

Why I Believe

By Trent D. Schrock

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Introduction

The birth of an exercise.

“I believe. Help my unbelief!”

How I relate to this heart cry, uttered so long ago by a father who believed in Jesus enough to ask him to heal his son, but who also seemed aware his faith was, well, very human. You can read about this event in the gospel of Mark 9:14-29.

We are human. Our faith has cracks. We know these cracks, and in times of great testing they are exposed. Our weakness shows.

Over the past twenty-five years, a number of my close friends have turned their backs on Christianity. Many of these defections, accompanied by the steady stream of high-profile Christians who renounced their faith, landed as body blows.

Along with the discouragement and loss each instance inflicted on me, my eyes could not help but turn inward and examine the foundations of my own faith. What did I believe? Why did I believe it? How did my faith remain while so many around me were tossing theirs aside like so much empty Christmas wrapping?

It wasn't as if I hadn't experienced many of the same questions these friends put forward. Throughout my life as a believer, God has allowed me to go through a series of faith tests.

For others, these tests might have been a light lunch. For me, they were enormous, ground-shaking challenges. It went like this; I would receive a challenging question and then I would have to ask myself ten more challenging questions in order to feel comfortable with my faith.

These challenges tested my faith to the core and stripped me of nearly everything in the process. They took a deep emotional toll. During one such test, I dangled precariously over the awful maw of ink-black despair. Purpose was being sucked out of my soul. There was no reason to live.

Can you relate to this?

It was a dark time. To this day, I am humbled by those experiences. Humbled. But also greatly strengthened and filled with thanksgiving.

It is important to mention that most of my questions were not answered in the moment of distress. Just a few. Some questions were answered later. Some much later. Some not at all. In fact, it often has been years before some scripture, or some speaker, or some Christian writer, or some grace-sparked thought delivers just the right answer for that faith-jarring query.

Although some questions still remain unanswered, these tests developed a patience in my soul. My confidence has grown through the answers received that God will give the answers I need in the time I need it.

Faith is still not easy. Those of us who believe know we do so against the rushing current of the culture around us. Christianity is increasingly unpopular in western culture. In addition, many of us find challenges to Christianity by other thinkers are not as difficult to handle as the unavoidable questions in our own heads. Our faith has been challenged, both from outside

sources, and from our own examinations. Our faith is actively being challenged. Our faith will be challenged on into the future. Our faith lives within this constant stream of challenges.

But this has always been the case. Two thousand years' worth of great Christian thinkers have given their lives to facing such challenges head on. How vividly I remember the first time it dawned on me that there were powerfully reasoned answers for nearly every question I heard to faith in Christ. When this revelation struck, a sobering thought chilled me. *I almost caved at the very first line of questioning.*

Seriously!

That epiphany remains. I hope I never forget it. But most of all, I hope I never forget the countless personal reasons for my faith in Christ.

So, what sparked this particular exercise?

Throughout the years, I have participated in many conversations with unbelievers and former believers. During one particular fireside conversation, a friend chided me about perceived weaknesses in scripture. It was tempting to offer a retort, because his out-of-context use of the passage was provoking. But I felt it was best to stay silent in the circumstances. Past experience had trained me that arguments about personal beliefs usually do more harm than good, and I could feel my argumentative side rising up. So, I sat quietly and let the bait skim by.

However, as he talked, I wondered. Why did his arguments fail to move me? This question ignited within my soul a resolve to write down the many reasons for my faith in Christ.

I write in shapes. In the journal where I began recording my reasons, I organized my thoughts chronologically in a circle, with the top of the circle being my earliest recollections of faith, and, moving clockwise around the circle, the reasons that developed in each subsequent stage of my life. Elementary school, high school, college, and so on. My most current reasons reside at the eleven o'clock position on the circle.

As I wrote, my excitement grew. The list expanded. In addition, I realized with a thrill that each reason remained alive and well. In fact, most had grown in their significance over the years.

Christians are instructed to be ready to give an answer for that crazy hope that lives inside us. In the past, if I had been asked, "Trent, why do you believe? Why do you have hope in Christ?" I think I might have remembered two or three convenient reasons for that particular moment. But as I did this exercise, the list grew like a stack of Ebenezer stones testifying to the many ways God has drawn me to himself.

My excitement spilled over into conversations with other believers. I began to ask other Christians, "Why do you believe?" Their answers stirred memories of latent reasons of my own.

This exercise also produced five questions that I could ask any person whether Christian or not. These questions can bring about a meaningful understanding between friends and acquaintances.

1. What do you believe?
2. Why do you believe it?
3. What is your trusted source?

4. Who best articulates your beliefs?

In other words, is there anyone who has written a concise summary of your beliefs that can bring me to a better understanding of your beliefs?

5. What are the weaknesses of your beliefs?

This question flows out of my personal premise that an intellectually honest person already knows and can articulate some of the weaknesses of their own position. Caution. It may not land well. Ask with care.

My objective in such a delicate conversation is to hear and understand. Relationships are easily damaged when the topic of faith or “central life motivations” is discussed.

So, why write and share “Why I believe?”

My original intention in this “Why I believe” exercise was to examine my own foundations. The project was to benefit my wife and I as we discussed, and I recorded, my reasons for faith in Christ. But it quickly took on greater importance. My present hope is that this growing list will bear testimony to our children and our children’s children. Faith has reason. I hope it will inspire them to be intentional about their faith. God has no grandchildren. Their faith will need to be their own.

I also hope it may protect them from some of that prideful generational bias to which I fell prey as a young man.

And along the way, I hope many who read this will be inspired to take record of their own faith, and will then pass it on to their children, their friends, and their acquaintances.

What I Believe

By Trent D. Schrock

Ok, even though this article is titled “Why I believe,” it is important to be clear...What is the belief for which I feel compelled to give reasons? In other words, before answering “Why I believe,” I feel I must first declare “What I believe.”

My faith is best summarized by what is commonly called “the apostles’ creed.”

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

And born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven,

And is seated at the right hand of the Father.

From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The holy catholic church,

The communion of saints,

The forgiveness of sin,

The resurrection of the body,

And the life everlasting. Amen

I also find such a delight in the gospel of God’s love that I believe it is worth mentioning the good news. It’s so personal. The gospel is most concisely stated here:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17 ESV)

That about does it. Having clarified what I believe, here, now, is...Why I believe!

