

# A Study of Faith

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## Introduction

The word “Faith” can be somewhat vague. People live by their “faith,” defend their “faith,” and critique the “faith” of others; yet, it is sometimes a difficult concept to define. What is faith? How does it relate to religion in general? Is the term applicable to worldviews that do not hold to theism, such as secular humanism? How does faith relate to the subject of evidences? Is faith blind? Does science contradict faith? These, and other, questions help to stimulate the discussion that will follow in this study.

More specifically, I wish to consider the nature of faith as it touches upon belief and acceptance of the Bible. What is biblical faith? Does it blindly accept the Bible regardless of any evidence to the contrary of its reliability? Is biblical faith reasonable? Is faith a reasonable response to the evidence? What does the Bible say about faith? Have its critics and friends correctly represented biblical faith? In this study we will consider some of the fundamental aspects of true faith.

## What Is Faith?

One of the problems in discussing the concept of faith is that the word itself carries with it various connotations; it can be defined in differing ways. If those who discuss the concept do not use the word in the same ways, then

equivocation may result and misunderstandings will occur. We hope to avoid this by defining the term and using the definition consistently.

Modern definitions vary, depending upon the context of its usage. For example, all of the following definitions may be properly used depending upon the context (Faith 658): 1. Unquestioning belief; 2. unquestioning belief in God, religion, etc.; 3. a religion or system of religious beliefs; 4. anything believed; 5. complete trust, confidence, or reliance; 6. faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, or allegiance to some person or thing.

In the Bible, “faith” is used in both an *objective* and a *subjective* sense. Objectively, “the faith” is the body or system of beliefs considered to be revealed in the Scriptures. It is used this way in Jude 3, which speaks of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” Subjectively, faith is personal and individual, referring to the trust and loyalty of the individual who responds to what is perceived as the objective faith. We are primarily concerned here with faith in a more subjective sense. We want to consider whether the subjective aspect of faith is a reasonable response to evidence.

The idea of “unquestioning belief” is, basically, “Belief without evidence” (Landau 255). This is the way that many people use the term, including some believers who see faith and evidence to be in contradiction with each other. People use it to imply that faith does not rest upon any logical proof or material evidence.

For example, one definition of faith is “a kind of belief that is not supported by evidence. It is common in religious contexts” (Burr and Goldinger 533). This is the way that some religious people view faith; but, in this study, I will argue that biblical faith is based upon evidence and that such views of faith are inconsistent with a biblical worldview. It is often argued that faith and science contradict. Again, I believe this to be a misunderstanding, or a misrepresentation, of biblical faith. This is a serious question that needs further consideration.

In this study, faith will be primarily used in the sense of “complete trust, confidence, or reliance.” *The basic idea of faith is trust.* It goes beyond merely believing something. Many people “believe” things that they do not necessarily put their faith in. We might even “believe” something about which we are not too certain. For example, I may use the idea of “belief” in a very weak sense about a subject with which I am not very knowledgeable. I might say, “I believe that the sun is ninety-three million miles from the earth.” This may be based upon some scientific evidence I have studied, but I would not be shocked to find that the number could change, due to further evidence, or that I may be wrong in making this statement, due to a misunderstanding. This is really just another way of saying, “I think that such and such is true, but I may be wrong.” Belief can also be used in a much stronger

sense, though, which corresponds more to the idea of faith.

There are three basic factors involved in this type of belief or faith (Purtill 72):

1. *There should be some understanding of what someone claims to believe.* If someone claims to believe in God, then this person should know something about God. Acts 17 records that Paul went to the city of Athens and began to proclaim something about the “unknown God.” They had a belief about which they knew nothing. The first step was to teach something about God. This, in turn, could help foster a true faith by those who would choose it. Faith without any understanding is not the type of faith one should defend. It is blind and unreasonable.

2. *There should be a willingness to act in accordance with a stated belief.* We do not generally think too highly of one who states beliefs without being willing to live by them. We often refer to such a person as a hypocrite. There ought to be a connection between someone’s “faith” and that person’s actions. Strong conviction compels people to act.

3. *There needs to be a reason for believing something.* If people believe in something based upon a mere whim or a hunch, then they will end up being unreasonable or they will lack confidence. Feelings do not make a good foundation for certain faith. Faith is not very secure if it is not based upon a solid foundation. If one asks, “Why do you believe that?” and the response is, “just because,” then

this “faith” is not well-reasoned. Such a response is not acceptable for one looking for a foundation on which to build a proper worldview.

*True faith, not merely belief, is achieved when people know what they believe, why they believe it, and are committed to acting consistently with it.* Concerning biblical faith, Christians should know what they believe, why they believe it, and be willing to act upon it. Otherwise, faith becomes a shallow and meaningless philosophy. It becomes a creed with no practical meaning, a shell without any inside substance.

Kreeft and Tacelli add that there are four dimensions of religious faith (30-31). These are as follows:

1. *Emotional faith.* This is the feeling of assurance, trust, or confidence (I’m not talking about mere emotionalism here). This would include the concept of hope, which is much stronger than a mere wish. It would also include inward peace. These feelings come as a result of confidence in the object of faith.

2. *Intellectual faith.* This is belief itself. It is stronger than emotional faith because it is more stable and unchanging. Feelings can be shaken, while the mind remains firm in a belief. This is more than a typical opinion. It is held with fervor and zeal. It is this dimension of faith that is often “formulated in propositions and summarized in creeds.”

