

# The Many Causes Of Unbelief

**Introduction.** Most reasonable people would agree that actions, beliefs and ideas have consequences. In his book, *Does It Matter What I Believe?*, Millard J. Erickson, wrote that there are numerous reasons "... why having correct beliefs is important. Our whole lives are inevitably affected by the real world around us, so what we believe about it is of the utmost importance.... What we believe about reality does not change the truth, nor its effect upon us. Correct belief, however, enables us to know the truth as it is, and then to take appropriate action, so that it will have the best possible effect upon our lives. Having correct beliefs is also necessary because of the large amount and variety of incorrect beliefs which are about."

Consider then, in this context, belief in the existence of God. Surely it is safe to say that practically no single belief in the thousands of years of recorded human history has produced as many, or as varied a set of consequences as this one idea. It has been studied and debated from the beginning of time. It has been responsible for some of the most impassioned speeches of which the human spirit is capable. It has engendered multiplied millions of pages of text upon which billions of words -- both pro and con -- have been written. Ultimately, it has produced as a consequence either belief or unbelief -- both of which have serious implications. This lesson is going to explore the different reasons or causes of unbelief.

## I. **Parents And Upbringing**

- A. The essence of Paul's thought in Romans 14:7 has been perpetuated in the saying that "no man is an island." From the beginning to the end of our lives, we interact socially with those around us. However, surely one of the most formidable influences upon any human being comes in the form of parents. Children are born with sponge-like minds that begin basically as "blank slates" upon which parents have a grand opportunity (and awesome responsibility) to write.
- B. Sometimes that task is accomplished by instruction, which is why parents are admonished to teach and nurture their children (Ephesians 6:4). Sometimes it is accomplished by discipline (Proverbs 29:15). Sometimes it is accomplished by exemplary behavior that provides a proper example, which is why the apostle Peter discussed this in the context of a family relationship (1 Peter 3:1-2).
- C. If accurate instruction, timely discipline and a proper example coupled with faithfulness can produce such wonderful results, what results might inaccurate instruction, a lack of discipline and an improper example coupled with unfaithfulness produce?
  1. Although at times we wish they did not, the truth of the matter is that more often than not the decisions we make, and the actions

- that stem from those decisions, inevitably affect those we love the most. Certainly this is true in a spiritual context.
2. One expert in child psychology, Joshua Liebman, put it this way: "I believe that much atheism has the ground prepared for it in the disillusionment with the parent which has arisen in the child. Disbelief in life, skepticism about humanity, the denial of God -- all sink their roots in the soil of emotion long before exposure to courses in philosophy and science. Life has scarred such people early and has made them unwilling to believe either in man or in God."
- D. If children witness callous indifference, skepticism or outright infidelity on the part of their parents in regard to spiritual matters, more often than not those children will exhibit the same callousness, skepticism or infidelity in their own lives. Is it not also extremely likely that their children will be reared in the same atmosphere? Thus, in the end, the spiritual condition of not one, but several generations has been affected adversely as a result of the instruction/example of parents and the subsequent upbringing received.

## II. **Education**

- A. Surely one of the most important causes of unbelief in the world today relates to the kind of education a person receives. As we saw this morning, the educational system in America is the end product of John Dewey's "progressive education movement." In his book, *The Long War Against God*, Henry Morris discussed how the progressive education movement "profoundly changed education not only in America but also in many other countries" as well.
- B. As a result of Dewey's efforts through the educational establishment, the kind of education now being offered in many public schools has the potential to discourage or destroy faith in God, while at the same time encouraging and promoting unbelief.
1. One of the most important tools employed by Dewey and his intellectual offspring to cripple belief was, and is, organic evolution. Evolution was as sharp a break with the biblical view of creation as anyone could make, and it was quickly picked up by those anxious to disprove the validity of orthodox religion.
  2. Morris correctly assessed the post-Dewey situation when he wrote, "The underlying assumption of progressive education was that the child is simply an evolved animal and must be trained as such -- not as an individual created in God's image with tremendous potential as an individual."
- C. The humanistic society that Dewey and his cohorts envisioned neither included nor allowed for belief in the God of the Bible. Thus, every effort was made to use the educational system to gain new recruits.