Why I Believe

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Reason #1: I received the gospel in a loving context at an early age.

From my earliest recollection, my parents and their extended families delivered the gospel to me in a context that was believable. They talked about God, prayed to God, read the Bible to us, took us to church, and seemed to allow this belief to affect every aspect of their lives.

My parents did not pretend to be perfect. I could see their humanity clearly. In a way, their imperfections were in themselves a testimony of these very truths in their lives rather than a detriment to my acceptance. They looked to another source. I followed their gaze.

I remember connecting with the message of Christ on a deep soul level at a very early age.

Later in life, those who challenged my faith, and my own personal challenges as well, led me to test this foundation. Do I believe in Christ merely because I am parroting my parents? It's a great question to ask. But long story short...no. While my childhood faith certainly grew alongside the faith of my parents and grandparents, even the earliest tendrils of my faith were distinctly personal. Later challenges probed this question. Roots grew deeper.

This reason stands tall today, even after all these years and all those challenges. Although it cannot stand as unique by comparison to the faith of all who follow in their parents' footsteps, I find that it is not to be diminished as a valid reason for faith. I believed in Christ on a deeply personal basis from my earliest recollection.

Reason #1b: Examples of love

My daily culture was woven with thousands of stitches from acts of accountability and acts of love both great and small. This culture was spoken of as the fruit of God's Spirit at work. I saw it, and I believed it. I believe it to this day.

Reason #1c: Testimonies of changed lives

I grew up surrounded by countless examples of changed lives, folks who lived selfishly...and then suddenly they didn't. They changed. They overcame habitual sins. They became more kind, more honest, gentler, more loving.

I experienced this same change during my own surrender and growth as a Christian.

I know the argument "it worked for me" is not an effective argument by itself. I won't try to make it stand on its own. But I must also be honest that my life and the life of so many others around me convinced me of the power of God and join the chorus of reasons for my belief in Christ.

Recently, I asked our pastor my question of the decade, "Why do you believe?" This was his answer (in loose paraphrase). "A changed life. I used to be x, but after surrendering to Christ I was different."

He has read a lot, studied a lot, and seen a lot as a pastor of a city church of 1000+. He knows the arguments against Christianity. His faith has been greatly challenged. Yet, the first reason he gave for his faith was his personal experience with the life-changing power of Christ.

Reason #1d: The power of scripture in my life

In Romans 10:17, Paul makes the argument that faith comes from hearing God's word.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:14-17 ESV)

I read the scriptures a lot as a child and a young man. To what degree did this prepare me for faith? And to what degree did it defend my faith against attacks? I don't know how to measure that. I know that knowledge of scripture in context went a long way toward saving me from arguments that tried to misuse them, or that attempted to point out weaknesses in the texts.

Many scriptures played an important role in my youth. Here are three passages from Psalm 119 that were in the forefront of my mind when I first recorded this reason for my faith in Christ. I have highlighted some of the phrases that show the ability of the Scriptures to protect against loss of faith.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. **I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word.** (Psalm 119:9-16 ESV)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word! Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your rules. I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. **The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.** I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end. (Psalm 119:105-112 ESV)

I hate the double-minded, but I love your law. **You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.** Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God. **Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope! Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually!** You spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. All the wicked of the earth you discard as dross, therefore I love your testimonies. My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments. (Psalm 119:113-120 ESV)

An encouragement:

Christians, be in the Word! Distractions pull at our attention, eat our time, and numb our minds. Be proactive. Read, study, listen to, memorize, and meditate on God's Word. Know it in context. Know who it was written to, and why. Know how it spoke to the culture into which it was written. Know how it speaks to our present culture. Know how it speaks to our present challenges. Most of all, know how it all points to Christ. There is great beauty contained within its pages, and that beauty offers strength, healing, and power to overcome.

Reason #1e: The power of Christian service. The heart of believers at work in our communities.

What impact did my parents' Christian service have in my life? Again, I don't know how to measure this. But I know that their acts of generosity continue to stir me today. And their love for and service to the widows, orphans, and outcasts whom they invited into our home on a regular basis formed a feast of genuine Christianity.

In addition, their constant speaking of Christ and pointing to God's Word as the source and the answer were a steady exercise in the application of God's Word in this young believer's life.

Reason #2: The internal consistency of Scripture:

I read a lot of scripture growing up. It was also taught to me at home, at church, at my Grandpa Schrock's table. It was written in the lives around me. Although I couldn't have put it into words at the time, I found an internal consistency in Scripture that convicted me, delighted me, and defended my faith against many attacks over the years. I can't count the number of times I have heard a professor or a friend or an antagonist or a news article or even a preacher say something about Scripture, and that strong sense of internal consistency kicks in and sifts the challenge to determine what rang true and what did not.

Some of my personal thoughts on Scripture:

At the foundation of every Christian's faith there must be this important stone; "The Bible tells me so." Either God told us about Himself, or we must

“make it up” by selecting from a mix of sources. In the end, our selection requires synthesis by our own fallible minds. I’ve tried this before. I’ve certainly watched others do it. It’s uncomfortable. I know in my soul I don’t have the power to make something true or not, whatever those Disney songs may say.

The Bible, especially as lived by human Christians, is an easy target for attacks of all kinds. I’ve experienced a few hundred of these in my lifetime. I see the creases at which these attacks are aimed.

Would you believe me if I told you I have yet to see an attack that I could honestly acknowledge as legitimate?

Would you believe me if I told you that attacks against the Christian faith have almost always sought to delegitimize the text, because any real challenge to Christianity must go to the source of the message.

Would you believe me if I contended that two thousand years of withering attacks have left it intact? In fact, the more time goes by, the more manuscript evidence is discovered, including earlier and earlier documents proving the gospels and epistles were written...when they said they were written... and said...what they said they did. Feel free to search this for yourself. Josh McDowell (author of *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and a boatload of other books) went on such a quest with the intention of proving Christianity wrong and melted from agnostic critic to everyday believer and vocal defender of the faith.

There are countless examples. Thousands? Tens of thousands? Two millennia of such attacks have proven to be false, mis-directed, or just plain wrong.

There are always more attacks in cue. There always will be.

