



ON FAITH, ATHEISM & APOLOGETICS

By

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CHAPTERS

A Case For Faith 3

Atheism & Apologetics 9

Bonus Chapter - Being A Seeker 17

[These notes are from a Bible study taught 40 years ago. The notes are in
outline form.]

A Case For Faith

You may be familiar with Lee Strobel's book *The Case for Faith*. It was published four years ago (Zondervan, 2014). While I am also a career journalist and former atheist and will recommend Lee's book to you, this *Teaching Notes* is not about his book.

I wrote this Bible study about 40 years ago (1976) and titled it "A Case for Faith" to address how the Apostle John presented his case for faith in Jesus Christ in his Gospel account. I had been saved for about five years by that time and was amazed at the perfection of God's Word and the Gospel of Christ. I still am.

Please turn in your Bible to John 20.

John's Gospel account was written about 20 years after the Synoptic Gospels. The word "synoptic" comes from the Greek word σύνοψις and Latin *synopticus*. The Greek word comes from σύν (together) and οψις (seeing) and carries the idea of "seeing all together." The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark and Luke. Each shares some of the same information about Christ's life and ministry.

John's Gospel is different. While John's Gospel supplements the Synoptics, 92% of the content in the fourth Gospel is unique to itself and is not found in the other Gospels. By comparison, Matthew has 42%, Luke 59%, and

Mark 7% unique to their Gospels. John omits much that the Synoptics record and records much that they omit. For example, there are 35 miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospels. John lists only eight of those miracles and six of them are unique to his account.

There are 12 discourses of Christ which are entirely unique to John's Gospel. Probably the best known is the discourse with Nicodemus about spiritual and external life. No other Gospel writer even mentions the existence of a Nicodemus, but John brings his name up three different times: first when Nicodemus met Jesus, later when Nicodemus stood up for Christ's right to be heard, and third when Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took the dead body of the crucified Christ and buried Him. Nicodemus had an important part in the life of Christ, but only John records it.

Other discourses found only in John's Gospel are –

- Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman
- Christ's discussion with the Jews on the source of eternal life and its witness as found in chapter 5
- Christ's teaching in chapter 7 at the Feast of Tabernacles on the source of truth
- Christ's talk with the people that He was the Light of the word and True object of faith found in chapter 8
- Christ's teaching to the Pharisees in chapter 10 that He was the Good Shepherd

- Christ's dialogue with the Jews on His unity with the Godhead also found in chapter 10
- Christ's discourse with the crowd that He was the world's Redeemer found in chapter 12
- Christ's upper room teaching, discourse and prayer found in chapters 13 – 17

Let's look for a moment at John 20:30-31 to see John's summary for his "Case for Faith" –

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Next, let's observe how John presented this unique Case for Faith at the beginning of his Gospel account –

Opening Statement – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." John 1:1-5

Exhibit A – “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:6-13

Exhibit B – “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” John 1:35-40

Exhibit C – “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.” John 1:41-42

Exhibit D – “The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” John 1:43-49

Now, back to John 20 – “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

I might explain what John said this way – ‘There are many other exhibits that I could bring before you today, but these are enough to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing in Him brings life, for there is true and everlasting life in His name.’

John's Case for Faith

- In the discourses that Jesus had with the general public, He pointed them to the fact that He was **ultimate reality**.
- In the discourses that Jesus had with His disciples in private, He pointed them to the fact that He was **eternal sufficiency**.
- To the world our message is that Jesus is **ultimate reality**.
- In our own lives as God's children we need to constantly remember that Jesus is our **eternal sufficiency**.

Atheism & Apologetics

I was a well-known atheist in the area where I lived in the late 1960's and early 70's because of hosting a daily radio talk show where religion was often a topic of discussion. I was a "strong" atheist and used my position to challenge and mock the beliefs of religious people, especially Christians.

After becoming a Christian, I received many invitations to share my story at churches, religious group meetings and on Christian radio programs. The earliest notes I've found from my talks about atheism is from a talk I gave on radio more than 40 years ago. I share these notes with the hope they might help you understand the thinking of atheists and the great privilege we have to share Christ with them.

[This transcript is from a radio program broadcast more than 40 years ago.]

On today's broadcast we're going to share with you a solution to a very embarrassing situation faced by many Christians.

How often have you been sharing the Gospel with a neighbor, someone at work or school, or in door-to-door visitation, when a person has said, "Do you believe the Bible? You've got to be kidding! You couldn't prove the Bible if your life depended on it." Or how about this one – "Man, you've committed intellectual suicide! Nobody with any education believes that book any more. It's just a bunch of fairy tales. It's filled with contradictions

and science has proved it to be a joke by some pranksters back in the old days.”