1. The shock received by the inexperienced young student is overwhelming when he enters the classroom of such teachers and discovers to his great bewilderment that these men and women of acclaimed learning do not believe the views taught him in his early childhood days; and since the student sits at their feet day after day, it usually does not require a great deal of time until the foundation of his faith begins to crumble by these unbelieving teachers. Only too often the results are disastrous.
  2. The young Christian becomes disturbed, confused, and bewildered. Social pressure and the weight of authority add to his difficulties. First he begins to doubt the infallibility of the Bible in matters of geology, but he will not stop there. Other difficulties arise, and before long skepticism and unbelief have taken the place of his childhood faith, and the saddest of all tragedies has happened. Once more a young Christian has gained a glittering world of pseudo-learning but has lost his own immortal soul. Such a scenario is not merely theoretical, but practical.
- D. When scientists champion a cause, people generally take notice. When the atheistic concept of organic evolution is presented as something that "all reputable scientists believe," there are many people who accept such an assessment at face value. However, there are several problems wrong with this assumption.
1. First, any argument based on "counting heads" is fallacious. Philosophy professors instruct their students on the various fallacies of human thought, one of which is the "fallacy of consensus." However, truth is not determined by popular opinion or majority vote. Something may be, and often is, true even when accepted only by a small minority. The history of science is full of such examples.
    - a) British medical doctor, Edward Jenner (1749-1823), was scorned when he suggested smallpox could be prevented by infecting people with a less-virulent strain of the disease-causing organism. Yet his vaccine has helped eradicate smallpox.
    - b) Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis (1818-1865) of Austria is another interesting case study. He noticed the high mortality rate among surgical patients, and suggested that the deaths resulted from surgeons washing neither their hands nor their instruments between patients. Dr. Semmelweis asked them to do both, but they ridiculed him and refused to comply. Today, the solutions posed by this doctor are the basis of antiseptic techniques in surgery.
    - c) So scientific successes often have occurred because researchers rebelled against the status quo. The cases of Jenner and Semmelweis document all too well the fact that "the intellectuals," although in the majority, may be wrong. Just because "hun-

dreds of thousands of scientists" believe something does not make it right.

- d) Believing something based on the assumption that "everyone else" also believes it often can lead to disastrous results (Exodus 23:2).
2. Second, the prestige of a position's advocates has nothing to do with whether that position is true or false. The soundness or strength of a claim is not based on: (1) the number of people supporting the claim; or (2) the intellect or prestige of the one(s) making that claim.
3. Third, the idea of strict objectivity in intellectual circles is a myth. While most scholars like to think of themselves as broadminded, unprejudiced paragons of virtue, the fact is that they, too, suffer from bouts of bias and bigotry. Phillip Abelson, one-time editor of *Science*, wrote, "One of the most astonishing characteristics of scientists is that some of them are plain, old-fashioned bigots. Their zeal has a fanatical, egocentric quality characterized by disdain and intolerance for anyone or any value not associated with a special area of intellectual activity."
4. Fourth, on occasion it has been the "intellectuals" who have championed what can only be called "crazy" concepts. James D. Bales addressed this fact when he wrote, "There is no unreasonable position, there is no weird idea, which has not been propagated by some brilliant man who has a number of degrees after his name. Some have argued that everything is an illusion, others have maintained that they are nothing but a mess of matter or just a living mass of meat, others maintain that there is no realm of the rational and thus the very concept of an intellectual is an illusion ..."
  - a) The majority usually abandon God's wisdom in favor of their own (Matthew 7:14; 1 Corinthians 1:19-21). It should not surprise us that many "intelligent" people view belief in God as ridiculous. The most intelligent often are the least spiritual because "the god of this world" has blinded their minds (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).
  - b) We must not fall prey to mob psychology which suggests that because "everyone is doing it" that somehow makes it right (Psalm 14:1). We need not be intimidated by the pseudo-intellectualism of those who hold themselves with higher regard than they do God.

### III. **Immorality**

- A. In his book, *If There's a God, Why Are There Atheists?*, R. C. Sproul titled one of the chapter subheadings "The Threat of Moral Excellence." In that section, he noted, "It is a common occurrence among social

human beings that a person who manifests a superior excellence is resented by his contemporaries. The student who consistently breaks the curve of the academic grading system is frequently treated with quiet hostility by his classmates.... The unusually competent person represents a threat not only to his peers but to his superiors as well, and is frequently treated as *persona non grata*.... Competency at a moral level is perhaps the most unwelcome kind of competency."