Perhaps a few such attacks have crashed into your ship of faith like red shells in a Mario Kart race. They’ve left you jolted and helplessly waving your little arms. Perhaps you have a handful of unanswered questions about certain passages or purported problems with a passage or two...or many more. I do as well. But I also have piles of examples of my past questions being satisfied. The trend? Well...you see.

Reason #3: The philosophical consistency of scripture

Since my youth, long before I knew how to put it into words, I found within scripture a philosophical consistency. This sense that the scriptures presented a consistent explanation of many everyday things such as the world and its operations, the nature of people, the character of God, the nature of wisdom, the nature of love, the nature of suffering, and the presence of evil has only grown as I have studied scripture layer upon layer, year after year.

This consistency was evident to me in the commands, the instruction, the poetry, the narratives, and the historical accounts. I wish I, like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, or Peter in front of the Sanhedrin, or Stephen in front of the antagonistic crowd, could “begin with Moses and all the prophets” and explain how beautifully it all points to Christ.

It was because of this sense of consistency that I have never seen the presence of evil or suffering as being a problem for the integrity of the Christian faith. Scripture consistently speaks

of these uncomfortable concepts, tells us much of their nature, describes much about their origin, and gives us some of the reasons that even “good” people experience such troubles.

And speaking of “good,” Scripture is consistent in expressing the limits and fallibility of humankind, while declaring that God is the only one who is good. David. Joseph. Abraham. No person in scripture is presented without flaws. We see them in their unvarnished humanity. The exception is the one man, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

Reason #4: The psychological consistency of scripture

From my perspective, scripture “nails” human nature, from heart to psyche to actions. In short, man is basically evil, governed by a desperately wicked heart. He is easily self-deceived and easily deceived by others.

I was a good kid but saw in myself the capacity for all kinds of evil. When I was honest with myself, I would catch glimpses of my own wickedness and self-deception. I also caught glimpses of it in every person around me, even in those who argued throughout our social sciences classes that man was basically good and claimed society or religion or parental training as culprits for implanting evil into good little hearts.

I honestly don’t know how anyone can examine their own fluctuating motives and make a believable argument for goodness as the base of the human heart.

And I also don’t know how one can watch a child and be convinced that man is basically good. Children show occasional flashes of generosity and kindness. These moments peak out like the sun from behind great clouds of selfishness, unkindness, and outright tantrums. But even in the most sweet-natured child, selfishness and unkindness expose the nature of the human heart.

This fabric of humanity is depicted in whole within scripture, as well as in countless interweaving threads lifted out for examination by the narratives of the Bible.

Scripture also spends quite a bit of time telling us this very thing quite clearly.

[The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? \(Jeremiah 17:9 ESV\)](#)

In the letter to the Romans, Paul quotes a plethora of scripture from the Old Testament about this very topic, as part of the argument that every person in the world, every person throughout history, is wicked (sinful) and in need of the Savior.

[What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:](#)

[“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”](#)

[“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.”](#)

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:9-26 ESV)

Reason #5: The overwhelming appearance of design in nature.

If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck...it’s a duck.

This was the colloquial wisdom of the hard-working midwestern salt-of-the-earth culture in which I grew up. It was called “common sense.”

As I look at the world around me, I am overwhelmed by indications that all things...living creatures and the environment in which we live and the universe in which we reside...have been designed.

There is a somewhat famous argument about the watchmaker. If a person walking along a beach finds a watch, his first assumption, and the right assumption, will be that there is a watchmaker. Such an intricate machine with such precise sets of springs and wheels and gears all working to keep steady time must have had a designer and builder. Therefore, something as designed-appearing as the universe must have been designed.

This picture has been argued back and forth for centuries. I’ve heard many arguments for and against. But like so many present-day arguments, I find them to be unimaginative and far too small. What I personally see in nature is not a watch. Rather, I see watches within watches within watches to great orders of magnitude beyond description.

Here is a contemplation on one tiny example taken from an infinitesimal speck within the thin layer of atmosphere that surrounds our tiny planet.

In other words...a few thoughts on the human body.

Each human body is an organism made up of some 30 trillion+ cells. Think about that and seek to comprehend that fact before going on.

Each of these cells possesses and actively defends a DNA map made up of 3 billion base pairs. In other words, 200+ billion atoms are arranged in exactly the same order in each of 30 trillion cells. These 30 trillion maps are stubbornly consistent in their complex makeup, and stubbornly resilient at maintaining their order throughout the life of that organism.

Each of those 30 trillion cells is specialized by using the precise portion of that map required for the placement of that cell within the body so as to form an interwoven mesh of living structure and pulsing organ systems that each perform a specific series of essential tasks for the life of those cells as individuals and for the life of the body as a whole.

This specialization is wonderfully elastic at just the right time (during the intense cell divisions and specializations that take place within the womb, for example, or during times of healing and repair), and amazingly static for most of the rest of that body's life.

These intricate maps are made in such a way that they can be carefully unzipped, copied into a mirror image of a perfectly sized portion of the map, and re-zipped intact. The mirror copy of the map-fragment is then used by an intricate set of biological "machinery" to make an exact copy portion of the original map that was needed to produce a complex protein structure that is then perfectly placed to do exactly what the greater body needs at exactly the right time to keep the body functioning healthily...defending, copying, replicating, dismantling, detoxifying, eliminating, capturing energy, storing energy, releasing energy, metabolizing energy on both a cellular and whole-body level.

All the while these complex functions are taking place, each cell (almost all cell types within the body, that is) is replicating in whole, all 200+ billion atoms of the map plus an incredible complexity of other cellular structures and systems being precisely copied, as needed, within its proper time, so cells that are wearing out can be replaced and the whole organism can continue to live and thrive.

Ok, I know. Some brain cells don't replicate. This actually strengthens the point.

Old cells are sloughed off or broken down and safely removed without harm to the ongoing life of the body, and new cells take their place performing these countless functions, each function being of near infinite complexity. Study the process of hearing or smelling, the flow of information through the nerves, the wonder of T-cells and their function as part of the immune system, or the nature of bone growth and repair.

If each process is fantastically intricate, what orders of magnitude must be applied to describe the incredible complexity of the whole as these cells work together to form a living, breathing body?