3. *Volitional faith.* This dimension is where obedience melds with intellectual and

emotional faith. It is an act of the will when a person commits to doing what he or she perceives is the will of God. True faith shows itself in action by doing “good works.” Faith seeks not only the heart, but also the will and commitment of the individual. “Belief is what happens when you decide to be honest and put your mind in the service of truth” (31).

4. *Heart faith.* In the Bible, the word “heart” indicates the very center of the soul of the individual. Though it is the seat of feelings and emotions, it is more than just feelings. It is where we make our choices and find the courage to carry them out. Faith is something that must be conceived in the heart. This, in turn, will affect our feelings, will, and intellect. These ideas will come up again later in the study.

### Various Views Of Faith

There are four basic historical views concerning faith, especially as it relates to reason (Purkiser 17). **First** is the position that *faith and reason are equally valid*, though independent and unrelated. This led to the idea of “twofold truth” during the Middle Ages. **Second** is the concept that *reason is subordinate to faith*, meaning that reason must accept whatever “faith” dictates. This is characteristic of mysticism, and is not a proper view of biblical faith. This is also characteristic of those who have rejected any new scientific discovery if it did not fit with their preconceived notions. The problem between Galileo and the

Catholic Church is a classic example. **Third** is the view that *faith is subordinate to reason*. Only that which reason finds acceptable is true. This is better known as *rationalism*. **Fourth** is the position that *faith and reason are not contradictory, but rather complementary*. Each supplements the other in the search for what is true. Like two halves of a complete whole, together they make possible understanding and knowledge. This would be true in every area of life, not just in religion.

Augustine argued that faith should take priority over reason, yet true faith required the aid of reason. To Augustine, faith was not blind, but it was necessary for understanding.

God hath made thee a rational animal ... Stir up, I say, the eyes of reason, use thine eyes as a man should, consider the heaven and earth, the ornaments of the heaven, the fruitfulness of the earth, the flight of the birds, the swimming of the fish, the virtue of the seeds, the order of the seasons, consider the works, and seek for the Author; take a view of what thou seest, and seek Him Whom thou seest not. Believe on Him Whom thou seest not, because of these things which thou seest.  
(Augustine 255)

In this view, one can derive faith in the unseen from simply viewing the things that can be seen. To Augustine, “everybody who believes, thinks” (262). Reason cannot be dismissed from a discussion of faith.

Thomas Aquinas put even more stress on reason. He argued that there are some things beyond human reasoning, and therefore need faith. Other things, however, are within humanity’s ability to reason them out and arrive at knowledge of truth. He put the existence of God into this category and put forth arguments that still have a strong impact on this discussion today. Whether understood by reason or by faith, all truth is the object of belief (Aquinas 264). On the nature of faith, Aquinas argued that two things are necessary: first, the things of faith must be “proposed to man,” and second, the believer must assent to the things proposed (271). In other words, faith is a choice, but what is proposed must come from God. The things of faith, according to this view, are beyond human reason and, therefore, must be revealed by God. However, Aquinas also argued that faith must be induced by both external means (such as miracles) and internal means. The internal means is an act of God, “moving man inwardly by grace” (272). Among many fundamentalists and charismatics, this is still a popular view.

Martin Luther, a leader in the Reformation, put stress on faith as the sole factor involved in salvation from sin. Works that come from faith were good, but they had nothing to do with salvation. This was in direct

reaction and contradiction to the position of the Catholic Church.

Benedict de Spinoza, on the other hand, argued that faith is basically only as good as the works, or obedience, in which one engages.

Spinoza defined faith as that which

looks for nothing but obedience and piety. Again, philosophy is based on axioms which must be sought from nature alone: faith is based on history and language, and must be sought for only in Scripture and revelation. Faith, therefore, allows the greatest latitude in philosophic speculation.... (286)

Karl Barth argued for a rational faith. He saw faith as a rational trust in God.

The Creed of Christian faith rests upon knowledge. And where the Creed is uttered and confessed knowledge should be, is meant to be, created. Christian faith is not irrational, not anti-rational, not supra-rational, but rational in the proper sense. ... rightly understood the act of faith is also an act of knowledge. Faith means knowledge. (299)

Soren Kierkegaard argued for an existential faith. He avoided the typical theological discussions or intellectual analysis of the “essence” of faith. Faith is both a venture and a risk, with its object being an existential relationship with God. Faith is not something that is separate from the individual. He argued that “every misunderstanding of Christianity may at once be recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual” (313). He saw faith as having two tasks: “to take care in every moment to discover the improbable, the paradox; and then to hold it fast with the passion of inwardness” (313).

Paul Tillich described faith as “ultimate concern” (1). People have many concerns, especially for physical needs. However, according to Tillich, there are greater, spiritual concerns. Whatever becomes the most urgent concern is what defines one’s faith. “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned. The content matters infinitely for the life of the believer, but it does not matter for the formal definition of faith” (Tillich 4). While this concept might be a bit vague, Tillich has had an impact in philosophy and religion with his arguments.

The foregoing, brief survey of views concerning faith demonstrate that faith has been a long-debated issue. Some tie it to knowledge and rational thinking, others declare that it is outside of reason and comes only from God. Others take a view that incorporates several facets of these areas.

In modern times, most do not speak so philosophically about faith. Faith is seen more as a vehicle for salvation among fundamentalists. Faith is independent and personal, involving the whole person — intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and even physically. There is no substitute for it. It is the driving force for each individual. It motivates and defines character. It is the conviction of one's soul, the love of one's life. Faith is what gives life true meaning. Concerning the Protestant conception of faith, Huston Smith writes that faith "is not simply a matter of belief, an acceptance of knowledge held with certainty yet not on evidence. It is a response of the entire man" (465).