- B. Who among us has not endured taunts from people we know because we steadfastly refused to participate in something immoral? Think about the teenager who rebuffs his friends' invitation to "do drugs," the employee who chooses not to "fudge" his time sheet, or the college student who elects not to cheat on the exam. It should come as no surprise, then, that as man finds himself self-sufficient he will discard his religious convictions, or having none, he will fight those of others.
- C. Christ was morally unique and mankind recognized this fact (Matthew 8:27; John 7:46). Virtually everything Christ taught, and did, was quite different than the common practices of His day -- and of ours (cf. Matthew 5:38-41, 44). People reacted with disgust to Him (Luke 22:2). If people reacted with downright disgust to the moral perfection of Christ, with what kind of disdain might they be expected to react to the moral perfection of God?
- D. Some might object on the grounds that not all unbelievers lapse into moral decay. Bales addressed this objection in his book, *How Can Ye Believe?*, with the following points:
  - 1. Men are sometimes glad to get away from the moral authority of the Bible not because they want to do some things that it forbids, but because some of the things which it sanctions and commands they do not want to do.
  - 2. The sinful attitude of heart may not be of the type that we generally associate with immorality, but it is indicative of the pride of individuals who do not want to admit that they are sinners. Such an individual may welcome unbelief because it removes the accusing high standard of the faith which passes judgment on his life.
  - 3. The collapse in moral conduct may not come immediately because the habits of the individual and his attitudes have been constructed by Christian morality and he finds it difficult to break away from them and to get over the idea of the shamefulness of certain types of conduct.
- E. Wilbur M. Smith said, "The point I am making is this: one of the reasons why men refuse to accept the [gospel] is because the very principles of their lives are in every way contradictory to the ethical principles of the Bible, and, determined to remain in the lawlessness of their

own sensuality, they could not possibly embrace a holy religion nor walk with a holy God, nor look for salvation to His holy Son, nor have any love for His holy Word ... one of the deepest, profoundest, most powerful causes for unbelief, holding men back from Christ is a life of sin."

#### IV. **Scientific Materialism**

- A. As said before, we are living in an era where science reigns supreme and where we view daily its astonishing accomplishments.
  - 1. Because of the tremendous strides that have been, and are being, made, science has become somewhat of a sacred cow and the laboratory a sort of "holy of holies."
  - 2. As Wilbur Smith put it: "The very word 'laboratory' has in it the connotation of certainty, of wonder, of the discovery of secrets. Millions of people are living today because of the development of medicine, and thank God for that! Many are able to walk the streets today because of insulin, who, otherwise, would long ago have been in their graves. One discovery drives men onto another. The eliciting of one secret is only the opening of the door into another realm of mystery and delight. There is a positiveness, definiteness and promise about mathematical equations, physical laws and chemical formulae, which make men feel that here their feet are on solid rock, that their minds are grappling with realities."
- B. Yet undoubtedly one of the greatest obstacles to belief in God is the attitude that science somehow has made belief in God obsolete. Philosopher A. J. Ayer put it this way: "I believe in science. That is, I believe that a theory about the way the world works is not acceptable unless it is confirmed by the facts, and I believe that the only way to discover what the facts are is by empirical observation."
- C. Although scientists express hope that God will not be rendered obsolete, they acknowledge that, in fact, all too often it has. Wilbur Smith wrote, "But science is no synonym for spirituality, and the life of men is made up of more things than can be measured with test tubes and balances. Yet, man is so absorbed in the pursuit of nature's secrets that he is increasingly ignorant of his inner spiritual life, and this is one of the tragedies of our day. Men engaged in science are themselves partly to blame for this. They devote days and nights, months, and sometimes years, to the discovery of some scientific fact, but they will not give twenty minutes a day to pondering the Word of God, nor five minutes a day to the exercise of their soul in prayer to God.... Of course if men are going to lift such a miserable thing as humanity to a pedestal, then a holy and invisible God must be not only ignored, but despisingly rejected and hated, which is why many of our intellectual

leaders today who look upon humanity as divine, must irritatingly and scornfully declare their conviction that a transcendent, omnipotent, sovereign and eternal Being can, for them, have no meaning."

- D. While we should be grateful for the strides that science has made, we also should acknowledge all that science owes to God. The statement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," is the cornerstone of all scientific thinking. If Genesis 1:1 is the cornerstone of science, then surely Genesis 1:28 is the charter of science.

