

How many of you have ever said, or heard someone say, “If I’m going to believe in God, he needs to give me a sign and make it loud and clear that God is real?”

This is essentially the ultimatum that Thomas - often called “doubting Thomas” -

Define Terms - Christian and Secularist (not trying to be offensive!)

What does it mean to believe? Since our culture argues through slogans (often riddled with assumptions), I thought it helpful to answer the question of what it means to believe by interacting with a few of these slogans.

Slogan 1: Christians have an emotional need to believe in God, whereas secularists are inherently rational relying on science. - implies that Christians deny clear facts about the world and that secularists are merely following logical reasoning.

Reality -> it takes just as much faith to disbelieve in God as it does to believe in God.

Neil Degrasse Tyson - Interview concerning UFOs - “the instruments seemed to show objects accelerating and decelerating at impossible speeds...”

- The scientific method cannot justify itself - it relies on observation (our senses) - how can we trust our senses to inform our mind of what is real? Are we in the matrix/brains in a vat? - We “have faith” that scientific inquiry can tell us about the world in which we live.
- In the same way that you can’t “prove” god’s existence through scientific inquiry, you cannot disprove god’s existence through scientific inquiry. Therefore, no one can have “certainty” in God’s existence or lack of existence.
- The belief in the origins of the universe existing from nothing cannot be scientifically tested or proved.
- The nature of the good life - morality, justice, love - cannot be answered scientifically. Therefore, secularists cannot have an independent worldview with religion subtracted. They are always borrowing from a religious authority to answer life’s existential questions. If evolution is inherently random - it cannot answer the question of what “ought” to be.

Slogan 2: It doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you are genuine in your belief.

People on both sides readily acknowledge the benefits of religion not only on the individual, but society as a whole.

One paper¹ published by professors of Yale, Harvard, and Duke argues that strong religious belief has significant benefits for both the individual and society such as:

- Increased levels of education
- Lower crime rates
- Increased civic involvement
- Higher levels of cooperation
- Lower divorce rates
- Higher marital satisfaction
- And better child adjustment
- Better physical health including but not limited to lower rates of coronary disease, emphysema, cirrhosis, lower blood pressure, longer life expectancy.
- Better mental health and lower levels of depression.
- Overall better quality of life as more are self described as “happy.”

This leads to the common assumption that the religious impulse provides an evolutionary advantage and that it doesn't matter if what is externally believed in is true, rather what matters is the internal presence of belief. In other words - it doesn't matter if god is real or not, what matters is that you live as if god is real.

Reality → 3 issues

1. If applied to literally anything else in life, the person would be labeled mentally insane. Beautiful mind with Russell Crowe.
2. Untenable to the creation of a healthy society- contradictions of good, morality, purpose. What is life and what is protected? What is justice and do all have a right to it? What is love and how is it maintained?
3. Bait and switch to affirm an individualistic sense of truth and undermine any semblance of the divine - the emphasis on the internal perception of the world.

¹ Who Benefits from Religion? Daniel Mochon, Michael I. Norton, Dan Ariely

Slogan 3: There is no room for doubt. For secularists, sometimes there are a lot of things that are hard to believe (miracles, angels, etc.) so an all or nothing approach is difficult. For some Christians, there may be pressure to have 100% certainty all the time- any questioning of the faith is seen as anathema.

Reality→ Scriptures have several examples of those with doubts and hesitations concerning faith:

John the Baptist - "I need to be baptized by you" - "are you the one?"

The Disciples - M@ 28:17 - When they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted (waivered, hesitated).

In these two instances, God is leaning on weak spots (misplaced faith) of the person.

Deconstruction? Trendy but nothing new. Often the result of putting something other than Jesus at the center of our faith. For Francis Schaeffer, he had such hope on the holiness and unity of the church that when he did not see what he thought he should see in the church, he deconstructed his faith...

Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) - Theologian, Philosopher, Pastor - became distressed during his life and "deconstructed" Speaking to his wife: *"...I really feel torn to pieces by the lack of reality, the lack of seeing the results the Bible talks about, which should be seen in the Lord's people. I'm not talking only about people I'm working with... but I'm not satisfied with myself. It seems that the only honest thing to do is to rethink, re-examine the whole matter of Christianity. Is it true? I need to go back to my agnosticism and start at the beginning."*²

Because belief in Jesus is inherently invitational (Jesus invites Thomas to touch- Jesus invites us to hear his words), there is by deduction room to ask questions.

So what does it mean to believe? It means to carefully consider the nature of the world and the claims of Christ leading a decision to either worship Jesus as Lord and God, or to reject him.

How do we do this?

² Duriez. Francis Schaeffer 109

For secularists - Open your hearts to the possibility of who Jesus is. Don't get hung up on miracles, etc. start with Jesus. His life teaching, and the question of his resurrection.

For Christians, base your faith on the person of Jesus and his resurrection. If we have questions - ask them! The nature of the scriptures, suffering, intersection of science and faith.

Resources for further study:

Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (ISBN: 978-1-59448-349-3)

Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (ISBN: 978-0-8308-1947-8)