### **Is Faith Blind?**

The definition of faith as being "belief without evidence" has already been noted. This is a common understanding of faith, especially among those who do not believe in God or accept the Bible; though some believers accept this idea also. "Faith," in this view, takes on a mystical atmosphere. It is based on nothing but feelings and emotions; it has no real foundation to it. Kurtz, a secular humanist, said, "Faith by itself, in opposition to reason, is irrational" (220). With this I would agree, if by this statement Kurtz uses the phrase "faith by itself" to mean "belief without evidence." Concerning many believers' apprehension of delving into

evidence, John Gibbon made the following remarks:

Ask devout Christians whether they believe that Christ died and rose again, and they will say that of course they do. Ask them for evidence, and they will be baffled by the question. It is not a matter of evidence, but of belief; asking for evidence indicates doubt, and with doubt there is no faith. (21-23)

There may be believers who feel this way, but it is not a biblical understanding; and there are many believers who see the need for a reasonable apologetic. Asking for evidence does not indicate doubt; rather, it is seeking a basis upon which to believe and act. Faith needs to have a foundation. True faith does not disregard reason and evidence. It is not applicable only where evidence and fact are missing. It is not blind; and this is where some serious misunderstandings about faith are found.

It is often supposed that reason and faith, knowledge and belief, are in some way contrary or opposed to the other. The endless controversies between science and religion, education and devotion, secular knowledge and religious belief,

are all based on this mistaken idea. (Purkiser 17)

If this “mistaken idea” could be cleared up in the minds of those who enter the discussion of faith, then perhaps the controversies will not be so endless. Faith does not require that we be eyewitnesses of everything we profess faith in, but it does presume that proper evidence exists so that faith is a legitimate response.

A couple of personal examples illustrate the point. I have complete faith (i.e., trust) in my wife. In saying this, would one automatically assume that this “faith” is without evidence? It depends upon the use of the term. I know, based upon previous evidence, that when she tells me that she will do something, it is as good as done. Even though I have not personally witnessed everything she has done, her record is such that any future action on her part warrants my faith in her. This is not “belief without evidence,” but neither is it because I have scientifically proven that she is trustworthy. I have true faith, and it is not blind. Another example: I have faith that my “mom” is really my physical mother, and that my “dad” is really my father. I have not scientifically verified this. I only have the evidence of eyewitnesses and documents. The primary eyewitnesses are my parents themselves; but I would not discredit them just because they have a stake in who I am. Who would argue, though, that my faith in them as my parents is unfounded and irrational?

These examples are analogous to my faith in God as a Christian. I believe that the evidence is such that warrants faith on my part. Many lines of reasoning are used for argumentation, and there are many ways of demonstrating evidence on behalf of God. Not everyone will believe or accept it, but that fact does not make the evidence invalid anymore than evidence for a man walking on the moon is invalid because some have refused to accept it. Through evidence, reason, and logic, faith is a legitimate response.

In the Bible, there are many examples given in which evidence is appealed to for confirmation. Jesus said that “though you do not believe Me, believe the works” that He did (John 10:37-38). Matthew 11:2-5 records that John had sent some disciples to ask Jesus if He were the “coming one.” Jesus responded, “Go and report to John the things which you hear and see.” The claims were not enough; empirical works accompanied the claims. The point is that the Bible itself gives these types of examples to show that evidence should be involved in our decisions to believe and exercise faith. No one was asking others to believe “just because,” even though there was absolutely no evidence to support the claims. If the Bible is portrayed in this way, then it is being misrepresented.

What this shows is that biblical faith is not gullibility or credulity. We are not asked to believe just anything because some nebulous character made some outrageous claims; and the ancient writers have preyed upon our wishes in

order to get us to believe in spite of evidence to the contrary. The biblical writers appealed to eyewitness testimony and historical evidence in order to produce faith in the readers. This is seen in the straight reading of the texts.

(Explaining the theological meanings based on differing philosophies is another discussion, though it has a bearing upon what one finally accepts as valid.)

Still, some may argue that there is a sense in which faith is blind. For example, the Bible says “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). It speaks of Abraham, who “by faith” went to where he was sent, “not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8). Concerning the first statement, “we walk by faith, not by sight,” the context is speaking of things that we cannot visibly see on the earth. This does not necessarily mean blindness (i.e., lack of evidence), however. If evidence exists that God is, and that he fulfills promises, then faith is not blind, for it accepts, as true, things that are not seen, based upon the reasonable evidence that can be comprehended. In Abraham’s case, he had reason to trust that God would care for him. The evidence was based upon God’s faithfulness, not in the ability to know everything that God had asked him to do. I have children who trust me. There are times when I ask them to do certain things that they do not understand. Because I am their “dad,” however, and have cared for them, they go ahead and do what they are told. Is their “faith” blind? I think not (I hope not!).

Faith, therefore, is not blindness. Faith is “rationally defensible.” It is not “irrational prejudice” (Purkiser 19). It is simple trust and dependence upon one who is considered to be faithful and trustworthy. If there are reasons for believing in and trusting God, then faith in Him is not blind, even when we do not necessarily understand all the “whys and wherefores” of God and His will.