A person I was talking with recently shared that this is what had happened to her at work. Christians are being challenged by unbelievers at every turn. The mouths of millions of God’s people have been shut over the years by scoffers. These Christians knew that Jesus had lived and died for them, but they couldn’t prove it to someone else. They knew that Jesus had changed their life, but they didn’t know how to defend their faith. Many Christians have even had their own faith in God shaken by infidels.

Having been an atheist and scoffer before I was saved, I know both sides of the coin. Before I was saved I would quote from the great philosophers of past ages who repudiated the Bible and “proved” its unreliability. I used to quote from a book entitled “1001 Errors in the Bible.” My heart breaks as I think of the thousands of Christians listening today who are petrified by atheists and agnostics.

I would like to share some easy to remember facts that will put backbone in your faith and muscle in your witness.

Be Ready

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be

ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” 1
Peter 3:15-16

An expanded translation of verse 15 from the Greek reads – “Always being those who are ready to present a verbal defense to everyone who asks you for logical explanation concerning the hope which is in all of you.”

The Amplified Bible reads – “Always be ready to give a logical defense to any one who asks you to account for the hope that is in you.”

You and I are always to have at our ready a logical defense and explanation for what we believe.

Paul Little wrote a book entitled “Know Why You Believe.” It’s one thing to know what the Bible says and believe it. It’s another thing to know “why” we believe the Bible.

Christianity is not, I repeat, is **not** “blind faith.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “I know whom I have believed.” Paul wasn’t confused. He didn’t take someone’s word for it. He knew what, who, where, when, how and why he believed.

Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” Jesus didn’t say that we *might* know the truth or that we could possibly stumble on the truth some day. He said, “You shall know the truth!”

The Apostle John wrote, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God: that ye may know that ye have eternal life.”

See and Know

God has not made His purpose and will a big, dark secret. He has revealed it in black and white for everyone to see and know.

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.” 2 Peter 1:16-18

Peter knew what he was talking about because he was there – as an eyewitness.

We recently had a fire on our property. I was a witness to the fire, along with more than 70 other people. Do you believe me because I tell you I heard about it from someone or because I tell you I was an eyewitness to the fire? Some people might question my reliability as a witness, but they would hear from more than 70 other people who supported what I said about the fire because they were also eyewitnesses to the same fire.

This is what Peter was saying. He was there. He saw Jesus with his own eyes. Peter walked with Jesus for years. He heard Jesus teach. He watched Jesus perform miracles. He saw Jesus arrested. Peter saw the empty tomb. He saw the risen Christ. He saw Jesus ascend into Heaven. Peter was an eyewitness to the existence, the passion and the glory of Jesus Christ. That kind of evidence holds up in any honest court.

Let's read on from verse 17 –

“For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” 2 Peter 1:17-21

The Bible

The Bible is the most provable Book of antiquity. The Bible is reliable. It is the Word of the Almighty, unchanging God. It is different from every book ever written. It has no equal.

The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years and more than 60 generations. It was written by more than 40 men comprised of scholars, poets, kings, fishermen, philosophers, statesmen, peasants, a physician, a tax collector and many others. It was written in scores of different places on three different continents during dozens of different moods in three different languages about hundreds of controversial subjects, but all with one central theme – “God’s redemption of sinful man through Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.” No other Bible measures up to the Bible!

The Bible is not just 66 separate books, but one great Book with one great Character and one great Theme. The Bible has had the largest circulation every known to mankind and publishing. The Bible has been read by more people and published by more people into more languages and dialects than any other book that has ever existed. The Bible has been translated into more than 1,500 languages and dialects. Several thousand translators are at work at this very moment translating the Bible into hundreds of new dialects. The Bible has survived time, persecution and criticism. The Bible has stood for almost 4,000 years against the onslaught of infidels and devils. Men have tried to burn it, ban it, destroy it, disprove it – and yet the Bible stands.

Voltaire, an infamous infidel of the 18th century, said that the Bible and Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history within 100 years. That was 250 years ago. Voltaire is dead – Jesus Christ lives!

There was a time when “higher” critics stated that the Pentateuch could not have been written by Moses because writing was not in existence at the time of Moses. However, the discovery of the “Black Stele” with the written laws of Hammurabi shattered this theory. This written code was created 200 years before Moses was born. Sumerian and Babylonian cuneiform writing was well known before Abraham’s time. This fact is attested by finds at Kish, Larsa, Farm, Ur, Nippur, Eridu, Accad and Lagash.

