

This book would be an excellent choice for a study with your non-believing friends.

### The Reason for God by Timothy Keller

There are many reasons to doubt Christianity, Keller attempts to refute the top seven.

#### **Doubt #1 -- There can't be just one true religion**

– It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one way to think about all religions (namely they are all equal) is right. Religion is a set of beliefs that explain what life is all about, who we are, and the most important things that human beings should spend their time doing. We all have religion and we all need to accept this truth. It is wrong for people to call for the exclusion of religious views from the public square, because that call is in and of itself religious.

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**Doubt #2 – How could a good God allow suffering** – this doubt comes from an understanding of justice and injustice. Where did the idea of justice and cruelty come from? If justice is real and not some figment of my imagination, then there is something greater out there that placed it in me, Animals don't complain of injustice and if we just evolved, and all is meaningless, why should any of us even care about justice? A belief in God really makes sense at this point. The Christian savior helps us understand even more, because unique from all other religions we find Jesus Christ suffering with us, and for us, we can draw comfort from that, also the Christian view of heaven helps make sense of pain, we believe that one day all the agonies endured, will be redeemed and glorified.

**Doubt #3 – Christianity is a straightjacket** – absolute truth is for the birds, it will cramp my style, no thanks. There is real freedom found in relativism and inclusion. Nobody is completely inclusive, everyone draws "truth" lines in the sand at some point. Also love is a freedom robbing straightjacket, but those who experience the joy of true love don't seem to mind, a fish is limited by water and that's o.k. Humans are free to experiment, take risks, make mistakes, but over time this freedom teaches them their limits, knowing your limits allows you to grow through constraint. Also Christianity is the most culturally diverse religion in all the world, there is tremendous variety and freedom within Christianity.

**Doubt #4 The church is responsible for so much injustice** – nobody gets angry that hospitals are full of sick people, it's what they are for. So to should no one be angry that churches are full of spiritually, morally, emotionally sick people. The church is a hospital for sinners not a museum for saints. Both churches and hospitals can be messy places at times, but that's o.k. they are accomplishing their purpose. Regarding "Christian" countries and war/violence. Well, if you want to do a body count the atheist regimes win, however, it is true that "Christian fanatics" have done great damage, but it is not that they are "too Christian" it is that they are not Christian enough. In every case these fanatics strayed from God's Word. The human race is a violent race, Christian teaching draws people away from these base urges, unfortunately some have resisted that draw.

**Doubt #5 How can a loving God send people to hell.** – Wrath is first of all not a "bad" thing. It's ok to be angry at injustice, and evil. God is right to be angry at evil. God's wrath is also a good thing b/c it allows us to forgive. Knowing that God is going to take care of all things one day allows us to forgive and move on. Also, one must realize that those whose final destination is the fires of hell are not poor repentant sinners crying out for mercy, they remain in their sinfulness, they remain in their pride, anger, bitterness and self-pity. Their self centered, blame shifting ways will not go away – they will be utterly miserable, locked in the prison of their own self-centeredness. There will be no cries of "I'm sorry let me out" from the pit, all who are in hell are there because they have chosen it.

**Doubt #6 Science has disproved Christianity.** – Since science by it's very nature cannot discern or test for supernatural causes, they must not exist. Therefore Christianity is bogus. This kind of circular reasoning is what is bogus. Science is full of improvable pre-suppositions, at least as many as religion. When it actually comes down to the "real" science part, the stuff that we can measure, and observe Keller basically blows off evolution as "no big deal" science and religion are not at odds with each other because you really can be a God fearing evolutionist that has a high view of Scripture. He then name drops some notable examples such as R.A. Torrey, and B.B. Warfield and moves on. Of course one must develop a certain "flexible" hermeneutic if Scripture is not to clash with evolution. In my opinion this chapter was his worst, I don't see how evolution is compatible with Scripture – someone will need to explain that one to me.

**Doubt #7 You can't take the Bible literally.** – it's legends, and stories, it might be entertaining but surely not reliable. Given the "counterproductive" nature of the gospel and the Bible as a whole, one is led to believe that it's the truth, some fabrication, set to polish and smooth out an already developed religion would have hardly taken the approach of for example the gospels. They are way to "bumpy" to be false. Also the details of the gospels are too detailed, it is classic recollective writing, the disciples remembered this and that and wrote. Plus the epistles are so close to the original events, that there is not time for "legend" to develop. Remember the cultural issues are secondary, don't get bent all out of shape because you don't understand the culture of the ancient days, and thus are overly critical of the slavery issue or the gender issue, those are secondary issues, for example don't worry about the "gender role" debate until you figure out what you think about the central teachings of the faith.

**What is Christianity?** – so many different brands. The "what" of Christianity is the belief system of Christianity, the "how" of Christianity is the various denominations. Keller does not really tackle the protestant vs. catholic issue. He just hints that that Catholicism is inside true Christianity. Nor does he spend much time talking about how Christian fragmentation could be a major objection to Christianity. He just defines Christianity in the simplest possible terms.

There are also reasons to believe, reasons to leave off doubting, that is the second half of Keller's book. God's fingerprints are all over the place this is where all the standard arguments come in. The "clue killer" argument of the atheist teaches that since we evolved, & since existence is all about survival, we can explain why people are interested in God, it was a natural mechanism that developed to enhance survival – so when the mind thinks of God, or sees "clues" for God, we should just disregard them. All of the clues of God in this world, are mental creations, developed over time to enhance survival nothing more. You can't trust the mind when it thinks about God, and so the argument goes, but that argument proves self destructive, because then you could just as easily conclude, that you can't trust the mind when it thinks about the "truth" of natural selection, one should be equally skeptical of this thought, it to could be a creation of the mind, to enhance survival. The bottom line is you have to look at the clues, you have to dust for the God fingerprints that are really there. Reasonableness, and integrity says you cannot simply dismiss them.. These evidences for God combined with such things as forgiveness, grace, love, the spread of Christianity, the evidence for the reality of the resurrection, the gospel, the new heaven the new earth, the doctrine of the trinity and the "dance of God" all combine in such a way that it is not difficult to conclude that no one could have made this stuff up! In the end Christianity makes the best sense out of the questions that religion asks.

