

According to 18th Century agnostic philosopher Immanuel Kant, skepticism provides a temporary resting place for human reason, “where it can reflect upon its dogmatic wanderings and make survey of the region in which it finds itself, so that for the future it may be able to choose its path with more certainty.”¹ Kant adds that skepticism “is no dwelling place for permanent settlement”. That means skeptics are not content where they are. Unanswered questions and recurring doubts goad them to rearrange their puzzled perspective.

The stubborn reality of truth awakens, what Harvard Professor Michael Sandel calls, “the restlessness of reason to see where it might lead”.² Simmering within the human spirit, the truth about God generates an inescapable tension. It raises provocative questions that insist on plausible answers. Because absolutes exist, skeptics feel obligated to address unresolved dilemmas. Universal truths are so alive and active that they compel us to face the facts with forthright honesty.

Truth demands justice—that life be made right. Like a hot electrical wire, it prods skeptical minds to investigate probable solutions. Thoughtfully crafted questions escort skeptics toward the truth until its unshakable reality stares them right in the face.

The Right Question

“No man really becomes a fool—until he stops asking questions”

Charles Steinmetz (1865-1923), inventor of alternating electrical current

Before attempting to ask “why” questions, we gain perspective by addressing one vital “who” question. Beneath the surface, everyone wants to know the truth about God. Who is “God” exactly? What distinguishes God from others? Where does God dwell? What does God do? How can I recognize and know God for real? Without answering this paramount question correctly, skeptics prolong their quest for “why” answers. With so many reservations left hanging, dubious minds are tempted to blame God for bad things that happen. Poisoned by propaganda, this reaction reflects a classic misunderstanding of His divine character, motive, and method.

Jaded by a warped sense of reality, open minded skeptics become closed minded cynics. Fed-up with ongoing deception and unending delusion, their mind

¹ Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Pure Reason” II, II, 1787; e-text version by N. K. Smith, 1929 edition, p. 607 <http://staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/cpr/toc.html> (accessed 5-10-13)

² Michael Sandel, Professor of Government at Harvard University, <http://athome.harvard.edu/programs/jmr/preview.html#> (accessed 12-15-2007).

is made up in a coffin of contempt, locked in with self-protective scorn. Cynical minds focus everything through a filter of critical negativity. They oppose new ideas and reject corroborating evidence because they no longer trust anyone.

The Blind Faith Misnomer

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.... (Hosea 4:6 ESV)

Framed with proper intentions, questions do not indicate a lack of faith. Neither do they imply a shortage of trust. True faith incorporates evidence with assurance.

Now faith is the assurance [substance NKJ] of things hoped for, the conviction [evidence NKJ] of things not seen. (Heb 11:1 NAS)

Skeptics are wise to challenge status quo mentalities before approving and adopting them with any conviction. They retain reasonable doubt until evidence becomes verified fact. Honest questions reflect insufficient data and/or a lack of credible experience. Initiating a transparent inquiry reveals a healthy desire for greater understanding. God seeks informed followers that support their faith with reliable convictions.

Astute questions deserve careful consideration, and they merit an appropriate response. Where the freedom to ask, seek, and knock abounds, understanding ultimately emerges. Quandaries and conundrums do not threaten God's self-esteem. In fact, He insists that our union rest upon *"the knowledge of the truth"* as He reveals it with incremental clarity.³ The freedom to ask God anything without hesitation provides a foundation for interpersonal integrity and intimacy.

Secure relationships embrace the art of grappling for the truth side-by-side and digging deeper together. Exploring unknown territory exposes new connecting points that keep our relationship fresh. Investigating uncertainty with the Holy Spirit exposes our mind to God's heart. This process generates a robust margin of faith and a reliable bond of trust, which effectively elevates the Who above our why questions.

Jesus wired us to be on the same page with Him, right side up, front and center, on earth as it is in heaven. Rightly posed, questions reflect an appropriate appetite for mental and emotional restoration. Believing God for suitable explanations shows a healthy quest for assurance. Desiring to be in on things indicates a yearning to participate with God as He activates His plans and executes His will.

³ Hebrews 10:26; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:1

Ask, Seek, and Find

From God's perspective, stupid questions do not exist. He admires honesty and respects naivety, especially when we are confused, cautious, and conflicted. A pointed inquiry never intimidates God because He set the standard for competent and secure authority figures.

Though hindered by irrational doubts and emotional dents, we grow wiser and stronger by asking, seeking, and finding. Our Heavenly Father extends an earnest invitation compelling us to pursue the knowledge of the truth. He sent the Spirit of truth to teach us all things, to remind us what Jesus said, and to lead into all truth.⁴ God escorts us personally from mental acquisition to intimate encounters. We experience the Truth because Jesus fully integrates who He is into why, what, where, and when answers.

