

### When atheists and Christians agree

When a friend says that they can't believe in 'god' - I agree with them !

- I don't believe in the 'god' that they don't believe in either !

It is always important to find out what 'god' they don't believe in

- before we become defensive
- because usually their image of God is totally unbelievable

Probably they never really thought about what they mean by 'god'

- but have just dismissed the idea as fantastic and irrelevant
- or perhaps they have a weird syfi image that is more Startrek and Dr Who
- or more usually they can't take seriously the Christian God they were fed in school, or is portrayed in TV & Film, or the butt of jokes
- or perhaps they don't like the 'god' they get from listening to and watching Christians

Many of us have a picture of God in our subconscious

- even if we don't believe it
- that comes from children's picture books
- or even good art

### Sistine Chapel pictures

Michelangelo

- painted these images as part of the story of creation
- amazing paintings
- but image is of God as an old man, in the clouds - looking down on the world
- no wonder intelligent people reject this image of God that is now part of our culture
- perhaps it is the only one they have
- it is a ridiculous god – has more to do with ancient Greece than the Bible
- I don't believe in that sort of god

### What is God like ?

The obvious next question is - what sort of god could you believe in ?

Well if there is a god - then I think god is .....

- usually get a lot of new age gobbledygook
- which again is totally unbelievable

Why should there be any credibility in what ..... I think ?

If what I think is all there is to it - it isn't worth believing

- am I intelligent enough to have discovered god on my own ?
- have I a grasp of all that there is to know in the universe ?

- it is pure arrogance to say that God is what I think He is like
- If I can define god .... then he isn't God !

OK - how can we possibly know what God is like ? Never mind relate to him ?

We will never 'discover' God by investigation

- He is not a recluse that we can track down and expose
- He is not part of our world
- He must be beyond our world
- or else he is not God, but just a bigger version of us

God, as God, would need to take the initiative to make Himself known to us

- and even then only as far as we can cope with
- the Infinite breaking into this finite world

Moses asked to see God face to face

- God said no ... it would blow his mind
- But I will let you see 'my Glory' ... my character & nature
- those aspects of what God is like, that you and I can understand
- a finite representation of an infinite God
- it will always be partial and blurred – but one day ..... ?

God chose to reveal Himself in ways that we could understand

- through creation
- through interventions in everyday life
- through relationships with individual and nations
- through declarations from the prophets and writers

The Bible is the record of the unfolding of that revelation of what God is like

- ultimately in Jesus
- 'God in all His Fullness' / Colossians [that is another series]

However, the Bible is a difficult book – compared to other 'religious books'

Most of us would prefer

- a series of definitions and rules
- with a few blessed thoughts thrown in
- but that would make us arrogant
- because we would think that we had defined God

Whereas the Bible is

- a collection of narratives / poetry / prophecy / explanations
- that builds up into a bigger picture of what God is like
- his character & nature – His Glory [that's yet another series !]

Definitions and rules are very limited

- and really only give theologians and solicitors something to argue about
- but bible is about God in action, in relationships, in declarations

- and through them we can interpret and explore the depth and breadth of God's character and nature, and His purposes
- it does not define God but describes Him
- without the limits of a full stop at the end of a text book

Bible is difficult book – difficult to get a handle on sometimes

**The big picture** [ jigsaw ]

Look at your individual piece – any idea what the jigsaw picture is ?

Compare it with your neighbours - any idea what the picture is of ?

You will never guess - that's why I chose it !

Given time, if enough of you try and combine pieces

- then you will get a collection of small pictures
- but you don't have all the bits - I still have some in the box [800]
- and you will no doubt have forced some into place, that don't quite fit
- you will have only a partial picture and it is probably distorted

But if I show you the lid then it is obvious

- still difficult to do
- but at least you have something that makes sense of the bits
- all the small pictures build into one large portrait of the Mona Lisa
- the small pictures are real pictures and interesting in their own right
- but they combine to make a bigger picture which is more interesting
- but you need the big picture first - to fit the smaller ones together correctly

Parallel obvious

- the bible is full of small pictures of different aspects of God's character & nature
- but we need to see them as only part of the big picture
- and we need to have the big picture to be able to fit the smaller pictures together correctly

The big picture is .... **the Bible** .... the whole bible

Focusing in on any small part in isolation can give the wrong picture

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing

- and has led to some very interesting and completely wrong conclusions over the years
- you need to start with the bigger picture – not the detail
- the bible needs to interpret itself

When we take isolated verses like pieces of the jigsaw

- and add I think
- have a limited understanding and
- add personal experiences

- and then
- with cultural prejudices
  - try and combine these small pieces of understanding
  - and have to force some that don't quite fit together
  - because parts missing in our understanding
  - then we just get lots of small pictures
  - that give a distorted picture – and only a partial one

People constantly try and fit the bits together, without referring to the big picture

- creeds
- 'confessionals'
- denominations
- sects and cults

Need big picture / the whole bible – to study and to understand and for our understanding of the Bible and therefore what God is like, to be