## V. ***Evil, Pain And Suffering***

- A. Surely it can be said without fear of contradiction that one of the most frequent, and thus one of the most important, causes of unbelief is the existence of evil, pain and suffering in the world. The former televangelist Charles B. Templeton, who started the "Youth for Christ" rallies and was a very well-known evangelist with the Billy Graham Crusade, just quit one day. He abandoned it all -- not just the Billy Graham Crusade, but belief in God, Christ, the Bible and heaven. He wrote, "I was ridding myself of archaic, outdated notions. I was dealing with life as it is. There would be an end to asking the deity for his special interventions on my behalf because I was one of the family.... If there is a loving God, why does he permit -- much less create -- earthquakes, droughts, floods, tornadoes, and other natural disasters which kill thousands of innocent men, women, and children every year? How can a loving, omnipotent God permit -- much less create -- encephalitis, cerebral palsy, brain cancer, leprosy, Alzheimer's and other incurable illnesses to afflict millions of men, women, and children, most of whom are decent people?"
- B. We bring this up merely to document the role that evil, pain and suffering have played, and still continues to play, as an important cause of man's unbelief.
1. In 1851, Charles Darwin abandoned once and for all any vestige of belief in God after the death of his oldest daughter, Annie.
  2. Nine years later, on September 15, 1860, Thomas Huxley was to watch his oldest son, four-year-old Noel, die in his arms from scarlet fever.
  3. Samuel Langhorne Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain) became embittered against God after the death, in 1896, of his favorite daughter, Suzy.
  4. In the mid-1960s, a devoutly religious young man from Chattanooga, was a role model for all of his classmates. He led a prayer group and planned to become a foreign missionary -- until his sister died of leukemia and his father committed suicide. The boy's belief in God collapsed he subsequently became one of America's most outspoken unbelievers, humanists and pro-abortion advocates.

What was his name? Ted Turner, founder of world-famous CNN and the Turner Broadcasting System.

- C. At the end of His six days of creation (Genesis 1:31), God surveyed all that He had made, and proclaimed it "very good."
  - 1. Pestilence, disease and death were unknown. Man existed in a paradise of happiness and beauty where he shared an intimate and eternal relationship with his Maker (Genesis 3:8, 22).
  - 2. The peacefulness and tranquility of the first days of humanity were not to prevail, however. Moses informs us that as a direct consequence of human sin, the Earth was "cursed" (Genesis 3:17). Apparently, matters deteriorated rapidly (Genesis 6:5-7).
- D. The cause of all that is wrong with the earth is not godliness but ungodliness. Since God is love, and since love allows freedom of choice, God allows freedom of choice (cf. Joshua 24:15; John 5:39-40). God did not create men and women as robots to serve Him without any kind of free will on their part. Mankind now reaps the consequences of the misuse of freedom of choice (i.e., the sin) of previous generations (Galatians 6:7-8).
- E. Furthermore, God created a world ruled by natural laws established at the Creation. All of nature is regulated by these laws (such as gravity) -- not just the parts that we find convenient. These natural laws are both inviolable and non-selective. Everyone must obey them or suffer the consequences (cf. Luke 13:2-5). Fortunately, natural laws work continually so that we can understand and benefit from them. We are not left to sort out some kind of haphazard system that works one day but not the next.
  - 1. As much as the unbeliever hates to admit it, there are times when suffering is beneficial. Think of the man whose chest begins to throb as he enters the throes of a heart attack. Think of the woman whose side begins to ache at the onset of appendicitis.
  - 2. Is it not true also that suffering helps humankind develop the traits that people treasure the most? Bravery, heroism, altruistic love, self-sacrifice all flourish in less-than-perfect environments. Yet people who exhibit such traits are cherished and honored as having gone "above and beyond the call of duty" (John 15:13).
- F. Instead of blaming God because evil, pain, and suffering exist, we should turn to Him for strength, and let tragedies, of whatever nature, remind us that this world never was intended to be a final home (Hebrews 11:13-16). Our time here is temporary (James 4:14), and with God's help, we are able to overcome whatever comes our way (Romans 8:35-39; Psalm 46:1-3; 1 Peter 5:10).
- G. Finally, no one can suggest that suffering per se is contrary to the existence or goodness of God in light of the series of events that tran-

spired at Calvary almost two thousand years ago. The fact that even the Son of God was subjected to evil, pain and suffering shows conclusively that God loves and cares for His creation (Hebrews 5:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25). He is not the unloving, angry, vengeful God depicted by atheism and infidelity (Romans 5:8-10; 1 John 4:9-10).

