they could have simply missed the mark: submitting to Christ with a broken heart and humble spirit. It is my impression that this particular group of people comprises a large percentage of the average congregation. This is what we have come to in the twenty-first century church. The fire is too often out and the rote activity is in. This group becomes deceived by their own activities and good deeds, as mankind has always done. Perhaps the biggest enemy of mankind is the deep desire to earn our own salvation by doing good deeds. This primal desire to earn our own salvation is closely associated with unabashed humanism, which then feeds the fierce religious activity described above. Surely the more we do the better we are. Right?

Here we have some of the causes that keep men and women from Christ. It's the causes that matter. The human heart is like an onion that needs to be gently peeled, one layer at a time, to reveal the hurt, shame, pride, the worship of intellectualism, the thirst for control, the love of pleasure, the piercing and deep-seeded pain of sexual or emotional abuse, the hypocrisy, the perceived legalism, or the deceitfulness of religious activity. Don't you see? It is causes that keep people from coming to Christ – causes perpetrated by their own pride, lust, and greed, or causes perpetrated on them by others who have drained the hope away; others who have abused positions of trust; others who have shattered the precious innocence of the heart and spirit of a child of God. Causes are what matter. We need not waive a Bible in someone's face and annoyingly solicit their conversion. We need to gently, cautiously, and lovingly peel their onion.