The Bible is unique in its teaching. It is the only Book in the world containing prophecies relating to Israel, individual nations, specific cities, all of the peoples of the earth, and the One who would be the Savior and Messiah. The Bible is also the only Book where all prophecies have come true. Only the future prophecies remain.

The Bible is also the most detailed, accurate and complete book of history ever written. The Bible is also the most open and honest book ever written. While other books try to hide the mistakes and sins of the author or subject, the Bible openly reveals the sins of people, patriarchs, evangelists, apostles and churches.

The Bible is also unique in its influence on other literature. Cleland McAfee wrote, “If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library. There are works, covering almost all the great literary writers, devoted especially to showing how much the Bible has influenced them.” McAfee wrote that in 1912. In 1913, historian Philip Schaff wrote, “This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered

more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquent of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.”

Truly, the Bible is the greatest Book ever written and contains the greatest Story ever told. The Bible is God’s Word, inspired and infallible. Don’t ever let a scoffing infidel put you down, Christian, because you believe the Bible. Have pity on that man or woman for they don’t know what they are saying. An unschooled laborer with a Bible in his hand and Jesus in his life knows more about life and truth than the most educated, trained professor or philosopher who does not know Christ. “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

[Thank you for reading these teaching notes from more than 40 years ago. My prayer is they will be a blessing to you and your ministry. For more information about my conversion from atheism to Christianity, I invite you to read a series on our Faithandselfdefense.com blog titled [Convince Me There’s A God](#) (there are currently dozens of articles available in that series on topics ranging from cosmology to design to fine tuning to causality to scientific research to morality to archaeology). We are also publishing the series as Ebooks that can be found [here](#).]

Bonus Chapter - On Being A Seeker

The term “seeker” is used a lot in Christian circles today (e.g. seeker friendly, seeker sensitive, seeker focused). I found this Bible study about being a seeker from more than 40 years ago that may be helpful as you consider the proper use of the term.

A. The Savior

What does He seek after?

“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this

house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luke 19:1-10

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:19-24

Jesus came “to save that which was lost.” His message was demanding and direct. He called on people to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). Jesus told His disciples that the world would hate them even as they hated Him and would persecute them (John 15:19-21).

B. The Sinner

What does the sinner seek after? Well, to get a better idea of what the lost sinner does seek after, let’s first look at what they don’t seek after –

“What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:9-18

If the lost sinner does not seek after God, then what do they seek after? The Scriptures are quite clear that they seek after sin. They search out selfish indulgences, vain rewards, and hopeless dreams. They seek after position and power, pleasure and pomp. Sinful people are wholly given over to “the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.” Lost sinners are totally depraved and depraved totally. They sin sinfully and are sinfully sinful.

Even though sinners do not naturally “seek” after God, God seeks for them and gives them a path to eternal life. Here’s how Paul continues his thought about everyone being “under sin” (Romans 3:19-28) –

- Whatever the law says, it says to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God

- No flesh will be justified before God by performing deeds of the law for by the Law is the knowledge of sin
- The righteousness of God without the Law is made known, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ to everyone who believes
- There's no difference because everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God
- Sinners are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus
- God set Jesus forth to be the atonement for our sins through faith in the shed blood of Christ, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God
- God is just and the justifier of the person who believes in Jesus Christ
- Sinners are justified by faith without the deeds of the Law

C. The Saint

What does the saint seek after? Well, we are not saints because of what we do, but because of who we are in Jesus Christ – children of God. Our position in heaven is that of a saint, but our practice on earth may look more like that of a sinner at times. There is sometimes little difference between the actions and lifestyles of a lost sinner and a saved saint. However, there should be all the difference in the world! God has called each one of us to be seekers of those things which are above –

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Colossians 3:1-2

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33

“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” Psalm 34:1-14

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.” Proverbs 2:1-9

“They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them. Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things.” Proverbs 28:4-5

“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.” 1 Corinthians 14:12

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not

found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Hebrews 11:1-6

Let's look briefly at this list of what saints should seek after –

- The things which are above
- The Kingdom of God and His righteousness
- The Lord (we will be delivered from all fears and shall not want any good thing)
- Peace
- Wisdom, knowledge and understanding
- The Lord (we will understand all things)
- To build up the Body of Jesus Christ
- God

How do we become seekers of God, His righteousness and the things above where Christ is?

- Total commitment to the search
- Complete training for the search
- Studying the Bible, fellowshiping and praying daily – Acts 2:41-42
- Coming under the equipping ministry of the Body throughout the week –
Ephesians 4:11-16

So, here's our challenge –

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Ephesians 4:17-24

[Thank you for reading these teaching notes from more than 40 years ago. My prayer is they will be a blessing to you and your ministry.]