This 30 trillion-celled body is surrounded by and both invested and infested with trillions of other single-celled and multi-celled organisms. Symbiotic relationships with certain families of these cells facilitate food breakdown and nutrient intake and other essential processes. The intricate nature of these symbiotic relationships boggles the mind.

Meanwhile, relationship with those outside organisms is strictly monitored in a united manner by the 30 trillion cells of the body. Certain "outsider" organisms are instantly destroyed. Maps are kept on file of how to neutralize and destroy those organisms if a repeat invasion takes place. Special cells within the body patrol constantly for these past invaders, or shape attack plans against new invaders. The body also works as a whole to keep symbiotic relationships in exact check, keeping good guys where they should be while keeping bad guys out of the body.

The stomach and intestinal tract are of particular note in this regard. Even though they are inside the body, the stomach and intestinal lining act as borders, strictly monitoring what can pass into and out of the body itself from this internal tube. In a way, the stomach and GI tract act as a “tube within a tube” so that the tube running through our body is still considered to be “outside” the body. Within this “outside inside tube” lives an intense microbiome that would kill the body if allowed inside but perform excellent service to the body if kept in their “outside tube inside.”

This body also possesses the ability to move on a macro scale, communicate with other bodies around it, make and store memories, build friendships, love, procreate, and calculate solutions that allow the body to observe and effect the world and universe around it. Each of these processes and many, many more, are enormous in their complexity.

And this body has the ability to see!

And hear!

And synthesize information and develop intuitions and conclusions.

Furthermore, stored information from within one body can be shared and synthesized with past experiences, as well as the knowledge and experiences of other bodies, to perform crazy complex processes such as solving the puzzle of our own mind-boggling complexity.

I could go on and on in both directions: the wonder of the inner workings at the molecular, atomic, and sub-atomic levels, as well as the wonder of earth’s ecosystems, atmosphere, position in the solar system, our sun, our solar system, our solar system’s position in the galaxy, the infinite complexity of the universe.

(Clocks within clocks)¹⁰⁰⁰

Therefore, I am humbled. I am moved to awe and wonder. I see clocks. I believe there is a clock maker.

Like David, I am astonished. I acknowledge that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Because of this, I praise my Lord and Maker. Here is how David said it in a song.

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. (Psalm 139:13-14 ESV)

A quick note about intellectual honesty and “going where the data leads”:

When a famous scientist, one of the discoverers of the structure of DNA itself, has to make statements such as, “One must constantly remind oneself that everything we see has happened by chance,” well, maybe it should be allowed for one to consider that DNA might be in fact a miraculous design, the product of a miracle-working creator.

A quick note about one of the philosophical limits of science:

From my perspective, it is philosophically unsatisfying to write off the possibility of a creator simply because it cannot be falsified. While this may be a proper argument for what should or should not be taught in science classes, it is not conclusive regarding the great question, “is there a creator?” It merely illustrates that the answer to this question currently lies outside the self-imposed limits of our present scientific method.

There is a lot that could be said on this. Not the least of which is this; “Science” often breaks its own rule, promoting as historical fact hypotheses that are not falsifiable because, among other problems, they cannot be accurately recreated.

What if all science taught in classrooms could be only that which is “falsifiable?”

A quick note on that debate between atheistic evolution and creation:

During high school biology class, our teacher split us into two sides. One argued that we evolved from nothing. The other argued that we were created by God. This went on for several days.

I’m not a particularly quick thinker. I’m not good in a debate format. So, I was pretty quiet throughout this exercise. But on each side of the debate, one speaker rose to the fore, and it was fascinating watching the two of them go back and forth.

The young man arguing for creation kept referring to the Bible. After fielding a few of these statements, the evolution debater asked, “Why do I have to keep defending myself against that book? I don’t even believe in it.”

Solid.

However, when he was pressed with, “How can you prove that we evolved? How are you so sure?” His answer was “We’re here, aren’t we?”

I’ve thought about these two statements many times since that debate. They seem poignant. So many of the arguments I have heard for and against atheism or Christianity are encapsulated in those two basic phrases. Those two young men were only high-schoolers. But I think they happened to land on the foundational argument for their life beliefs.

For the Christian, the answer always comes back to, “The Bible tells me so.” It must. It is our trusted source.

For the atheist, the answer always seems to land on some form of, “We’re here, aren’t we?” Since an atheistic view of life cannot include a divine creator, there is no further explanation needed. We’re here. Case closed.

Unless...

Unless that atheist is also a philosopher, in which case he or she must first figure out whether we really are here.

And a note about “the easy button.”

Throughout my life, I have experienced the “easy button” accusation many times. It goes something like this. “Oh, sure, anytime a Christian can’t answer a question they just push the easy button. God did it. He’s God! Easy button.”

At first, this made me feel sheepish. Because, you know, wow, I don’t want to be ridiculous. Or simple minded. Or one of those weak people who must have a religious crutch to get through the difficult realities of life.

But I am learning to apply this simple test. Can the arguer’s argument stand up to his or her own premise?

I conclude, “no.”

No matter what people may try to say about “science” and “you must examine the data and go where it leads,” in the end all “God or no God” conclusions that I’ve observed are formulated through the lens of the human reading the data. One cannot prove there is a God. One cannot prove there is not a God. To land on either opinion is to believe something that the data does not and cannot give. Strong cases can be built. But I personally see invoking “chance” to be just as much the pressing of an easy button as invoking God. In other words, we all use “easy buttons” to bridge the gap between points of data.

And trust me, the use of the God “easy button” is more and more unpopular, and therefore increasingly “not easy” to use in public discourse.

Reason #6: The life and death of the apostles.

Even in my high school years, the life, suffering, and death of the apostles as they stood by their report about Christ, seemed significant. Why would men go through such pain and suffering for their beliefs unless they were convinced it was true? It seemed obvious they felt they saw something incredibly unique in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This testimony returned as a strong argument when I was in the midst of some faith-shaking contemplations during college. I couldn’t easily toss the testimony of the apostles aside.

The strength of this particular reason for faith has grown through the years. The more I study scripture, the clearer it becomes these friends and companions of Jesus believed strongly what they claimed to have seen.