Faith is not credulity. To be credulous is to be gullible, to be entirely uncritical, undiscerning and even unreasonable in one’s beliefs. But it is a great mistake to suppose that faith and reason are incompatible. Faith and sight are set in opposition to each other in Scripture, but not faith and reason. On the contrary, true faith is essentially reasonable because it trusts in the character and promises of God. (Stott 34).

### **Biblical Faith is Reasonable**

As opposed to being a blind faith, biblical faith is reasonable and rational. People need to know not only *what* they believe, but also *why* they believe it. Simply believing something does not make it true. Sincerity is no guarantee of truth. So faith is not wanting to believe that something is true regardless of

evidence to the contrary. True faith needs to have a reasonable foundation of evidence.

The object of faith is truth. "Faith, like knowledge, has an objective reference. If this reference is false, knowledge ceases to be knowledge, and faith ceases to be true faith" (Knudson 13). "Faith does not operate in a vacuum. Its goal or purpose is one with all man's intellectual quest, the grasp of significant truth" (Purkiser 21). Truth is objective and rational. If something is true, then it is true regardless of who believes it or rejects it. When a person accepts a belief, then he or she believes it to be true. The belief could be mistaken, but the one who believes does not think this, or else faith ceases to be genuine. "Religious faith to be truly faith must have the authentic note both of subjective sincerity and of a confident grasp of objective reality" (Knudson 14). The question is, what is truth? Philosophically, the problem here is that if there is no way to know truth, then how can there be any difference between right and wrong, truth and error? If we do not perceive that there is a real way to obtain knowledge, then there cannot be a reasonable faith by which to live. Christians accept the Bible as an objective means of knowing truth, not because they merely wish it to be so, but because they have a sincere conviction, based on evidence, that God is, and that the Bible is His communication to humanity.

Antony Flew, a prominent atheist philosopher, argued that if one's commitment of faith "is to be anything but arbitrary and

irrational there has to be some good reason, first, for making any such commitment at all and, second, for choosing any one particular commitment as opposed to any other." Further, he wrote, "Faith and Authority cannot serve as substitutes for a rational apologetic. ... Failure to produce any presentable apologetic ... amounts to a confession that there is no good reason whatsoever for believing what you believe" (159-160). He does not believe that Theism can really offer this, but I agree with the basic point that faith needs to be rationally presented. I will also add that his *atheistic faith* needs to have a similar presentation if Flew and others will be consistent with their demands. Just stating that "there is no God," for example does not mean that there is no God. Try as they may, they know it is impossible to prove such an unscientific proposition, especially since it would demand absolute knowledge of everything. Atheists, Theists, and apologists of any other worldview should seek to have a reasonable presentation of both what they believe and why they believe it. We should all be able to articulate why we accept some views and reject others as unreasonable. This also makes for better discussion.

It does not behoove people to "kiss their brains good-bye in becoming Christians" (Little 14). There should be warnings, therefore, about taking an anti-intellectual, irrational approach to faith. This is the approach that ignores all reason and does not understand the need for a reasonable and rational presentation of the

message of the Bible. True faith is not based on mere whim, whatever feels good at the moment. Such a faith is ruled almost solely by emotion. Sadly, many charismatics and fundamentalists often attribute such ideas about feelings and emotions to the work of the Holy Spirit — *something the Bible does not do*. Believers should know that we have minds that have been given to us so that we can think things out and think things through. Service to God is a reasonable service.

Many non-Christians fail to consider the gospel seriously because no one has ever presented the facts to them cogently. They associate faith with superstition based primarily on emotional considerations, and therefore they reject it (Little 17).

The Bible itself instructs believers to be ready to give an answer and reason for their hope (1 Pet. 3:15). It is

“of the utmost importance that Christians be prepared to give a reason, and an adequate reason, for the faith that is in them. ... To belittle the rational factor in religion is a grave mistake. Religion must be able to defend itself before the bar of modern

reason and conscience.”  
(Knudson 15)

For this reason, Theists should be willing to stand up and defend their position in a rational way. If they *cannot*, then they should question their own faith and try to learn why they believe what they believe. If they *will not*, then they should come to grips with their own fears. Why would anyone refuse to state sound reasons for accepting a particular point of view?

There is also a danger on the other end of the pendulum. While we stress the need for using our minds to reason things out (a God-given ability), we should also be aware of the fact that *our minds can be deceived*. If we judge truth *solely* by rational abilities, without an objective standard, then deception will occur, for our logic can be flawed. Further, even believers may find themselves rejecting certain Scriptures because the passages do not make “sense” to their preconceived notions. If proper evidence is enough to warrant the response of faith, then we should be careful not to become so dependent upon reason that we rationalize the evidence away. If we look hard enough, we can find “reasons” for rejecting just about anything because of our desires and prejudices (e.g., the Pharisees of Jesus’ day). “Reason” then becomes a misnomer for emotion, and we have come full circle back to irrational thinking.

Biblical faith is built upon evidence. This point is made in John 20; the account furnishes a good example of how faith should be

based upon evidence. After the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas, who was not present at the first appearance of Jesus, expressed doubt: “Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (vs. 25). Thomas was taking a “sight only” approach to the resurrection; he would not believe anything unless he saw it, first hand, with his own eyes. We should note, however, that his lack of prior sight did not make the resurrection false. If he had believed the other disciples, then he would have had several eyewitnesses who were credible and trustworthy.

