

I WILL NOT BELIEVE

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Christian apologist John Warwick Montgomery, in his dialogue with “God is Dead” theologian Thomas Altizer, told this parable:

Once upon a time there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to the friendly neighborhood psychiatrist. The psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his belief that he was dead. The psychiatrist decided to use the simple truth that dead men do not bleed. He put his patient to work reading medical texts, observing autopsies, etc. After weeks of effort the patient finally said, “All right, all right! You’ve convinced me. Dead men do not bleed.” Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him with a needle, and the blood flowed. The man looked down and contorted, ashen faced and cried, “Good Lord! Dead men bleed after all!” (Thomas J. J. Altizer and John Warwick Montgomery, *The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue: A Chapter in the God Is Dead Controversy*, 21-22)

Willard Van Orman Quine, who was professor of philosophy at Harvard University, compared a person’s system of beliefs to a spider’s web: all the beliefs are connected, with the most important at the center, and the least important at the periphery; he will at all costs protect the central belief, even relinquish other beliefs. The central tenet of the Christian faith is the triune God of Scripture. The central tenet of the unbeliever’s system of belief is a denial of this God. Moreover, the Christian believes that God raised Jesus from the dead; the unbeliever denies this. The unbeliever demands evidence for the Christian faith, and he thinks that Christian faith is an irrational leap. However, belief in God is the most rational thing a person can do.

The Scriptures teach that God through His creation reveals Himself to all men, so that all men know Him. David wrote in the Nineteenth Psalm, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1, 2) Saint Paul expounded this idea. He wrote to the Romans:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

God has made Himself known to all men. They know He exists, and they know what He is like. The existence and attributes of God is the central fact of reality. Although it is certain, and the unbeliever certainly knows it, he, because of his sinful heart, denies it; he refuses to acknowledge God and give Him thanks. In some way, although he knows God exists, the denial of God’s existence is his most cherished belief, and he interprets all evidence by that belief. To move a man from unbelief to belief takes an act of God. God must change a man’s

heart. This is precisely what He does: He changes a man's heart so that he believes. When God changes a man's heart, for the first time in that man's life he acknowledges God, and gives Him thanks.

God has made Himself known through His creation, and He has also revealed Himself by His Word. For the Christian today, that Word is the Scriptures. Saint Paul wrote to Saint Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) The believer believes, not only in the existence of God, but He believes what God has said, and He believes what God has said simply because it is God who said it. In the nature of the case, one cannot prove, with proof distinct from God, that what God has said is true. By what standard could he prove it? There is nothing greater than God. So, God, when He made a covenant with Abraham, swore by Himself. He walked between the pieces, not with Abraham, but by Himself. (Genesis 15:8-19) Saint Paul explained to the Hebrews, "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself." (Hebrews 6:13)

The Scriptures, from start to finish, teach about Christ, the Son of God, and those who believe God believe the Scriptures. Righteous men and women looked for the Christ, and, when He came, they believed in Him. After Jesus called Philip to be His disciple, Philip said to Nathaniel, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45) After Jesus taught that men must eat His flesh and drink His blood if they would have eternal life, many of His followers abandoned Him. When He asked the twelve if they also would leave Him, Saint Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68, 69) When Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?", she answered, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (John 11:26, 27) Some time later, Jesus asked His disciples who people say He is. The disciples answered that people said different things. "And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." So, Jesus asked them what they said about Him. Saint Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus told Saint Peter that he was blessed, because he did not conclude this on his own, but with the help of God. (Matthew 16:13-17)

Some Jews did believe in Jesus, but some did not. Jesus, early in His earthly ministry, healed a man on the Sabbath. The Jews persecuted Jesus because they believed healing to be work, and the law forbade a man to work on the Sabbath. Jesus replied to them, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." "Therefore," Saint John wrote, "the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." (John 5:18) Jesus told them that John the Baptist bore witness to Him as the Son of God, His works bore witness to Him, and, most importantly, His Father bore witness to Him. He then said to the Jews, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39) The Jews would not believe in Him, however, because they did not love God. They did not love God, so they did not seek honor from Him, but rather from each other. Jesus said that He would not bear witness against them; rather Moses would, the same Moses they claimed to believe in. Moses had recorded for them what they needed to know, but they did not believe it. Jesus said to them, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:45-47)