Furthermore, the message about Jesus in scripture is being corroborated by earlier and earlier manuscripts. The number of manuscripts is growing. These manuscripts come from diverse locations and are written in many different languages. This combination of factors means the “zealous monk” types of arguments, wherein it is hypothesized that later generations of Christians (as in some isolated monk who alone had the text) changed the message to make Jesus into something he wasn’t or changed the history of the early church and recordings of the life of the apostles... is just not plausible.

And so, this great question remains. Why would men live and die for a message considered blasphemous and worthy of death by their own countrymen and lunacy and worthy of torture and death by the rest of the culture at large?

It seems logical that, during their time with Jesus, they saw the crazy things they claimed they saw. Their faith in him was galvanized by the miraculous things they experienced first-hand. That conviction was necessary in order for them to withstand the ridicule and suffering that hounded them until their inglorious deaths.

Reason #7: MAPS

Sometime during or shortly after college, I was introduced to this acronym as a quick checklist of common apologetics. Some of these well-known defenses of the Christian faith impacted me in my K-12 years, as well as in college. But I don’t remember having the MAPS acronym explained to me until later.

MAPS stands for:

Manuscripts
Archaeology
Prophecy
Statistics

I could speak on each of these apologetics for a considerable time. Some of these apologetics have had a profound impact on me.

There is a lot here, so I encourage Christians to spend some time digging in this goldmine for themselves. There is a lot written about each aspect of the MAPS acronym, and the explanations have been built layer upon layer for centuries.

Since there are so many great points worth considering, I don't intend to go into detail at this time. Maybe I will return to this reason at some point and discuss some of my favorites in more detail.

But in the meantime, wow!

And keep your eyes open. Aspects of these defenses can be found in many of the reasons for faith I have recorded in this document.

Reason #8: A lack of plausible alternatives.

I went through many rounds of faith struggles in my early adult years. In the end, Christianity always stood out to me as the best world view available. I found alternative explanations for existence and meaning to be insufficient by comparison.

This includes the lack of a satisfying and plausible alternative explanation for:

- The existence of a universe in which life is possible
- The formation of earth (iron core, magnetic field, amount of water, phase of water, amount of atmosphere, make-up of the atmosphere, size of earth and therefore amount of gravity, etc).
- The location of earth (size and activity of our sun, distance from the sun, proximity and location of the moon, location of Jupiter).
- The existence of life of any kind
- The existence of multi-celled creatures
- Genetic “galaxies” in the DNA universe
- Self-awareness
- Our need for and innate desire for:
 - Love
 - Meaning
 - Purpose
 - Worship
 - Self-actualization
 - To be creative
 - And many more

Reason #8.5: Net Accumulation

The net accumulation of each of these implausibilities and many others multiplied by each other.

Reason #9: The beauty of the delicate balance.

There is a beauty to the delicate balance of factors that make life on earth possible.

This is an offshoot of Reason #5. It is a minor point within that major reason. But it stood out to me as a unique argument during a particular period of my post-college years.

Reason #10: The anthropic principle.

I know, I know, this is argued back and forth a lot, both the principle, and the semantics of using the word “anthropic.”

It is not a major reason for my faith in God, but it ties in to and adds dimension to argument #9. And I must confess I found it beneficial at one point in my early adulthood. It is a wonderfully big little thought, even for those who don't believe in God. This universe, a unique environment that possesses the wonderful capability of being able to be observed and explored, has within it (by chance or by creation) creatures who have just the right high abilities to observe, explore, and understand it.

We can see it with our eyes.

We can test it with our math.

We can confirm it with our physics.

Why?

Reason #11: Our fearfully and wonderfully made bodies.

This argument is also closely connected with Reason #5. But during the time our children were babies, and I held them in my arms...this reason took on a whole new level of deeply personal awe.

In addition to the physical, chemical, and physiological make-up of the body, I was captured by the wonder of all that happens in the womb, during birth, and just after. Each small and seemingly random aspect of interment, birth, feeding, and so many other aspects of the birth process and early childhood tied directly to the health and proper intellectual and emotional development of that little baby in my arms.

And things as simple as eye contact, skin-on-skin touch, breastfeeding, and even the abundance of natural reflexes continues to this day to strike me as wonderful.

Reason #12: The wonder of ice

During the time when our children were small, I had less time to consider deep life questions. It was a demanding time period. But within this quiet stage of life, many small beauties called for attention and were worthy of wonder.

Ice is unique. Most molecules become more compact when they change phases from liquid to solid. Water, because of its particular properties, is one of the very few molecules

whose solid phase is less dense than its liquid phase. Because of this, solid water floats on liquid water.

Water is an abundant and essential ingredient for the existence of life. Many creatures live in it. All of us are filled with it. It is essential to the transport of nutrients and nearly all other life functions within living organisms. If water acted like most other compounds and became denser as a solid, countless life processes would be disrupted or become impossible. Think about that for a while. Consider its ramifications.

Alongside this contemplation, consider that the surface of our planet, because of its distance from the sun, the thickness of our atmosphere, the abundance of water, the length of earth's daily rotations, and even the angle of the tilt of our planet's axis, allows water to stay primarily in that wonderful space between solid and gas, while still having both solid and gas present. Together, these factors allow and facilitate life processes.

It's pretty inspiring to think about the simple wonder of ice.

This reason may seem small, and it could be argued that it is intertwined with Reason #5, Reason #9, and Reason #11. But it delighted me at a particular time in my life, and it came readily to mind when I was writing down reasons for my faith.

Here are a few additional wonders that capture my mind from time to time. I enjoy being amazed and contemplating these marvels.

- Bioluminescence and its variety of mechanisms in many different creatures. If it evolved, it had to evolve many different times because there are so many different mechanisms.
- Sight. In humans. In all seeing creatures. In its many forms. Check out the mantis shrimp, for example. Or the light-sensitive cells around the edges of a scallop's shell.
- Electromagnetism, and the ability of sharks and other creatures to sense magnetic field.
- Electricity, and the ability of certain creatures to generate it in large doses.
- Energy waves, and the ability of plants and animals to capture and interpret bands of these energy waves (sight, sound, electrical, magnetic)
- Flight, and the many mechanisms by which creatures fly.
- Soil cultures, mycorrhiza, and communication and nutrient exchange between plants
- Photosynthesis
- Metamorphosis
- Gecko feet

These giant "small wonders" grow every time I look at them. Clocks within clocks.