After Jesus appeared again, Thomas believed because he saw (vv. 26-28). The following verses are important. Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (vs. 29). Jesus makes the point that belief was possible even though some had not personally seen him. What would serve as a foundational source of this faith? Verses 30-31 make the connection: “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” The works of Jesus represented empirical evidence of His identity. There were credible eyewitnesses who could testify to these things, and the historical records are given as documentation of the events. In this way, it is

reasonable to believe that Jesus was a historical character who performed these works and proved His identity. Just as one can accept the reality and feats of Alexander the Great, or the emperor Nero, one should also accept the accounts of the Christ.

It is not in vogue today to accept the Gospel accounts as historical. Liberal, non-fundamentalists believe in the historical reality of Jesus, but, in their view, the accounts of His works, resurrection, and claims were really just superimposed upon Him by later, over-zealous disciples. However, the accounts seem self-explanatory. Rejection of these accounts does not rest so much upon objective, historical grounds as much as upon philosophical and theological grounds. The point is to show that, by taking the accounts as historical documentation, it is reasonable to take the evidence and respond in faith (trust). If the evidence can be objectively shown to be inadequate or invalid, then let the critics do so. I have not been so convinced. According to the Bible, people are expected to accept Jesus on the basis of the evidence that he presented in the presence of many witnesses. If we can trust historical documentation and eyewitness testimony, then it is reasonable to accept the biblical accounts.

Hebrews 11:6 says “he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” There are two things stated here as objects of belief: God is, and God rewards those who seek Him. It is not

the design of this study to discuss evidences for the existence of God. There are many works available to deal with the subject. One example of such evidence is known as the teleological argument. It may be stated in different ways: whatever exists must have first existed in a mind; design demonstrates a designer. Arguments such as this provide a reasonable framework on which to accept the existence of God. If the Bible may be accepted as relating truth, historical or otherwise, then it is a witness to the concept that God rewards those who are doing what is right. Even non-fundamentalists would have to agree that the stories show that God rewards, in some fashion, those who do right. If this is true, then it is reasonable to respond in faith to these ideas.

### **What Kind of Evidence?**

In order to help clarify the nature of faith as it relates to evidence, we should consider the nature of evidence. First, we will distinguish between scientific and historical evidence.

#### **A. Scientific Evidence.**

Scientific evidence (in operation science) is that which is derived through the process of testing, observation, and repetition. Science is “systematized knowledge derived from observation and experiment carried on in order to determine the principles underlying

what is being studied” (Raven and Johnson 2). Its key components are testing and observation. Kurtz gives the general criteria for scientific evidence as being “data that are reproducible by independent observers and that can be examined experimentally in test cases” (245). The scientific method begins with hypotheses, which are possible answers as to why something happens the way it does. Then testing processes eliminate possibilities. After periods of observation and testing, the hypothesis that survives the tests may become a theory. While it is true that the scientific method is a sound way of determining what is factual, the method itself cannot prevent something from being true simply because it lies outside the realm of science.

Science, by its very nature, is limited. It is limited to what can be tested, repeated, and observed. If something cannot meet these criteria, then it stands outside the scientific method. For example, an historical event is outside of the realm of the scientific method. The reason for this is because an historical event is unique and cannot be repeated for testing or observation. For example, who built the pyramids of Egypt can be studied historically, but it cannot be scientifically verified in a lab. We cannot scientifically verify that Alexander the Great was such a powerful military leader, or that Nero was emperor of Rome. This does not mean that the historical events did not really happen. We accept these things because of the historical and logical evidences.

Furthermore, science cannot test abstract concepts such as justice, love, peace, kindness, faith, or goodness. It cannot make moral or value judgments, in and of itself. These things are still accepted as a part of our reality. Therefore, there are many things that are accepted as true and real, even though they cannot be tested and objectively observed in a laboratory.

What does this have to do with faith? Some suppose that faith and science contradict. This idea supposes that science is the only real way of having any knowledge, and that faith is irrational. This is a mistake. Faith and science do not contradict one another. They are in perfect harmony. In fact, it is quite possible to base certain beliefs upon scientific evidence. For example, if we recognize certain laws of nature, then these may serve to strengthen faith in the idea that there is a God. It is the law and the order of nature that makes scientific study a possibility. Law and order support a designer more than random, irrational, and disorderly events could ever do. There is nothing in the facts of science that contradict faith or God. This is important, for many believers are afraid of science. This ought not to be. Science is an honorable pursuit, and can serve as a catalyst for greater trust in more abstract ideas. There are many scientists who believe in God. Believers should welcome science. It may, in fact, enhance the believer's position, as Schlesinger argues:

I claim that the traditional theist need not recoil from examining his basic propositions by a method of inquiry which adopts the standards employed in science. On a correct understanding of the essence of scientific method, Theism does not stand to lose from such an inquiry; in fact it gains, emerging from it with enhanced credibility. (201)

Granted, one cannot scientifically prove, with mathematical certainty that God exists. Evidence from science, however, may aid in the process of showing the possibility and probability of God (e.g., design theory). If God exists, we cannot put him in under a microscope and study him in this way. "One might as well try to listen to colors or see musical tones" (Purkiser 24). Even so, some matters of science may help to serve as a solid foundation upon which to build stronger beliefs.

## **B. Historical Evidence.**

There is another kind of evidence, however, upon which faith relies. This evidence is historical and logical in nature. This is the type of evidence that is generally used in courts of law. It involves any relevant data such as eyewitnesses, written documents or various other records, structures and archaeological

finds. How do faith and history correspond to each other?

“History” can be used to refer to past events themselves, or it can refer to the account or record of the past. As touches evidence, upon which faith may stand, we are primarily concerned with the records of the past events. These records are the primary sources for developing faith. The problem we encounter is, how historical are these records?