## VI. ***Hypocrisy Of Christians***

- A. As much as those of us who believe in God hate to admit it, the truth of the matter is that on occasion our own actions have the potential to drive others toward unbelief. Try as we might, we still make mistakes, sometimes appalling ones. There always have been stories of graphic hypocrisy and sordid misconduct on the part of Christians (cf. Acts 5:1-11).
- B. Such hypocrisy and misconduct are hard pills to swallow even for fellow Christians. Yet put yourself in the place of the person who already is struggling with doubts not only about the system of belief, but about God as well. From their vantage point, when the system "fails" (i.e., when its adherents are unable to conform to it successfully in their own lives), what, then, shall be said about the God behind the system (Proverbs 25:19)?
- C. The unfaithfulness, hypocrisy or misconduct of a single believer can have severe repercussions not just for other believers, but for unbelievers as well. Such circumstances provide ammunition for those who continually are searching for what they consider to be legitimate reasons not to believe in God (1 Timothy 5:14).
- D. While we acknowledge the devastating effect that can result from the hypocrisy and/or misconduct of believers, and while we make no attempt to justify or excuse such conduct, at the same time we must recognize the fact that it is unfair to blame God for the blunders of humanity.
  - 1. Rejecting God because of hypocrisy in the lives of some of His followers can become a two-edged sword.
  - 2. It has been said that "hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue." Put another way, it is contradictory for an unbeliever to attempt to justify his unbelief by pointing out hypocrisy in someone else.
  - 3. By suggesting that a believer is a hypocrite, the unbeliever implies that there is a system of belief that, when properly adhered to, would legitimize the conduct of the believer. Where does that leave the unbeliever? James D. Bales explains: "When an individual accuses another of being a hypocrite, he is appealing to a standard of integrity. He is saying that it is wrong to be a hypocrite.... Those who hold to a world view which justifies the acceptance of moral

law can consistently oppose hypocrisy. Those whose world view rules out moral law cannot be consistent and accept a standard which says that hypocrisy is wrong."

- E. No one condemned hypocrisy more than Jesus (cf. Matthew 23:1-36). However, the label of "hypocrite" is sometimes misapplied. A person is not a hypocrite because he is weak, and fails at times in his struggle against evil. He is not a hypocrite because he never perfectly achieves God's standard. One is not a hypocrite because he is inconsistent. One may not be aware of the contradiction in his life.

## **VII. *Unjust Acts Committed By Believers In The Name Of God***

- A. It has been said that perhaps the only thing that is consistent in this world is inconsistency. Anyone who has tried to live according to a standard can attest to that fact. Hopefully, most people want to live a consistently good life. Such a feat, though, often falls under the category of "easier said than done." Especially is this true when the standard by which a person is attempting to live is itself a consistently high one.
- B. Even when those of us who firmly believe in God, and who confidently accept the Bible as His inspired communication to mankind, strive diligently to conform our words and deeds to those set out in God's word, we sometimes still fail. David was a man after God's "own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), yet he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered (2 Samuel 11-12). Peter loved his Master dearly, yet denied Him publicly three times on the eve of His crucifixion (Matthew 26:34, 69-75).
  - 1. Adding to the problem is the fact that we may be absolutely sincere in what we do or say, yet still be entirely wrong (cf. Numbers 4:15, 19-20; 2 Samuel 6:6-8).
  - 2. There can be no doubt that Uzzah was sincere in his attempts to protect the ark, but he was sincerely wrong.
- C. Unfortunately, throughout human history there are several examples of those who have professed the high standard of the New Testament, yet who have committed unjust acts in the name of God.
  - 1. For example, in the time period between A.D. 1095 and 1270, eight different crusades occurred, during which armies representing "Christendom" battled Muslims in and around Jerusalem to gain control of the "holy city" and force Mohammed's followers into submission to Christ.
  - 2. In 1613, Galileo published his first musings about the possible truthfulness of the Copernican system of planetary movements (i.e., that the Earth moves around the Sun). In 1616, a decree was issued by the Catholic Church that prevented Galileo from publish-