Reason #13: The beautiful fabric of Christ throughout scripture.

While raising our children, Heidi and I both taught a lot of Sunday school classes and camp lessons. Our studies for those lessons took us deeper and deeper into the wonder of God's presentation of Christ in scripture. The curriculum *Firm Foundations, Creation to Christ*

(McIlwain) was a wonderful start at examining the direct prophecies, clear allusions, narrative illustrations, and stunning foreshadows of Christ throughout the Old Testament.

Studying for a series of lessons on Genesis, as well as lessons on the layout and construction materials of the temple, the priesthood, the sacrificial system, the holy articles, the priestly duties and the order of processes within the temple are a marvel of direct portrayal and distinct foreshadowing. They tell not only of the nature of God's love for us in Christ, but also the deadliness of sin, the refreshment of mercy, the beauty of grace, the expected suffering, and the amazing sacrifice of the coming Christ.

Through these studies, and through many lessons and contemplations since then, the fabric of Christ has become increasingly evident. My wonder has grown. It's pretty humbling to see the many ways God told us of our need for him, our sinfulness, and the grace offered us in Christ.

Reason #14: Holiness.

Or "one small but important detail of the theological consistency of scripture."

During our parenting and teaching years, a big cultural shift took shape.

Well, it had been taking place in culture at large for some time, but it began to gain traction in the church. It ran like this...the God of the old testament is clearly different than the God of the new testament. The God of the old testament was angry, judgmental, and genocidal, whereas the God of the new testament is love.

I pondered this for a number of years. I didn't see God as being different in the old testament than he was in the new. I saw him as clearly one and the same. Why? Why did I, and many Christians, see it one way, while so many people, Christians included, saw it another?

The answer? I think the biggest key to these different perspectives is a view of the nature of Holiness.

If God is who he says he is, then he is our maker.

He is also perfect. Holy. Without sin.

And he is the ultimate judge of all humankind.

Many of his old testament interactions with humans were from his position as holy judge.

The notion of a judge is very unpopular in a culture that doesn't want to be judged. The notion of a holy judge is even more unwelcome. So, the result has been a reverse judgment of sorts. Even though it could be argued quite effectively that all of us long for real justice, our present culture doesn't like the concept of sin, of a judge, nor the outcome of holy judgment in action. Therefore, God is judged to be wrong...bad...even sinful, according to our present-day sensibilities.

However, if there is a God, we have no power to tell him what he can and cannot be.

A quick note about holiness and goodness:

I have contemplated this over the years, I have had a few earth-shaking moments when I wondered, *What if God isn't good? What if he doesn't love us? What if the God who made us is merely using us for some awful purpose the way Ego wanted to use Starlord in the Marvel[™] comics?*

Whew. Pretty disconcerting, right?

Thankfully, throughout the scriptures, old and new testament alike, we find the love, mercy, patience, and most of all the grace of God, present alongside his holiness. These two concepts, grace and holiness, are intertwined because they are his nature as he has presented himself to us. The same message that tells us of the holiness of God invites us into his family as treasured children and opens the door for us through Christ.

The holiness of God is evident in the old testament, alongside clear descriptions of his grace. The grace of God is evident in the new testament, alongside clear descriptions of his holiness.

This consistency is visible in the human responses recorded as well as in the direct statements about God and his nature. In both the old and new testament, those who experienced the holiness of God had the same reaction. See the children of Israel when Moses came down from the mountain, Isaiah's response to God's throne, Peter's gut level plea when he realized Jesus was God, John's response in the Revelation when encountering his friend in his full holy glory.

Therefore, I see within scripture a theological consistency throughout. Attempts to separate the God of the old testament from the God of the new testament seem baseless to me. In fact, instead of successfully demonstrating that the God of scripture changed from Old Testament to New, and that he must therefore be a construct of human imagination, these arguments instead give evidence to me of the arrogance of our present-day culture. Humans as a whole dislike the holiness of God. It's an uncomfortable concept. After all, if God is our maker and he is holy, he has every right to demand something of us that we cannot deliver, and that will shake us to our core.

So, the concept of holiness is cast aside by our present culture. And without an understanding of holiness, humankind will always have trouble coming to grips with who God has presented himself to be.

To close the loop on this frightening but wonderful topic; the ultimate presentation of these two Godly characteristics is Christ himself. Christ is both. He is the holiness of God, and his coming to take our place in death is the very grace of God delivered to us.

We can't measure up to God's perfection and therefore can't enter his holy presence because we lack holiness. We are impure. Impurities burn away in God's consuming fire.

Christ came to take our sins on his person, endure the holy wrath of God that we deserved, conquer sin, conquer death, and hand us his own righteous robe by which we can enter into the joy of the gracious and holy presence of God.

So...one reason for a faith that stands up to the cultural and generational bias of our age, a reason that is a key missing ingredient in our generation's understanding of God as he presented himself...holiness.

Reason #15: I believe the Bible because...

It was during this teaching period that we came across Voddie Bauchum's personal testimony about his journey from a Buddhist household to a Christian preacher and apologist.

Dr. Bauchum's summary of 2 Peter 1:16-21 is better than mere words uttered by a preacher to bolster the faith of beleaguered followers. It is a beautiful exegesis of the words of Peter, who spent a lot of time with Jesus, and whose changed life is instrumental in my own

faith. See Reason #6. Dr. Bauchum, in explaining his faith to a skeptical mentor, went right to an eyewitness source.

The context: Peter knows his own death is coming soon. In this letter, he knows he is talking to believers who are experiencing intense cultural pressure and are being threatened with personal physical harm. Persecution and suffering are their present realities at the time of this writing. Peter is reminding them that their faith in Christ is well-placed, and no persecution can change the facts of what God did for them in Christ. So, they are compelled not just to believe in Christ but to thrive in the qualities of a life in Christ, even in the midst of such pressures.

The passage:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1: 16-21 ESV)

Dr. Bauchum’s summary; I choose to believe the Bible because it’s a reliable collection of historical documents written by eyewitnesses during the lifetime of other eyewitnesses. They report supernatural events that took place in fulfillment of specific prophecies and claimed that their writings are divine rather than human in origin.

