



## Study Guide

### *Reasons to Believe · Chapter 1 — More Than a Feeling*

**Chapter Overview** In the opening chapter of *Reasons to Believe*, titled "More Than a Feeling," Scott Hahn argues that the Christian faith is far more than an irrational leap or a fleeting emotional experience. Instead, it is a reasonable, intellectually grounded response to objective truth. Hahn challenges the modern dichotomy that pits faith against reason, asserting that authentic belief requires both the heart and the mind to work in harmony. By drawing on personal narrative, scripture, and church history, the chapter establishes that believing in God is an act of intellectual honesty and that Christians are called to be prepared, thoughtful defenders of their faith.

**Learning Objectives** By the end of this study, participants should be able to: Distinguish between unstable emotional experiences and the enduring nature of intellectually grounded faith. Define "apologetics" and explain its purpose within the Christian tradition. Articulate the biblical and historical reasoning for infant baptism as a case study in reasoned faith. Recognize the necessity of "dogma" as the essential foundation that prevents religious collapse. Identify the relationship between faith and reason as complementary tools for discovering truth.

#### Section-by-Section Reading Breakdown

##### 1. The Challenge of "Dunked for Real"

Hahn recounts a personal story from his freshman year of college. His friends, caught up in the excitement of a new church experience, questioned the validity of their infant baptisms, suggesting they should be "dunked for real" because they could actually remember the experience and felt a new emotional fervency. Hahn was initially caught without a ready answer, illustrating how faith built only on memory or feeling can be easily shaken by external pressure. **Reflection Questions:** Hahn notes that his friends prioritized what they could "remember" and "feel" over the objective reality of their first baptism. In what ways does our culture prioritize emotional experience over historical or objective facts today? When your faith is challenged, is your first instinct to rely on how you feel, or on what you know to be true through study and scripture?

##### 2. The Biblical Defense of Infant Baptism

In response to his friends, Hahn delved into the logic of the Covenants. He argues that the New Covenant did not discard the inclusion of children found in the Old Covenant (where



circumcision was the sign) but fulfilled it. If God intended to exclude infants from the New Covenant, such a radical change would have been stated explicitly. Reflection Questions: How does the connection between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism illustrate that faith is "reasonable" rather than a series of disconnected rules? Hahn argues that the Kingdom belongs to children (Matthew 19:14). How does this biblical truth challenge the idea that a person must fully "understand" a sacrament for it to be valid?

### 3. Defining Apologetics and the Call to Reason

Hahn introduces the term "apologetics"—the theological art of explaining and defending the faith using reason, logic, and history. He emphasizes that this is not about "apologizing" or being aggressive; it is about being prepared to give an account for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15). Reflection Questions: Hahn states that the "best defense is a good offense," but that this offense must be rooted in prayer and humility. How can a Christian defend the faith without becoming "offensive" or argumentative? Why does God prefer "minds formed from profound study" over "snappy answers" or memorized talking points?

### 4. The Role of Dogma vs. Secular Skepticism

The chapter critiques the secular view that "dogma" is an imposition on the mind. Hahn argues that without dogma (defined truth), religion eventually collapses into generalized emotion and ethical intentions that lose their force. Apologetics shows that the dogmas of faith are compatible with reason, even if they surpass the limits of human reasoning. Reflection

## Questions:

The text suggests that when dogma is slighted, religion eventually loses "even the essence of its being." Have you seen examples of "faith" that has been reduced to mere "good feelings"? What was the result? How does the quote "Faith is not a feeling; it is a way of knowing" change your perspective on studying Church doctrine?

**Key Terms and Definitions**  
Term, Definition  
Apologetics, "The theological art of explaining and defending the Christian faith using reason, logic, history, and scripture. From the Greek apologia (a formal defense)."  
Dogma, Officially defined teachings of the Church held as divinely revealed truth; the definitive doctrine of the faith.  
Mystagogy, Guidance into the mysteries of faith; leading someone deeper into what they have already received.  
Fideism, The erroneous belief that one should rely on faith alone without any engagement of reason.  
Objective Truth, "Truth that exists independently of personal opinion, feeling, or emotional experience."  
Transcendence, The reality or existence of something beyond the material world.



Scripture References 1 Peter 3:15: "Always be ready to give a logical defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope and confident assurance that is within you, yet do it with gentleness and respect." Context: The foundational mandate for apologetics—reasoned defense rooted in hope and humility. Matthew 19:14: "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Context: Used by Hahn to show that the Kingdom is open to those who cannot yet "reason" for themselves, supporting the validity of infant baptism. Matthew 28:18-19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them..." Context: The Great Commission, presenting baptism as an authoritative command from Christ rather than a feeling-based preference. Acts 2:38-39: "For God's promise was made to you and your children..." Context: Peter's explicit inclusion of children in the promise of the Holy Spirit and baptism. Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation..." Context: The imperative to stand by the truth of the Gospel even when it is caricatured by secular culture as superstition.

## "Going Deeper": Related Theological Concepts

The Principle of St. Justin Martyr Hahn cites the early Christian apologist St. Justin Martyr, who famously stated, "Whatever is true is ours." This principle allows Christians to engage with science, philosophy, and secular culture without fear. Because God is the author of all truth, any truth found in pagan philosophy or modern science ultimately belongs to the Christian heritage.

Faith as Informed Trust Faith is compared to the everyday trust we place in doctors, historians, or loved ones. We do not demand mathematical proof for every relationship or historical fact; rather, we exercise "rational trust" based on accumulated signs and credible testimony. Faith in God follows this same logical pattern.

Worthy Successors in Apologetics Hahn encourages the study of other thinkers who have defended the faith with intellectual rigor. These include: Historical Figures: St. Justin Martyr. Modern Apologists: Peter Kreeft, Patrick Madrid, Jeff Cavins, Carl Keating, Scott Hahn, Dave Armstrong, and others mentioned in the text (e.g., Fr. Mitch Pacwa, Tim Staples, and Steven Ray).

## Closing Personal Application Exercise

1. **Rational Evaluation:** Spend 15 minutes this week identifying one specific doctrine or belief you hold. Write down the reasons why you believe it—looking for evidence in scripture, history, or logical reasoning rather than just "how it makes you feel."
2. **Distinguish Foundations:** The next time you experience a "spiritual dry spell" (a lack



of emotional fervor), list three objective truths about God that remain true regardless of your current mood.

3. **Intellectual Commitment:** Choose one resource—a book of theology, a historical study of the Church, or a philosophical essay—to read over the next month to help move your faith from a "feeling" to a "way of knowing."