- ing any of his additional supportive evidence. In 1632, he published that evidence, and one year later, he was found guilty by an Inquisition in Rome. He had to recant his findings and spent the rest of his life under house arrest.
3. In modern times, we have witnessed things no less savory. In 1988, Salman Rushdie authored *The Satanic Verses*, a book that drew the ire of radical Iranian Muslim spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) in the name of Allah, calling for the immediate assassination of Rushdie. Rushdie was forced to go into hiding in Britain for several years.
  4. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants have battled each other for decades under the flags of their respective religions. Innocent adults, teenagers and children die by the hundreds -- all in the name of God.
  5. In Yugoslavia, "Christian" Serbs depart on "search and destroy" missions in an effort to rout Muslim forces. "Ethnic cleansing" is carried out -- again, in God's name.
  6. Closer to home, militants bomb abortion clinics, maiming and killing patients and staff. These same individuals declare "open season" on medical doctors who perform abortions, and these practitioners subsequently are shot as they stand at their kitchen window or get in their car to drive to work. All in the name of the God of heaven.
- D. The unbeliever's case is made for him, and the roots of his unbelief grow deeper, as he witnesses what he views as unjust, wicked acts carried out by people who are supposed to live according to the Bible. How could a good God sanction such barbaric inhumanity, and why would anyone want to serve such a God?
- E. How should the believer respond to these kinds of actions?
1. First, let us admit that such events as the brutality of the Crusades, the murder of abortionists or the ethnic cleansing of Muslims are unjust deeds that never should have occurred. The acts committed are abhorrent and the attitudes of those responsible are deplorable. These events are contrary to God's nature (Luke 6:27-35).
  2. Second, it is unfair to blame God for unjust acts committed in His name by those who claim to believe in Him, yet who disobey His will. The fact that someone commits an act "in God's name" does not mean necessarily that the act itself is sanctioned by the One in whose name it was committed (Matthew 7:21-23). For example, when law-enforcement officers act "in the name of the law," but illegally beat a suspect to obtain a coerced confession, does the law bear the blame for their offenses? No! The law specifically forbade their actions.

3. Third, it is important to separate the real believer from the counterfeit believer. Just because someone claims to be a believer does not necessarily mean that he or she actually is a believer (Matthew 7:15-20). A counterfeit remains a counterfeit regardless of the fact that it claims (or even appears) to be genuine. Its genuineness is determined by whether or not it successfully matches the list of characteristics for that which is actually real.
  4. Fourth, speaking of consistency, we need to realize that it is not just the believer who should be held to such a standard. The unbeliever needs to comply as well. When you examine the legitimate teachings and fruits of a particular system, ask yourself: "Which one has more to commend itself -- belief in God, or unbelief?"
- F. When men act correctly -- in keeping with the doctrines of their respective world views -- which system has more to recommend itself, belief or unbelief? One system -- belief -- teaches that we should esteem others better than ourselves, love our neighbors and be self-sacrificing even unto death. The other -- unbelief -- teaches a "survival of the fittest" concept that makes the strong subjugate the weak and "selfish genes" ensures "every man for himself." Whom would you rather have for your neighbor -- the believer or the unbeliever?

**Conclusion.** Every person familiar with the Bible is aware of one of its central themes -- the evil results of unbelief (Hebrews 4:1-11). Throughout the Bible, God's warning was that belief (and its accompanying faithfulness) would bring spiritual life and His blessings, while unbelief (and its accompanying unfaithfulness) would bring His wrath and spiritual death. It should come as no surprise, then, to see Paul catalog in 1 Corinthians 10 a number of instances of apostasy as a warning to those who might be thinking about following in the footsteps of their unbelieving predecessors.

All too often man's "wisdom" has replaced God's, causing many to lose their way in what has become one of the most horrible, and yet one of the most common, tragedies of our day. The price humans have paid for being intellectually learned but spiritually ignorant -- the loss of their own souls -- has been far higher than we ever could have imagined.

The Lord is happy to help those today who live in honest unbelief, and has provided ample evidence that they might believe. Speaking through the apostle John, God addressed those who, having seen and accepted that evidence, spent a lifetime building their faith upon it (Revelation 21:6-7). Surely, the words of poet John Greenleaf Whittier are appropriate here: "For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been.'"

I am deeply indebted to Bert Thompson for the use of his material in this lesson and "The Many Faces Of Unbelief."