His summary of Peter’s reason for faith came at a perfect time, when scriptures were under severe attacks in culture at large...a culture who sees the Bible as nothing more than an ancient fairy tale.

Here is another eyewitness testimony to read and consider: 1 John 1:1-4.

The context: The apostle John, who was also with Peter on “the holy mountain” when they experienced the transformation of Jesus, as well as present with the resurrected Jesus, begins this letter with this explanation of one reason for his faith...a reason he wants to pass on to the letter’s recipients.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have

seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

And another: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

The context: Paul is reminding a distracted and staggering Corinthian church of the gospel they received and encouraging them that it is trustworthy. A big part of his reasoning is the number of eyewitnesses who remain alive at the time of his writing, including Paul himself.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, **most of whom are still alive**, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.** (1 Corinthians 15:1-8 ESV)

Reason #16: Scripture's ability to stand...

Its ability to withstand the animosity of thousands of years of critics, and the attacks on the real gospels and the real Jesus.

Our age has witnessed a major offensive on the authenticity of scripture and the historicity of Jesus. This onslaught has come in many forms, including accusations that Jesus never claimed to be God, or that the church gradually changed its view from Jesus as a man to Jesus as a deity. There have also been active promotions of alternate “gospels” in recent years such as the gospel of Judas, and the gospel of Mary Magdalene.

Did Jesus claim to be God? This challenge was put to me in college by one of my professors. It wasn't easy to dismiss. I had great respect for this professor, and still have an appreciation for the manner in which he approached difficult spiritual discussions.

This query sent me on a hunt through the gospels. At first, I was a little alarmed. It seemed that Jesus never used the words “I am God.” That is, at least, in a way our present-day western ears could identify.

Then I dove into the gospel of John. There was no question. Jesus was very clear. He claimed to be God. The Jews understood his claims as such, and because of those claims they hated him as a dangerous blasphemer and attempted to kill him. Eventually, they succeeded.

Subsequent years of study, including many series of sermons on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, have made it clear. Jesus claimed to be God in both word and deed. Those who recorded the events of his life and the words he spoke were consistent in their declaration that Jesus claimed to be God. And the culture around them definitely reacted as if Jesus was making this outlandish claim.

So, if you struggle with this question, read the gospels.

Regarding the church “changing its view” and doctoring the message about Jesus to match its shifting sensibilities...there are many defenses against this possibility. The best defense is the documents themselves. There are far too many documents of record, these documents are written in too many different languages, and more and more documents are being discovered year by year that pin the writings so close to the life of Jesus that it is implausible to think that someone, or a group of “someones,” could have had the time to change the message about Jesus, change it in all the documents that have been found plus the ones that haven’t been found and are still being discovered, change it in all the languages in which it was written, change it so thoroughly that the early church writings about the scriptures reflect no changes, and change it convincingly during the lifetime of eyewitnesses to the events.

Regarding the “other gospels...” Even if there wasn’t a massive difference in the number of copies of these supposed other gospels versus the four gospels we have in the canon (there is), and even if there wasn’t a significant difference in the time of the writing of these “gospels,” (there is) one could discern by reading them that there are significant problems with these purported gospels. Simple tests such as the accuracy of place, language, culture, names in use, and even plants mentioned expose them as false. These are tests that the four canonized gospels pass with flying colors. In addition, there is a significant theological inconsistency between these other “gospels” and the accepted canon.

I have heard that one of the best ways to identify counterfeit money or a counterfeit work of art is to study the originals so thoroughly that the counterfeit will stand out, even if one can’t immediately put the false features into words. It will feel different. It will look different. Subtle problems will trigger an “I don’t think this is right” kind of response even if the problems are not immediately visible. This is true of these “gospels.” Read the canonized scriptures. Read in particular the gospels and the old testament scriptures they reference. Read the letters of Peter, John, and Paul. Then read some of the non-canonical gospels. I believe the difference will be self-evident.

A great book on these matters written for everyday people is *The Case for the Real Jesus*, by investigative journalist Lee Strobel.

The person of Jesus and the validity of scripture has been under attack for millennia. I find the ability of Christ and the validity of scripture to withstand such a constant withering barrage to be remarkable.

Reason #17: Beauty!

This particular reason is very personal for me. Here is the quick back-story.

As a young designer in college, I became convinced that Beauty was far more universal than most people believed. Although the common catchphrase in this discussion is “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” I had a growing conviction that there were common threads in all things people perceived as beautiful. To me, these common threads argued “Beauty is. Beholders filter what they observe through personal preferences, past experiences, and core beliefs to identify the aspects of beauty they prefer.”

That’s not very catchy, is it? I’ll work on it.

Beauty became a contemplation for me. I began to collect the concepts that people thought were beautiful to see if I could boil out the core elements found within each of these objects.

This contemplation is still underway. The “pot” of my thoughts has been simmering over the fire for decades. Vapor has boiled off, and some common elements have appeared. Here are the first four.

- Light (from which we get all colors, brilliance, sparkle, saturation, etc.).
- Life (which has subsets such as youth, strength, health, joie de vivre, personality, vibrance, motion, etc.).
- Love (which has subsets of family, friendship, sacrifice, acceptance, care).
- Purity (everything that is beautiful seems to be made more beautiful when it is purified. Think of clear gems, purity of color versus “muddy” color, pure untainted snow, the pure water of a mountain lake).

Consider these elements for a few moments.

We are graced with beautiful sunsets as the sun slides down the evening sky until its light strikes the dome of our atmosphere at an angle that acts as a prism and fractures the sun’s light into brilliant colors. The world around us becomes golden, then pink. The sky transitions from orange and red to pink, purple and blue. Light.

This display is made more beautiful when it is reflected on water, which intensifies the color. When the water is in motion, which is a type of “life,” the colors draw our eye even more. Sparkles appear, and colors reflect, refract, and pulse on the rippling waves. Life.

The beauty of this view is even better when the water is pure, the air is clear, there are no distracting power lines or cell phone towers in view, and the quality of the clouds possesses a purity of rhythm that gives a pleasing texture to the colors. Purity.

And best of all, during such moments, one of the first things we want to do is share it with someone we love. We reach for the hand of our spouse beside us. We join in the applause and wonder of the people around us. Even strangers become friends for a moment as we share such splendid moments together. Love.