- more accurate
- more exciting
- more blessed

We need to step back and see the whole picture

That can only happen if we have a grasp and understanding of the whole bible

**biblefresh**

This next series, between now and the end of August is

- to help us see the big picture / the whole bible
- and then fit the pieces together / understand the detail

**The bible - a celebration**

400 years since the printing of the King James bible

- although not the first bible in English
- 'authorized' to be read openly in church and at home

BBC celebrated anniversary - with actors reading passages throughout a Sunday

But Bible is not just

- an historical literary masterpiece
- or a religious text book

It is the revelation of God - by God

- we of all people, Christians, should celebrate and take seriously

One recent survey in the UK suggests that only 25% of Christians read their bible between Sunday services

Why are we so complacent about such an amazing gift from God ?

Israel returned to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon, and when they had finished repairing the wall they came together in the city square

Imagine the emotion and worship that is described in these verses from

### **Nehemiah 8**

On the other hand -

### **5 reasons not to read the bible**

#### **it's too long**

Certainly is long – 66 books - but it is a very big picture !

Many helpful resources – reading plans 1year-5year / take time [no competition]

Just Start – there is always less to read after you have read some !

#### **it's too difficult**

Yes it is difficult - but not too difficult

Different levels – some parts are obvious, some more obscure

Study – many other things need worked at, and we do, if we think it worthwhile

Perhaps it isn't too difficult – but just we can't be bothered making the effort ?

Help from teaching / commentators / Home Group / books and friends to study

#### **it's too boring**

Repetitive and detailed

Some find Lev fascinating – in cultures where objects and liturgy important

Some find Psalms & poetry engaging – where oral tradition is important

If we know what we are looking for – truth about God

- and look for it rather than just reading the words
- might be surprised what we find

If I am really interested in the outcome of reading the bible - knowing God

- I will have a different attitude – different motivation
- and very different consequences

Ethos in CCB - not to be a teaching church - but to be a learning church

#### **I'm too busy**

Always

Used to make a big thing of Priorities – dangerous as never get far down the list

Choices – what are the alternatives

- too many Christian books ?

- cf bible time ?

I will never find time – I need to make it !

### **I'm too tired**

Yes

Competing demands of life, work family, church, or just age

But never too tired for eating / TV / sleeping [contradiction ?]

Need to develop Discipline – habit

Realistic ambition – 15 mins ? not 1 hour [unless it becomes ..... ]

There are real reasons why we find it difficult to read the bible

- but there are better reasons for reading it

It is very difficult to be disciplined and consistent

- but that doesn't mean we don't try

### **Before a person can KNOW**

- they have to want to know

Pray that God's Spirit will give you the desire to want to know more about Him

### **biblefresh**

Between now and September we are going as a church family help one another to get to grips with the Bible.

biblefresh is an initiative of Wycliffe / SU / BS / EA / and 100s of other organizations, to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Authorized Bible

biblefresh has 4 aims which we in CCB are attempting to follow

### **read the bible more**

individually – get behind the words and discover the author

also as families / friends / small groups / full church

learning & declaring the truth about God

have a fresh attitude

### **understand and apply it**

Challenges to our faith and testimony

Learn to handle the bible better

- apply our mind [1 Peter 1v13 – prepare your minds for action]

Personally / Sunday teaching / Home Groups E100 books / study notes etc

We want to be influenced by what we read  
We want to practice what we learn - experience the truth of it by living it

### **experience it in new and creative ways**

Not in how life comments on bible but in how the bible comments on life  
Role out over the next few months ideas and resources  
Invite ideas to share in Home Groups / Update / Web page

### **raise money to translate it for Burkina Faso**

amazingly BF chosen – with DJ coordinator – CCB already involved

### **1 Cor 13 - in French**

- recognize and get some of it - even proficient in French - miss some of subtlety

Burkina Faso

- sisala NT / DJ
- open emotion when reading in her own language what God had chosen to say to her – not guessing or part understanding

God has spoken and the challenge is to make it possible for people in BF to read it, study it in their own languages and to live it

Just after Easter Stephen Gilmore will tell us how we can be actively involved

All good and worthy, but

### **Before a person can KNOW**

- **they have to want to know**

But there is a risk involved

- **they have to be willing to know**

Pray that God's Spirit will give us as individuals, and a church, the courage

- to be willing to know more about Him
- it may be uncomfortable
- it will change our lives

Disturbing Questions –

If I never read the bible again would my outlook and behavior be any different ?  
Would anyone notice ?

If I did read the bible seriously, what difference could it make ?  
Would people notice ?

Start now – as we take Communion

**Jn 14 v8-10**

Philip asked Jesus

- show us the Father
- Jesus said – look at me
- if we want to see the clearest picture of what God is like
- look at Jesus

Take B&W - Jesus invites us to 'Remember me'

The B&W / cross etc are not the focus of communion

- visual aids to help us recognise the character & nature of Jesus
- to see Him and to see God

Think about Him and worship God

**Picture of Bread & Wine**