When the radiant Savior intercepted a radical Pharisee He demanded, "*Saul, Saul **why** are you persecuting Me?*"⁵ In response, Saul lifted his voice to proclaim the core passion of his heart. Bathed in blinding light, Saul elevated one question above all others, including the one posed by Jesus. Saul cried out, "***who** are you Lord?*" Instantly Jesus replied, "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*".⁶ The passion of Christ confronted a brutal enforcer and transformed him into a beloved companion. When Saul encountered the who behind Jesus' cutting question, why suddenly became irrelevant. Saul's reason for persecuting the body of Christ no longer mattered. Mercy had kissed truth and abolished Saul's murderous threats.

Knocking on God's door comes with a dependable promise. Jesus said, "*everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened*".⁷ God awaits our calloused knuckles and welcomes our curious heart. He knows that persistent knocking indicates a personal desire to know Him and His ways. After taking the initiative to convey words of life, Our Heavenly Father encourages us, His dear children, to employ a proactive approach. He says:

***if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you,
Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;
For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek***

⁴ John 14:26, John 16:13

⁵ Acts 9:4 NAS

⁶ Acts 9:5 NAS

⁷ Matthew 7:8 and Luke 11:10 NIV

*her as silver And **search** for her as for hidden treasures; **Then** you will **discern the fear of the LORD** And **discover the knowledge of God**.*

Proverbs 2:1-5 NIV

Our quest for truth involves a multistep response with cause-and-effect options:

- Receive Words communicated by Our Heavenly Father
- Value His Commands
- Listen Attentively to Wisdom
- Engage our Heart [our mind, will, and emotions] to Understand
- Cry Out for Discernment [Insight, NIV]
- Raise our Voice to Acquire Understanding
- Seek Understanding, Search for it as for Hidden Treasures

When we execute due diligence, Our Heavenly Father rewards us with discernment and revelation. He fascinates our puzzled heart with the fear of the Lord and convinces our perplexed mind with the Knowledge of God. When we seek Him with all our heart, He rewards us with priceless treasures.⁸

God affirms skeptics when they refuse to embrace inferior versions of divine reality. He respects their reticence to embrace misconceived notions based on flawed logic. Suspicious platitudes doused in watered down religion dilute the glorious splendor and awesome wonder of God. After meticulous scrutiny, dumbed down deities deserve flat-out rejection. When skeptics encounter the truth about Jesus, they become ardent worshipers grounded in the fear of the Lord. Their love matures without pretense, and like Saul they become staunch proponents of the truth. The impact of God's unfailing love and unmerited favor sweeps them off their feet and propels them in the way of wisdom.

Answers Are Not Enough

When a blade severs a finger—it hurts. Understanding the anatomy and physiology of pain suddenly becomes irrelevant. Cause and effect explanations are not worth mentioning because they fail to address the loss or relieve the pain. Even after the pain subsides, mechanistic details offer minimal consolation. Discussing how hand met blade in time and space no longer matters. We do not want a neurological explanation—we want our finger back. We do not want a clinical diagnosis for post-traumatic stress—we want peace of mind.

⁸ Deuteronomy 4:29

When unbearable pain and grief assault our senses, answers are not the solution. Relief, renewal, and restoration require healing beyond words. Words may clarify how-and-why concerns, but they do not bring back our loss or eliminate the pain. We cannot rationalize away the loss of a severed limb or demise of a broken relationship. Abused children and rape victims do not crave explanations. Words do not fix the misery, anguish, and despair inflicted by murder, death, or divorce. Academic advice and systematic logic only trivialize the magnitude of our loss.

Ultimately, we want to turn back the clock, for life to be the way it was—before the loss, before the pain, before Lucifer became Satan, and before Adam and Eve became sinners. We want our health back, our purity back, our dignity back, and our loved one back. We want everything to be the way God intended for it to be. For some circumstances, no explanation, interpretation, or application of reason will ever suffice.

Notwithstanding, our desire for complete restoration does not eliminate our quest for answers. Understanding and wholeness are not mutually exclusive. God’s provision features both restoration and revelation; He is all-inclusive.

God Knows How to be God

Our Heavenly Father sees what we do not want to think about. Nonetheless, His outlook never wavers. Jesus views generations of depravity without blinking because His expectation for the future is so certain. Absorbing every cry from every captive, God demonstrates sacred sensitivity. His ability to heal and restore is infinite. His power to emancipate and rejuvenate exceed all expectation. God has unlimited capacity to repair the most severe of wounds. Forgiving sin, absolving guilt, and resolving shame are His specialty. We are just beginning to grasp how thoroughly God restores shattered souls.

