

## MORALLY IRRESPONSIBLE DOUBT

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Every Easter I find that I am thinking there are going to be people at church who are not usually here on a regular basis – their family has asked of them to do the special church thing for Easter or something like that -- and I find that I want to not only ground you as Christians already but to persuade them to find Jesus credible and to commit to following him intelligently and wholeheartedly. So I marshal a set of observations, offer this proof and that, reason from A to B, try to be winsome... and hope that they will say, “You’ve convinced me; I’m in; where do I sign?” There may be someone here today for whom that is true.

But what I find is that after all my words I get polite nods ... and not much movement really. The listeners may be glad that I didn’t bore them and that the service on the whole had momentum and inspiration and that it ended more or less on time. But they weren’t hoping to convert beforehand and they still aren’t “after-hand.”

I give my best shot for reasons to believe and they remain where they are. I am in this camp trying to prove its reasonableness and they are in another camp and just staying there. But I am realizing there is something very, very uneven ... and unfair ... in all this. It’s this – I give reasons for my positions but they give none for theirs. It’s as if we’re thinking that I have a position so I need to have reasons and they don’t have a position so they don’t need reasons. BUT really I have a position *and* they have a position. I offer reasons and they don’t.

Further, in the semi-consciousness of our culture today people just reflexively think of those who say, “I’m a skeptic,” as intellectual. But this is not true. I’ve met skeptics who don’t tip the scales on brain power. Now, such a thought is a prejudice. There may be Christians who believe in a not very thoughtful way but there are certainly as well those who are not Christians in the same way.

But today, if I had my way, I would ask for the uncommitted to give a rationale for their position. “You give me the burden of proving my position. It’s only fair that I give you the burden of proving yours.”

And let’s not get into you “not having any position.” My stepson went to Germany this week for four months of study. He could have said, “I have no position with respect to Germany. I am not choosing to go to Germany and I am not choosing not to go to Germany. I am undecided.” You know he could have said that but while he was saying that, he’d be somewhere ... in this case, Florida. He can say that he’s not choosing to go to Germany and he’s not choosing to be in Florida. But he’d be in Florida while he was saying that. In other words, one cannot not choose. You may think you are not; it may feel you are not. But by default, you are.

So everyone has a position and I’m simply asking, “What are the proofs for that position? Your rationale?” To hold a position without thought, when you are endowed with reason, seems ... against what is right and the way it should be.

And let’s not get into you saying that I have my truth and you have your truth. You may prefer Brussel sprouts and I may not but what we’re talking about is whether there are such things as Brussel sprouts. Look, the White House is in Washington DC in reality whether you think it is not true and I think it is true or

vice versa. Truth is what's real regardless of what you believe. And you can say all day long that you have your truth about whether penicillin was actually discovered or not and I have mine but in reality it was either discovered or it wasn't. Correspondingly, Jesus rose from the dead or he didn't. There isn't a White House in reality for me but not a White House in reality for you. It's there or it isn't. He rose or he didn't.

You may believe it didn't happen and I may believe it did. And what we all want/need is for our beliefs to align with reality. Nobody wants to believe in false things. I don't want to believe and operate on eating gravel as good for my health when that's not true. We want to believe what's true. So what are the reasons or proofs for you believing that the truth is he didn't rise from the dead? We're trying to get our beliefs, in such a question, to align with what actually is, what actually happened.

So what's your rationale for saying Christ didn't rise from the dead? You may at this point say, "I'm not saying he didn't rise, I'm just saying we can't know." And I would say, "How do you know we cannot know? Have you tried? Are you being lazy? Do you know that the earth is round? You came to know those things so why can you not know this?"

Let's picture then the person with whom we are having this conversation saying, "I'm not saying you cannot know but that you cannot know for certain." And I would ask, "Can we with certain effort and inquiry come to a place where we find it logical and reasonable that it very likely happened? More likely that it did than did not?"

You see if a doctor was told of a new drug that was a cure and he or she said that they just couldn't make any personal conclusions about that, that they could not know that with any degree of certainty, you would find that to be lazy, to be not

only unprofessional and incompetent but even immoral. You would say that it is incumbent on them to find out if it is. You would think that there is a way to know and they ought to find it.

If you go to the airport, you don't say, "There is no information about which gate I depart from." You don't say, "I cannot know for certain which gate I depart from." You don't say, "I'm agnostic about gates" or "I'm very tolerant about gates and think all of them will work for getting me from Cleveland to New York at 2 pm today." You don't do that. You figure it out and that is because there are consequences to not finding out.

Is this not the case with Christ ... that there are consequences to not finding out?

There are consequences to our believing ... and to our NOT believing. I can believe there is gas in my car when there is not, and I'm stranded. I can disbelieve that there is gas in my car when it is, and I walk when I could have driven. And because there are consequences to both, it bears on all of us to ... think.

To doubt and to disbelieve without reason ... and to not try to know better, this is ... irresponsible. So let's all be responsible – either in believing or disbelieving.

*If you'd like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors & elders of the church would welcome your call.*

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