**An Airplane with One Wing**
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"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:15

I grew up in a small church, where I had the privilege of serving as an elder. I also taught Sabbath School and worked in a supporting role in evangelistic efforts. I was very sure of what I believed.

However, when I arrived on the campus of a large secular university as a new student, I found myself facing questions for which I had no answers. Brilliant professors who awed me with the depth of their knowledge and the clarity of their thought, also ridiculed my faith. I had few answers for their challenges to the Bible or their contempt for its "mythological" stories.

My experience is certainly not unique. Statistics vary, but somewhere between sixty to eighty percent of youth will lose their faith as they move from late high school to university graduation. It would be naive and simplistic to think that there is one single reason. However, one major reason--one shared by my friends who lost their faith--is that their Christian beliefs lost any credibility. They simply concluded that what they had been taught in church didn't make sense in our modern world. Intuitively, they accepted some or most of its moral principles, but the Bible itself lost its authority. When challenged, they could not say precisely what they believed or why they believed it.

My wife, Leyanne, has taught in Adventist elementary schools for over twenty years. She believes in Christian education. Our children are students in our schools. Yet she has noticed that while we are good at teaching Bible stories, and, to a lesser extent, our doctrines, we do not teach children the reasons for our faith. Why be an Adventist rather than, say, a Catholic or a Baptist, or even a Buddhist? Why believe the Bible is historically true? Why accept the stories of miracles when our society treats them as myths? Does biblical morality make sense, when every television show or movie has the couple hop into bed when they develop the least glint of attraction? Can we even believe in God in an age of science?

To bring it home, let's consider the Sabbath. Yes, the Bible teaches that Saturday is the Sabbath, but so what? How do I know that the gospels, with their miracle stories, tell us what really happened? How do I know that the Bible has not been changed since the days of the apostles? Do we even have the right books? If the Bible becomes suspect, doctrines lose their foundations. Christianity becomes merely a "faith tradition", and Adventism one of many options, none of which has any claim to truth over another.

What I suggest is that as educators, we must be sure to teach our children *why* the Bible is to be trusted. We must prepare them, as Peter declares, "to give an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give the reason for the hope [they] have…" (1 Peter 3.15). Also, in a culture that ridicules faith, and particularly Christians, we must help them know that our beliefs are both rational and attractive. In a society that sternly warns us that to say you have the truth is

intolerant of others, our children must become confident that God is real, and this has consequences for living life. Faith is not merely a matter of personal preference.

We can begin this in the early grades. In her grade 3-5 classroom this year, Leyanne includes four lines of evidence to support her students growing faith--archaeology, manuscript evidence, nature, and the fine-tuning of our universe. She is reading and discussing selections from Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*, and *The Case for the Creator* as adapted for children. She also uses a wonderful variety of child friendly DVDs that powerfully present God as creator. The goal is to prepare children to face the challenges that a secular society presents, so that their faith does not crumble when they leave the protection of a Christian educational environment.

Some, including fellow pastors and teachers, argue that encouraging children to develop a personal experience with Christ is all that is needed. There is no need to delve into questions of history, archaeology, philosophy and science. However, as a pastor, I have talked with Pentecostals who tell me that they *know* what they believe is true, because of an experience. I have also spoken to Mormons who cite as evidence their "inner testimony". Modern Wiccans have told me of their experience of power in their contacts with the spirit world. Each of these faiths appeals to personal experience as a test of truth. Each speaks with the integrity of personal conviction. So how do I choose?

That is where objective considerations, such as the historicity of the gospels, the resurrection of Jesus, and the eye witness accounts of those early witnesses, enable me to test experience and choose that which is true. Knowledge of objective information combined with sound reasoning keeps me from going by my feelings, which I can mistake for experience of God.

Let me be clear. You cannot be a Christian without a personal relationship with Jesus as Lord. The Spirit of God provides joy and strength that enrich life, and give meaning and purpose. However, experience is analogous to one wing of an airplane. The other is a clear understanding of who God is, and what he has done-- a firm grasp on solid biblical teaching that can stand up to the challenges of an anti-Christian culture. It is a reasonable faith that can weather scrutiny and attack, that will not waver in difficult times. Both *heart* and *mind* must be in harmony for faith to be strong and real. We owe it to our children to develop both as they sit at our feet in our classrooms.

For resources and readings on the topics raised in this article, for yourself or the classroom, contact me at richardroschman@yahoo.ca.