Without exception, God always gets it right. When He acts, the Almighty has what it takes to meet our need in time, space, and eternity. That means the timing of His intervention does not diminish the competence of His performance. Before, during, and after, God delivers what we need with invincible mastery. No one can improve upon the timing or effectiveness of His influence. In every circumstance, God generates benefits for those that love Him.⁹ Paul reminds us:

Never doubt God’s mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelieva-

⁹ Romans 8:28

ble dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you. (Ephesian 3:20 TPT)

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide comprehensive relief for all humanity. Our connection with Jesus ensures that we will not experience the most severe consequence of sin and death, i.e., eternal separation from our Heavenly Father. The remaining pain and suffering, as excruciating as they may be, linger for a brief moment compared with "*the second death*" mentioned in the Revelation.¹⁰

Confidence to Wait

Connecting with God may not answer every why question in this life. It does however provide joy and peace during our earthly struggle. Paul pronounced a powerful blessing when He wrote:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13 ESV)

Hope for humanity does not depend on mental acuity or emotional aptitude; it relies on the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Heavenly Father reigns as the God of hope. He sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit to connect our heart permanently with His passionate love. God never compromises regarding this priority. His timing and influence guarantee a favorable outcome. From heaven's vantage point, the best is yet to come. Until that time, God imparts peace, joy, and hope. His behavior never deviates from His eternal purpose.

Despite the apparent risk to his image, God demonstrates immense patience. His longsuffering stands in contrast with our urgent and at times desperate needs—here and now. God knows what is best for us so He waits with absolute assurance that His purpose will prevail. The God of hope can afford to wait, even when naysayers put Him on trial for recurring evil that plagues this planet, from both human and demonic sources.

Sometimes God exerts His influence directly. At other times, He watches, listens, and waits with incomprehensible forbearance. While spiritual darkness ravaged the earth, Almighty God waited in the tender confines of a teenager's womb. After thousands of years of waiting, Almighty God constrained Himself to nine tedious months of fetal growth, one trimester at a time. Jesus paused Himself in cramped obscurity, posing as a vulnerable human embryo.

¹⁰ Revelation 20:13-15

Finally, Jesus Christ the Son of God burst in and out of this world like a brilliant snapshot in history! After ministering publicly for just three and a half years in a sparsely populated region of the ancient world, He suddenly disappeared. The exact representation of God came and went, discreetly returning to His Father's side. The radiance of divine glory descended and then promptly ascended out of sight. The image of the invisible God flashed His presence right past us.¹¹

At just the right time, God arrived in person. After waiting for such a very long time, His physical connection with humanity was brief and inconspicuous. The Savior of the world streaked by time and space at a pace that confounds us. Nonetheless, Jesus stayed long enough to fulfill His mission. He paid the price required to reconnect us permanently with His passionate love. He provided the perfect remedy for all sin and its consequences. Jesus accomplished His Father's will by providing total release for everyone condemned to eternal death. He did everything necessary to furnish us with extraordinary benefits relevant to this life.

The incarnate one in whom all the fullness of God lives in bodily form has ascended into heaven.¹² His intervention was and always is, timely and perfect. Jesus did everything we needed God to do while He was here in the flesh. He now waits beyond the scope of our senses in an elusive spiritual realm. With our Heavenly Father, Jesus views nations festering in wickedness as the church contends for righteousness.

Jesus watched with inconceivable restraint as ravenous beasts tore human flesh and bone apart in coliseums throughout the Roman Empire. He watched world leaders like Emperor Nero indulge their frenzy to torture and crucify. He saw the brutality of depraved despots like Mao Tse-Tung, Joseph Stalin, and Adolph Hitler, as they annihilated the body and soul of countless millions. Jesus witnessed the infamous crusades and notorious inquisitions. He observed the slaughter of lost souls without regard for their eternal destiny. God saw faithful believers beheaded or burned at the stake over relatively petty doctrinal disputes.

God continues watching with astounding forbearance, as resourceful men and women employ their strength for political and religious dominance. He listens to arrogant intellectuals as they strive to invent alternatives for God. The influence of Jean Rousseau, secular humanism philosopher (1712-1778), Charles Darwin, innovator of the theory of evolution and natural selection (1809-1882), Karl Marx, socialist economic philosopher (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche, atheist philoso-

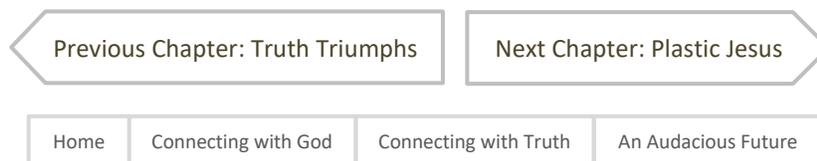
¹¹ John 14:9, Colossians 1:15, and Hebrews 1:3

¹² Colossians 2:9

pher (1844-1900), and Sigmund Freud, psychoanalyst (1856-1939) substitute God with nature, self, or the State.

Nonetheless, the “*God of enduring patience*” looks down with undiminished confidence.¹³ He waits—as we wait. Being slow to anger and rich in mercy, God sees through eyes of infallible grace and invincible truth.¹⁴ With supreme optimism, He observes the evil and the good—and yes, the good remains strong, resilient, and far reaching!

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,
(Romans 15:5 NAS)



¹³ Jeremiah 15:15

¹⁴ Psalm 103:8