

SCEPTICISM

I was watching a television program about the conflict between Israel and Hamas when one of the commentators said that most people are sceptical about the information coming from both sides. I found that I, too, was sceptical and suddenly realised that scepticism has been relevant throughout human history.

In simple terms, it's a type of safety measure because when people don't have enough definitive information about a subject, they cannot be decisive about it.

An example is when a football club buys a new player. Their supporters will have different ideas of how good or bad he'll be for the team. Some will say he's a great buy, others will ask why they bothered. Some will never wait to see if he'll benefit the team because of their scepticism.

God would surely have known about scepticism when he sent his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to show and tell us how to love God and our neighbours. So, how did Jesus get around this problem?

At the start of his campaign to save sinners, Our Lord Jesus Christ knew he had to gain the confidence of those he'd selected, but with their natural scepticism, what would be the best way to achieve this?

If he told them he was the "Son of God", they would probably have laughed, and someone would say something like "Yes, and I'm Moses."

Is this why Jesus's exceptional wisdom resulted in him not mentioning who he was but getting them to wonder who he was? He did this by teaching the scriptures with authority and working miracles such as walking on water, raising the dead, controlling the weather, and curing many illnesses.

All this resulted in his disciples asking him who he was, but he asked them who people thought he was because he knew they had seen and heard many of the things he'd done. They told him that some thought he was Moses, others Elijah and other famous prophets.

He then looked at Peter and asked him who he thought Jesus was. Peter replied that he was the Son of God. Jesus told him he could only have known this if his Father had told him.

This scepticism that all human beings seem to have resulted in Jesus having to use methods of overcoming it that could not be challenged. We'll look at just two magnificent ones from the Bible.

WALKING ON WATER

In Matthew 14:24-33 we have a great way of Jesus overcoming the scepticism of some of his followers.

One day, some of Jesus's disciples were in a boat far out on the lake when winds caused a storm, making them fearful. Jesus, who was on the shore, saw their plight and started to walk on the water towards them, shouting, "Courage, it is I, do not fear." Peter called back, saying, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water. "Come," said Jesus. Peter then got out of the boat and walked on the water towards Jesus. As the winds blew against his face, scepticism reared its ugly head, and Peter started to become afraid and slowly began to sink, shouting, "Lord save me". Jesus took him by the hand, saying, "Man of little faith, why did you doubt me?" As they got into the boat, the wind dropped, and the disciples bowed down, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God".

This was the wind causing Peter's scepticism to take over and doubt Jesus. Was this Jesus knowing what would happen? Is this why he walked on water in a gale, calmed the weather and saved the disciples in the boat so that it would cause their scepticism to vanish as they now knew from what they had witnessed that he was the Son of God?

THE RISEN CHRIST

Jesus had spent time and energy showing and teaching his disciples how to preach his words of love. He wanted them to go out into the world and teach it to all men. The one last problem he had was the scepticism of those who needed a final absolute truth, beyond any doubt, that he was the Son of God.

He did this by prophesying about what was going to happen to him. He told them that he would be arrested, tried, convicted, and then put to death and buried, but the crucial part of the prophecy was that after three days, he would rise from the dead. They knew that no human being could do this.

What he prophesied happened, and after three days, while they were hiding in a room, afraid of what the Israelites would do to them, he appeared in their midst.

Again, scepticism came to the fore, and one of his Apostles, Thomas, who was not present at this first meeting, was unconvinced. The scepticism in him could have made him think that the person they had seen was either someone who looked like Christ or his unknown twin.

Thomas said the only way he would accept that the person they had seen was Christ was to be able to put his fingers in the holes made by the nails during his crucifixion and his hand in the wound in the side caused by a Roman soldier's spear thrust.

Jesus appeared again when Thomas was present and offered the holes in his hands and feet and the hole in his side for him to examine.

When he saw them, Thomas bent down, all scepticism gone, saying, "My Lord and my God".

Men of all ages have used scepticism for all kinds of things, but when it's used to deny Christ or God his Father, look in the Bible. You'll find all the answers you need there.