The scribes and the Pharisees were religious leaders in Israel, but they were great hypocrites. All their religious practice, Jesus said, they practiced in order to receive to receive money and honor from men. They made their phylacteries broad, and their tassels long. They loved to be honored at feasts, and in the synagogues. They loved to be called Teacher. They prayed long prayers to impress people, but they manipulated widows into giving them their estates. They were exacting in formal religion, even tithing their spices, but they neglected the more important matters of the law, like justice and mercy. Because of their avarice, they used their positions to extort money from people. (Matthew 23:1-26) They were exacting in the religious observance of their disciples, but not of themselves. When it came to money, however, they could be lax. The law says, Honor thy father and thy mother, and He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. (Exodus 20:12; 21:17) The Pharisees, however, told men that if they dedicated their wealth to the temple, then they would not have to use any of it to help their parents. (Matthew 15:1-9) No doubt this benefitted the scribes and Pharisees, as well as the man. This explains Jesus's parable of the Unrighteous Steward. In that parable, the steward of a rich man stood accused of wasting his possessions, and the rich man demanded an accounting, and said he could no longer be steward. So, the steward collected from the king's debtors partial payments, so that they would be in his debt. Jesus told the, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:1-13) The Pharisees enriched themselves at the expense of the poor and widows, but for the benefit of the wealthy. Saint Luke reports, "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." (Luke 16:14) So Jesus told another parable, that of the Rich Man and Lazarus. There was a rich man, and a poor man, called Lazarus. Lazarus was very sick, and lay outside the gates of the rich man's house, begging for crumbs from his table. They both died, and Lazarus was taken to Abraham's bosom, and the rich man to torment. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, but Abraham said they should read Moses and the prophets. The rich man said that the Scriptures were not enough, but if someone were to return from the dead, then his brothers would repent. Abraham replied, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16:19-31) The rich man was naive to think that men who would not believe the Word of God would believe an act of God.

Jesus's disciples believed God, and so they believed the Scriptures. There were some things, however, namely Jesus's death and resurrection, that they were slow to understand. Jesus, not long before His death, told His disciples in no uncertain terms that He would both die, and return to life. He said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again." (Luke 18:31-33) Although the Hebrew scriptures and Christ both taught His death and resurrection, the disciples did not understand. Saint Luke writes, "And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." (Luke 18:34)

Even after He rose from the dead, His followers did not immediately understand. On the morning of Jesus's resurrection, several women went to the tomb. When they saw that the stone had been rolled away, Mary Magdalene ran back to tell Peter and John, but the others went inside. There inside, they saw two angels who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. So, with great joy they ran to tell the disciples. Mary Magdalene told Saint Peter and Saint John that someone had taken away Jesus's body, so the three raced to the tomb. (John 20:1, 2) John arrived first, and looked inside, but did not enter. Peter arrived next and went inside, and John followed him. There they saw the empty linen clothes, and the face cloth, but Jesus was not there. It

was then that John believed, for, He would later write, “as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.” (John 20:9) At first they did not understand, but they did come both to understand, and to believe. After Peter and John left the tomb, Jesus appeared to Mary. He spoke to her, and she acknowledged Him. She went to the disciples and told them that she had seen the Lord. (John 20:18)

Later that day, Jesus joined two disciples traveling from to the village of Emmaus. Jesus joined them, but they did not recognize Him. They spoke of Jesus’s execution, and said that they had hoped that He was the savior. They said that the women had reported seeing the tomb empty, and that certain disciples had confirmed their report, but that none had seen Him. Jesus then said to them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25, 26) Saint Luke writes, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets,” Saint Luke writes, “he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:26) Jesus explained to them what the Scriptures taught about Christ, that He must die and rise again in glory. When Jesus finally left them, only then did they recognize Him.

When the two returned to Jerusalem, they told the disciples they had seen the Lord, and the disciples told them that the Lord had appeared to Saint Peter. That evening, Jesus appeared to all the disciples, except for Thomas, who was then among them. Jesus showed them His hands and His side, with their wounds, and they believed. Concerning Thomas, Saint Luke recorded the following:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. (Luke 24:24-29)

The disciples saw the risen Lord, and believed the Scriptures and Him. The testimony of the disciples ought to have been enough for Thomas, but it was not. For some reason, He would not accept it. He insisted on seeing the Lord for himself. Jesus did indulge Thomas, but the indulgence came with an admonition: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” Christ’s apostles saw Him risen from the dead, and their testimony is sufficient for faith, because Jesus has given them authority to speak for Him.

Saint John, after recording the episode of Thomas’s faith, wrote of his purpose in writing his Gospel. He wrote, “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.” (John 20:30, 31) Since Jesus ascended into heaven, no one has seen Him perform miracles. They have no need to see Him perform miracles, however, for the record of His signs has been preserved in Scripture. Jesus’s resurrection is proof that He is the Christ, the Son of God. The unbeliever does not need proof of the resurrection. The resurrection is proof. He needs to believe the Scriptures. If he will not

believe the Scriptures, then he will not believe any so-called proof. He needs for God to open his heart to believe.

Let us have hearts always ready to believe the Word of God. Let us proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. Let us pray that God will open the hearts of those who hear our proclamation.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*