

Why I am a Christian:

in a scientific, humanistic and atheistic world

Part 1: Other people taught me to believe

A. My Parents

- ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
- ⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
- ⁹ They will be a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck. Proverbs 1:7-9

1. They taught me to have **faith** in God (out of respect, I at least consider what they had to offer)
- a. This is often used as a criticism: *“You only believe because your parents taught you to believe.”*

There is no question that the beginning of my faith journey was due to my parent’s influence. Being taught about faith by parents does make it more likely that one will become a person of faith. However, to reduce and dismiss a person’s belief to such a singular absolute, as though this is the only reason why one believes, is a fallacious argument that ignores the complexity of a person’s decisions and the dynamics of one’s interactions with life. People are not so one dimensional.

- b. The greatest indicator of whether one has faith is the church attendance of his/her parents:
- **80%** for those whose father attends worship regularly (regardless of the mother’s attendance)
 - **40%** for those whose moms worship regularly (without the father)
 - **10%** for those whose parents don’t worship, even if they claim to believe in God.
- c. We are more likely to **embrace** those values that our parents taught us.
- 1) This is true of our politics, values, and morals as well.
- Most people whose parents were politically liberal/conservative grow up to be politically liberal/conservative.
 - Most people whose parents value education will value education.
 - Most people whose parents love the Pitt Panthers, love the Pitt Panthers.
- 2) If something is **important**, we pass it on to our children.
2. We don’t accept our parents’ lessons **blindly**, however
- a. We examine most of the values and lessons our parents teach us.
- There are many things my parents taught me that I’ve found to be **worthwhile**
 - There are other things my parents taught me that I’ve **rejected**.
- b. I’ve considered the faith of my parents, and I have decided that much of what they taught me is:
- **plausible**
 - an accurate expression of my **values**.

Thank you, mom and dad, for gifting me with something of such great value!

B. The Early **Christians**

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

1. The characteristics of the early Christians

a. Faith amidst **oppression**

- The early Christians were an oppressed political minority in the first century, most of them **slaves**. They had no rights and no power, and yet...
- People were attracted to Jesus and his message, even when it was clear that Jesus was not the hoped for **political** Messiah who would deliver the Jews from Roman oppression.

b. **Diversity**

1) In the later 1st Century, Christianity expanded rapidly across cultural and racial lines

2) Most other religions of the world were **parochial** in nature.

- **Buddhism**, one of the few ancient religions that was culturally and racially diverse, took over 300 years before it was finally introduced outside of India into China in the East and Alexandria in the West.
- **Islam** was dominated by the Arabs for the first 500 years of its existence, until the Turks embraced Islam as their religion in the 12th century.
- However, by the end of the 1st Century AD (in less than 50 years), there were Christian **communities** in Rome, Syria, India, Greece, and Asia Minor

2. The early Christians did not use **force** in order to spread their faith

a. Early Christians gave their **life** for what they believed in, but did not **kill** for what they believed in.

b. This is an unusual sociological phenomenon: most religions or political isms gain followers through military **force** or by the accumulation of political **power**.

Buddhism: This type of pacifistic growth occurred in Buddhism, as well, in the 4th Century BC. This is one of the reasons why I have great respect for the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. He was born to King Suddhodana of the Shakya clan, and could have used his political power to enforce his belief system. Instead, he rejected his title and position to seek enlightenment and an end to suffering. It is my contention that much of Buddha's philosophy is seen in Jesus (remember, Buddha predated Jesus by over 400 years).

Islam: The spread of Islam in the 7th Century AD under Mohammed, Abu Bakr, and the subsequent caliphs, was a result of the political and military conquests of the Arab Empire. At first, the Muslims did not want converts, because this would dilute the economic and status advantage of the Muslims over the conquered peoples (i.e.—non-Muslims were second class citizens). The Muslims only tolerated other religions if they were subservient to Islam. However, as the Arab Empire met a stiffening resistance to their expansion in the

West, and as their political and military expansion stagnated, they began to convert the pagan, Jewish and Christian populations within their conquered territories in order to solidify their power base.

Humanism: The humanistic and atheistic revolutions of the early 20th century began with political power grabs and the oppression of those who disagreed. The Communist Revolution, a humanistic, scientific, and political movement, murdered more than 60 million people. World War I, II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War were all the result of humanistic, political hubris and power grabs

Contemporary Politics: Political parties snatch, accumulate and solidify their power by any means possible, rather than using the power of persuasion, in order to enforce their will upon people and to ensure their own political survival.

Early Christianity: The Christianity of the first century grew without accumulating political or military power. Of the early disciples, all but John gave his life for his belief in Christ, and John probably had the most difficult life of all of the disciples. Stephen, one of the first deacons of the church, gave his life for his faith. (Acts 6) Notice, however, that none of the early Christians killed for their faith. Christians of the first century, those who knew Jesus or knew those who knew Jesus, never attempted to gain power: they were political pacifists. Christianity can and does grow without accumulating power, which is why Christians should reject contemporary Christians, liberal or conservative, who collude with power:

Medieval Christianity: It wasn't until the early 4th Century AD that Christianity gained a political foothold when Constantine, a pagan emperor who converted to Christianity, outlawed the persecution of Christians with the Edict of Milan, and ushered in an era of religious tolerance. Unfortunately, Christians proved that they were no better stewards of power than the Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Humanists and Atheists. There is no end to the books chronicling the damage caused by Christianity to the world and to the cause of Christ by colluding with power throughout the Middle Ages. This is a warning to Christians who desire to use political power as a means of solidifying their status and position, which is a betrayal of Christ and the values of the church (which is, in my opinion, the unpardonable sin: using Christ for personal, financial and political gain).

For those atheists and agnostics who are too humorless to understand that words can be used to express different nuances of meaning: I am not using “know” in a scientific sense, to which I already alluded in the introduction when I said that I believe in God but cannot prove God scientifically. “Know” in this context is a reference to faith and belief, e.g.—“*I know in my heart that my brother actually does love me, even though he ripped the heads off of all of my Star Trek Barbies.*” The word “know,” according to Webster’s dictionary, can be used in a technical sense to express an understanding of facts, but is also commonly and appropriately used when talking about those things we think or believe.

C. Christian **Friends**

⁹ Two are better than one,

because they have a good return for their work:

¹⁰ If one falls down,

his friend can help him up.

But pity the man who falls

and has no one to help him up!

¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

¹² Though one may be overpowered,

two can defend themselves.

¹³ A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-13

1. Other Christians have faith for me when I **doubt**...

a. In my despair and desperation, they are there for me

b. We need each other and need to be connected to the **church**.

c. Faith is not about Jesus and **me**, but Jesus and **us**:

- God is known in the **unity** of believers
- Those who “do” God on their own at home cannot and do not **know** God.

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:20-23

2. Those who **disengage** from the church...

a. are ripe for **despair** and a cooling of their relationship with God.

- It is not that the life of a Christian is **easier** than those who are not.
- However, those who do not live their lives within the protective umbrella of the church will not have the support to **sustain** them when life gets difficult.

b. are being **selfish**

- They are not giving of themselves to others who are in **need**
- They could be a blessing to others by their presence and by the gifts that God has given them, which are to be used in the context of the **church** (I Corinthians 12)