Ronald Nash, in his *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding*, discusses the distinction of three kinds of knowledge (135-153). These are *historical knowledge*, *historic knowledge*, and *faith knowledge*. *Historical knowledge* is the knowledge derived from scientific historiography. This is the search for how things really happened, apart from any meaning or special interest. *Historic knowledge* comes when significance is attached to the historical events. Later generations cull the information from historical knowledge and decide what is significant and relevant for their personal situations. *Faith knowledge*, which is said to be inseparable from religious commitment, is supposedly the knowledge about the past that is so important that nothing greater can be conceived. That Jesus died, for example, is historical knowledge and can be investigated historically. That his death was significant is historic knowledge; but faith knowledge says, “he died for my sins.” I don’t have any particular problems with these distinctions.

The real question at issue here is, does faith knowledge have any dependence upon historical knowledge, or it is completely independent of historical reality? Here is the point at which conservative and liberal believers part company. Conservatives argue that faith knowledge is dependent upon historical knowledge. In other words, without the reality of the historical events — namely the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus — then faith becomes meaningless. This is what Paul was arguing in his first epistle to Corinth. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, “your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). If there is no historical event that may rightly be called the “resurrection,” then faith becomes founded upon nothing.

Liberal believers argue that faith can and does have meaning apart from historical knowledge. Theologians have used two German words for history: *Historie* and *Geschichte* (Nash 14). *Historie* is the sum total of historical facts which are objectively verifiable. *Geschichte* is more existential, calling upon the individual to make a commitment and attach meaning to the *historie*. Part of Bultmann’s theology was based upon the distinction of these words. The question is, can an event, or its story, be a true object of faith without it also being historical reality? One argument, in answering this in the affirmative, is to point to several stories, legends, or imaginary events that have come to have great significance and meaning for subsequent generations, even

though there is no real basis in history. This is granted. However, for the most part, these mythological, nonhistorical events that have assumed the status of *Geschichte* have done so because they were first believed to be historical. For example, I could not attach any faith knowledge to the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* because I have no reason to think that there is any basis in historical fact. If there were, what would be the significance?

From a descriptive viewpoint, people can believe all kinds of things for many reasons, whether good or bad. In this descriptive sense, people may put their faith in stories that are myths or legends. However, considered normatively, which describes what people ought to believe and the grounds for a well-formed faith, rational people know that they should not put faith in stories that are mythological. “Likewise, faith knowledge about Jesus that is knowingly not grounded on historical knowledge cannot qualify as genuine or well-formed faith” (Nash 141). I fail to see how a real faith can develop if there are no historical grounds on which to build that faith. Again, biblical faith is not a leap in the dark; it is a submissive trust that is based upon well-grounded evidence. *Faith knowledge needs to be grounded in historical knowledge.* The historical events of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, for which there is much evidence, serve as the foundation for accepting the idea that Jesus died for our sins, a concept rejected by many liberal believers. I cannot

scientifically prove these things, but the historical and logical evidence is strong enough to warrant the response of faith.

Why are people reluctant to relate faith knowledge so closely to historical knowledge? It would be easy just to toss out labels like “fundamentalists” and “liberals,” but the fact is that there are philosophical and theological presuppositions at work that are seldom acknowledged. Some are afraid that we should not subject faith to the possible falsifications of historical knowledge. This might place us at the mercy of the historians, who may repaint the picture of Jesus. This is being done today. The question is, is the reconstruction of the Jesus of history reasonable and based upon objective evidence? Do we throw out the traditional and ancient acceptance of the events surrounding Jesus for modern revisions that have even less foundation in historical fact? For example, do we throw out the resurrection, which is said to be based on eyewitness testimony, for a theory without any objective evidence, like Crossan’s, which says that Jesus was buried in a shallow grave and eaten by wild dogs? If the resurrection is non-historical, as liberal believers argue, then on what basis should I accept other theories that have no foundation in history? History may not be able to provide the certainty of a laboratory, but its methods are time-tested and trustworthy. I am willing to “bite the bullet” and live with risk (Nash 146).

Faith has an essential relationship to history. “History and faith, therefore, are closely

akin because both demand the attitude of trust before you can use them at all” (Hoover 122). Anytime we accept any historical proposition, we are doing so by faith. It is “by faith” that we accept the historical fact that George Washington was the first president of the United States. We were not there; we did not see. We put our trust in the historical process and accept the reasonable evidence. We cannot go back in a time machine to physically verify history; there is, therefore, always an element of risk about believing something to be historically true. If we insist that we must directly experience something before we can accept it, then one is hopelessly doomed to become a miserable skeptic. Even our own personal memory could not satisfy anyone. How do we know that what we experienced is what really happened? The point is that history avoids the pitfalls of rationalism. “The past cannot be experienced directly; it can be encountered only through the medium of records” (Nash 147). The acceptance of these records involves elements of risk and faith. It is this way for every historical event that is accepted as true.

History also avoids mysticism (Hoover 122). We do not view historical events as totally subjective. We trust that there was a real event that took place in the past corresponding with our knowledge. From that point, we accept that this event is open to investigation by all interested parties. Granted, the meaning that we attach to the events go beyond the simple historical facts. Still, these meanings are

grounded in the acceptance of the historical knowledge. In this way, then, faith and history are interdependent. “Without historical knowledge, the kind of faith described in the New Testament cannot exist. But without faith, there cannot be historical knowledge. Faith is a necessary precondition for historical knowledge” (Nash 148). I might add that this statement is true regarding any historical knowledge. Without some exercise of trust in the process of recovering the events of the past, we could not accept anything in history.

