

Why Is Evidence Not Sufficient to Convince Some Atheists – Part 1

The famous atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell was once asked what he would say to God if he found himself standing before Him after his death. Russell replied, “I probably would ask, ‘Sir, why did You not give me better evidence?’”

For Russell, as for many atheists today, it all came down to the evidence, to a

form of miracle that has no possible explanation in the natural world. The implication is that, given better evidence for God, atheists would believe.

When we hear claims like these, it is tempting to think belief in God comes down to the evidence *and nothing else*. On this view, it’s as if we have an “evidence meter” in our heads. And when the “evidence meter” reaches a certain level, we believe in God. But is it really that simple? Does belief in God *merely* depend on evidence or is it a heart issue?

In fact, there are 3 main reasons why someone will reject a claim of truth:

Some reject rationally: they have rational doubts and would welcome evidence.

Some reject emotionally: their doubts are purely emotional. Someone may say something like, “I know a lot of hypocritical believers. If that’s what God is about, I want no part of it.” Or “I have friends who believe in God and I would never want to be like them.” Some skeptics have been injured or offended by believers, others have been hurt because they prayed and saw no answer to their prayers, or because tragedy hit them and they think God is the One who caused it. So they respond emotionally based on some experience in their past and struggle to overcome negative feelings that prevent them from evaluating the situation fairly.

Some reject volitionally: some atheists are *willfully* resistant and refuse to accept any argument offered by believers. In fact, they are happy running their own life saying: “It’s all fables and nonsense, I just don’t have time to think about those kinds of things” or “I don’t care if it is true, I’m not changing my life.” Some may even say things like, “I’m a good person, so I’m not worried about God.” They *willfully* reject God because they are unwilling to change their life to embrace the truth.

Actually few people object for rational reasons; the majority object to the truth for emotional or volitional reasons, and I would say most of them for purely volitional reasons. Each of us wants to be in charge, to be our own master, to make our own decisions and pursue our own interests without limitation, especially the limits that God might impose on us.

The brilliant French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal believed evidence for God played an important role. However, it wasn’t the decisive factor.

In his masterful book *Pensées*, Pascal wrote, “Willing to appear openly to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from Him with all their heart, God so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given indications of Himself, which are visible to those who seek Him and not to those who do not seek Him. There is enough light for those to see who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.”

As Pascal makes it clear, the evidence for God is *not* the issue. To put it another way, the problem is not *with God*; the problem is *with us*, it’s a heart issue.

Pascal’s ideas find support in both the Old and New Testaments. Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah to the children of Israel, God says, “You will seek Me and find Me, **when** you seek Me with all your heart.” (Jer. 29:13)

There is no clearer example of this in Scripture than the Pharisees’ response to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. “When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of Him but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.” (John 12:9–11)

After being confronted with evidence that Jesus miraculously brought Lazarus back from the dead, the chief priests didn’t repent and turn to God. No, they made plans to kill Lazarus.

This passage highlights two different responses to the same evidence. Many believed in Jesus because of the evidence, but this miraculous event didn’t *guarantee* that everyone would believe. There were some, in this case the chief priests, who had the same evidence and chose to reject it.

Lazarus was *living, breathing evidence* of Jesus’ identity. However, rather than believe, the chief priests made plans to destroy the evidence.

Why? Because belief in God has consequences. (To be followed)