I believe each of these elements has the ability to take something beautiful and make it even more beautiful.

There was this wonderful moment of epiphany when, in turning these base elements over and over in my mind, I suddenly realized, “These are all characteristics of God! These are all names he has claimed for himself! God IS beauty!”

The beauties we see are all fractals of his beauty shed on us, little messages drawing our eyes, as C.S. Lewis states, “up the sunbeam to the sun.”

Perhaps you saw it sooner than I did.

It would be impossible to describe the depth of this surprise in my soul, or the ongoing impact this contemplation has had within me as it continues to bloom and flourish. My plan is to write more in depth about beauty at some point. Perhaps it will be my magnum opus. When I write about it, I intend to post my thoughts under the Beauty Project tab on trentschrock.com.

But for now...the concept of beauty is still too big. The pot is still on the boil.

Reason #18: The Gospel.

The more I study scripture, the more I find a beauty to the gospel that is both simple and yet infinitely complex. It can be understood in a moment, and yet studied for a lifetime without exhausting its wonder. Like great jewels well-cut, every turn of the gospel in one's palm, every change of light behind it, every setting in which it is presented by scripture, reveals some deeper intricacy. Brilliance flashes from some new facet.

More and more satisfying answers to our greatest needs and deepest yearnings are found in this one thing, the gospel of God as delivered to us in Jesus Christ. Love. Grace. Favor. Value. Meaning. Significance. Mercy. Forgiveness. Ability to forgive. Acceptance. Belonging. Family. Friendship. Deep relationship. Intimacy. Hope. True wealth. Meaningful work. Satisfying purpose. Eternal life. And on and on.

Do you want an exercise in the impact of Christ in our lives? I recommend a study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, with a focus on this question, "what has God done for us in Christ?" Or, put another way, "just how good is this good news?"

Reason #19: Work.

I love to work. I find a great deal of satisfaction in solving problems, serving people, wrestling beautiful landscapes out of Indiana clay, growing flowers in our family nursery, and even in this difficult art of communication through the written word.

As a young man, work was so satisfying to me, and built within me such a sense of capability and confidence, that I have long had the desire to give that experience to others. I see good honest work as the cure to a lot of ills in this world.

Perhaps I am too simple.

And perhaps this is an unusual reason for faith in God. It may seem like a small reason by comparison to other great defenses of the faith. But I find the topic of work as described in scripture to match my personal experience, and to be a gratifying explanation of this necessary aspect of life.

How does scripture speak of work? These concepts come largely from Genesis, Proverbs, and Ephesians, but they are presented with consistency throughout scripture.

1. God, our maker, works. We are made in his likeness.
2. God gave meaningful work to man (caring for the garden in which he was placed) before sin entered the world.
3. After sin, work became more difficult. It was cursed on account of sin. But it didn't go away. It wasn't abolished. Rather, it remains a daily reality. And there are redeeming aspects to our daily work that still show through the sweat and thorns of the curse.
4. Work can be very satisfying.
5. Diligent work and careful stewarding of the "fruits of labor" is the way of the wise.
6. Work brings earthly benefits such as food, shelter, clothing, and even generational wealth that can be passed on as an inheritance.

7. Believers in the Old Testament and in the early church participated in many different occupations. Nearly every occupation can be pure, can be performed as working for the Lord and not for men, and can minister to others.
8. Although work can bring physical and financial rewards, and is a part of our spiritual make-up, we cannot work our way into heaven. That job was far too big for us. So, Christ did the work. God provided us with the rewards of the finished work of Christ.
9. Even though we cannot earn our salvation, believers are given meaningful work by God. There is work to be done. God has gone so far as to prepare it in advance for us so that as we come alive and follow him, we have meaningful work laid out in front of us. See Ephesians 2:1-10, with a special emphasis on verse 10.
10. "Daily work" is assumed and even commanded in many places in Scripture. This is especially visible of Paul's letters as he instructed local churches on practical matters. He told the Ephesians to stop stealing from others and work so they would have extra to give to those in need (Ephesians 4:28), and the Colossians to do their work as if they were working for the Lord and not for men (Colossians 3:23). He even chastised the Thessalonians for sitting around waiting for Jesus' return and told them in so many words, "Get back to work," (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Paul himself worked both as an evangelist for Christ, and as a tentmaker to support himself financially. In fact, the assumption that believers hold an occupation is so thoroughly presumed in scripture that one doesn't have to look far to see the expectation of daily work woven into the fabric of the early church.
11. In addition to our daily work, laborers are being sent into the fields to harvest souls for Christ. In Ephesians 2, Paul tells of the good works God has prepared in advance for believers to perform. In chapter 4, he describes the different occupations that need to be done within the church. Christ fills those needs with believers gifted in those areas.

Scripture's treatment of work is consistent from beginning to end. And the beautiful manner in which physical occupation is interwoven with spiritual work is consistent with the way our maker has created us, as well as with the fullness of his grace. It may seem small, but this simple concept is near and dear to my heart and stands as an earthy but powerful testimony of the truth of scripture.

Reason #20: Grace.

This is very similar to Reason #18, because the Gospel is the culminating message of God's grace to us. It is his favor extended. But although it is similar, the concept of Grace is a distinctly wonderful testimony to me. It is a reason that stands alone.

I see a consistency in the grace of God from the first breath of Genesis to the final chapter of Revelation. There is a philosophical beauty contained within this grace that I can barely describe, but it moves me.

This grace culminates in Christ. Not merely in his incarnation, which is God coming to earth and taking on our flesh. But also, in his life, his death, his descent into hell, his resurrection and conquest over death, his ascension to the Father's right hand, his coming return, his coming

kingdom, his coming gathering of his family from all tribes and nations, his eternal presence. Each of these is a lavish demonstration of his grace toward us.

And the beauty of his grace is of such quality that it is growing ever larger as a reason for my faith in Christ.

The Conclusion.

Faith has reasons. Throughout our lives, these reasons grow and interweave like a braided rope. Each reason strengthens the others.

I hope you enjoyed reading this, and are inspired to record your own reasons for faith in Christ. And I hope you share your reasons with your family and friends.

In Closing.

If you would like to talk more about this, or if you would like a PDF of this article, reach out to me at trent@paragonlandscaping.com.