Paul’s arguments of 1 Corinthians 15 clearly tie faith to the historical validity of Jesus’ death and resurrection. If we can trust eyewitness accounts, historical records, and ancient writings, then we have sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. We attach the meanings to the events, and trust that we are making the correct decisions. In reality, this is the way that we all operate on a day to day level, regardless of one’s particular beliefs or practices. For example, when I fell in love with the woman who would become my wife, we both recounted, over much time, our own personal histories. We trusted that we were telling the truth, and we based our commitment to each other on, not only who we had been, but also who we believed we could become. This is faith, but it was based on solid evidence. If we let ourselves, we could degenerate into a blob of skepticism and fear, but that would be unreasonable. As a Christian, I accept the same

attitude of faith toward what I believe and practice.

### **C. Logical Evidence.**

By logical evidence, I refer to the reasonable conclusions that may be drawn based upon sound logic. Evidence is interpreted inductively. We take specific pieces of evidence and, based upon that, draw generalized conclusions. This is known as an “inductive leap.” By inductive leaps, we reach logical and reasonable conclusions about many things in life. The use of inductive reasoning in the field of science is what we call the scientific method. Enough specific samplings of experiments are done so that general conclusions are reached. For example, enough samplings of test cases may equate high fat diets with coronary disease. All persons with coronary disease cannot be tested, but a sufficient sampling may lead to the general conclusion. When that general conclusion is reached, however, there is an element of faith that is being exercised by those who make the conclusions. They trust that their conclusions are right based on the available evidence.

Anytime we make inductive leaps, we are invoking some kind of faith, for inductive arguments cannot produce mathematical certainty. They can only produce possible, probable, and perhaps believable conclusions. The evidence is sufficient, however, to warrant the conclusion. This is only logical. Now the

question is, how safe are we in reaching these conclusions? This depends upon the quality and quantity of the evidence. Christians argue that there is sufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that God exists. This does not necessarily have to be proved by one argument by itself; a series of arguments can be employed (e.g., teleological, cosmological, Christological, etc.) that independently argue for the existence of God. Together, they can make a strong case. Faith in Jesus may be based upon the historical evidences that touch upon the person of Jesus and the credibility of the biblical documents. There are many lines of reasoning, and together they can form a substantive case. The point of all of this is to argue that faith relies upon logic and reason. That is why real faith is reasonable. Believers have no desire to be irrational or illogical. Faith can be reasonably represented.

Along these lines, it is also possible to make a deductive argument for the existence of God. The argument may be put in syllogistic form as follows (Chumbley 6):

1. If God has been seen, then God is.
2. God has been seen in the person of Jesus Christ.
3. Therefore, God is.

This argument, of course, hinges upon the proof of the minor premise. The proof of this premise is then based upon several lines of evidence that must be investigated. The argument is valid, regardless of the conclusion

one makes about its truthfulness (i.e., an argument can be validly stated and not true). Again, logic is not foreign to believers.

Whereas isolated evidence may be strong or weak depending upon its qualifications and acceptance by listeners, reasoning ties data and ideas together to formulate conclusions. Further, evidence and reasoning are combined by the effective advocate to constitute proof offered as justification for making a particular choice. (Keefe, Harte, and Norton 139)

The conclusions that we trust based upon reasoning from the evidence are accepted by faith. We justify our choices in life by faith; and that goes for the religious and non-religious. We pull the evidence together by reason, draw conclusions, and justify choices. That is faith at work. If no choices existed, then “faith” would not have much meaning.

### **Models of Faith**

Nash discusses three separate models, or analogies, of faith in order to show that faith and history are interdependent (150-152). First, faith is compared to the physical act of leaning or resting. There is a surrender of commitment

by the act of putting all of one’s weight on a support. For example, if I sit down on a chair, I am committing myself to this act; and I trust that the chair will support my weight. There is a sense in which faith is being exercised by the action. How do I know it won’t break? If I did not believe that the chair would hold my weight, then would I be considered very rational for committing my weight to it? This model illustrates how faith should have something objective to support it. This kind of support is provided by historical knowledge.

Second, faith may also be compared to walking a tightrope. It is like a balancing act. Hoover suggests that faith and history “create a subtle balance between knowledge and hope, a beneficent tension between reason and will, analysis and choice, head and heart...” (123). Balance is vital to success. Depending upon cultural considerations, it may be necessary to stress one side more than another. Kierkegaard’s culture, for example, was so strongly leaning toward rationalism, that he seemed so extreme toward subjectivism. In this postmodern age, the tilt toward irrationalism and subjectivism appears so strong that it seems justified to tilt back toward rational explanations of faith. Faith is a proper balance between rationalism on the one hand and irrational subjectivism on the other. Falling too far to either side is a serious danger, and believers need to avoid that.

Third, there is a sense in which faith may be said to be a “leap,” in which faith looks beyond the available evidence. If we did not do

this, then we would not go very far in life at all. Most of the things we accept are because we are willing to look a little beyond the evidence, all the while coming back to the solid ground that evidence provides. For example, Hume asked, how do we know that the future will be anything like the past? How do we know that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow? Just because it has in the past is not a certain guarantee that it will in the future. We assume, based on our observations of the laws of nature, that things in nature will continue to act in a regular way. The ground for this confidence is based on evidence, but the idea that the future will be like the past is part of our faith. It is a leap based on the evidence available to us. Evidence is only available to us now, giving us indications of what has happened up to this point. It is reasonable to believe, then, that tomorrow will be much like today; but the evidence for tomorrow does not yet exist. Biblical faith requires a similar kind of leap.

The mistake that is made is in thinking that this religious “leap” is “in the dark.” One can leap without being blind. Biblical faith requires a solid point from which to leap. It is not a blind leap. This point is expressed well in the following:

We must never get very far from our evidence, from our objective ground of support. We have to keep coming back to something solid. History

provides the kind of solid support required by the man or woman of faith.

If faith is a leap, then there must be something solid to support that leap. There must always be grounds or reasons or evidence to support the faith initially. (Nash 152)

### **What Faith Does Not Require**

It has been noted that faith involves some understanding of what a person claims to believe in. A believer in God needs to have some concept of who God is. Some make the mistake, however, of criticizing faith by demanding that a believer tell everything there is to know about God. If one cannot explain everything, then this person’s faith is criticized as being unfounded and superstitious. However, faith does not require that a person have a complete and perfect understanding of the object of faith. One can make a reasonable case for believing in God without being able to explain all of the attributes and actions of God. I have faith in my wife, but far be it from me to say that I fully understand her as a woman. I’m afraid my understanding of women is not very adequate. Even so, I still put my faith in her as my spouse.

The Bible is not a comprehensive picture of all that is involved in deity. There is

much about God that we cannot know or understand, as the Bible indicates (Rom. 11:33-34; Isa. 55:8-9). This does not mean, however, that we cannot put our faith in him and trust that He will care for us. I do not know much about the workings of a computer, but that does not stop me from using it.

Further, faith does not require that we understand *why* God has done everything that is attributed to Him. We may properly act upon the premise that “God is” and that “He rewards those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6), without our knowing and explaining all the reasons why God has done what He has done. If we have sufficient reasons to accept that “God is,” then we have a sufficient reason to act in accordance with this belief. Faith does not require absolute understanding and total knowledge.

### **Faith Has Consequences**

By saying that faith has consequences, I mean that faith does not exist in a vacuum. It affects a person’s life through and through.

Someone has said that faith is not “believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence.” . . . Faith is not some kind of nebulous feeling that we work up; faith is confidence that God’s Word is true, and conviction that acting

upon that Word will bring His blessing. (Weirsbe 75).

The second chapter in the book of James gives a good overview of various kinds of “faith” that may exist (Weirsbe 76-80). It demonstrates that biblical faith is a faith that demands action, regardless of the consequences. First, it speaks of “dead faith.” This is a faith that produces no works. It is a faith that is all talk, but there is no action to accompany it. Therefore, it is worthless. It is a faith that is intellectual only, but has no effect on the heart. “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (James 2:17).

James also speaks of what may be called “demonic faith”: “the demons also believe, and shudder.” This is a faith that is both intellectual and emotional. It touches the heart, in some way, but it still does not produce the actions that are consistent with genuine faith. There are people who have a particular faith, and even get very emotional about it when challenged, but they still do not live up to what they profess to believe. “Faith without works is useless.”

“Dynamic faith” is faith that is intellectually satisfying, touches the heart, and brings about a changed life. It produces works and actions that are consistent with what is professed. Biblical faith goes hand in hand with action. It has the consequence of causing people to do whatever is necessary to be consistent with their profession. It is dynamic because it is active.

Biblical faith, then, has these three elements:

1. *It is intellectually satisfying.* I have been arguing throughout that faith should be reasonable. It must appeal to the intellect. It is not something that a person merely wishes to be true, but knows otherwise. It satisfies the intellectual need for reason and logic.

2. *It is emotionally satisfying.* Emotions should not rule the intellect or the will. However, we are creatures of emotions, and a faith that does not touch the heart is not worth very much. Emotion without intellect is unreasonable, for it acts upon mere wishes, regardless of evidence and reason. On the other hand, intellect without emotion is dry and dissatisfactory. Our heads and our hearts need satisfaction.

3. *It prevails upon the will.* As pointed out, it is possible to have an intellectual and emotional faith without causing action on the part of the believer. Biblical faith, however, also touches the will. If it does not, then it is still a faith that is not valuable on a practical level.

The three elements of *intellect*, *emotion*, and *will* are present in every worldview that shapes a person's life. It is true of Christianity, but it is also true of humanism, atheism, and any other "ism" by which a person lives. We all believe that we have solid, intellectual reasons for believing what we believe. Our emotions can easily get caught up in our worldviews, politically and religiously. Our wills determine our actions; and these will generally be

consistent with the depth of our convictions on any given matter. True faith, then, has real consequences for a person's life. It is our "glasses" through which we view the world.

### Conclusion

This study has argued that true faith is basic trust that results in action. It does not contradict reason or science, but does, in fact, coincide with these disciplines. Biblical faith is a reasonable faith because it is to be based upon proper reason and evidence. It is not blind, but it rests on a solid, objective ground. Though faith sometimes involves a "leap," the leap is not "in the dark," and it always should come back to the solid ground of evidence. Biblical faith is not blindness.

Faith involves the intellectual part of a person. It must be satisfying for the mind. Thus, reason is an integral part of faith. Faith must also satisfy the emotional needs of the person. Emotion should not be the ruling factor of life, but it should be a response to the intellectual understanding. Further, faith should involve the will. The convicted person will act in accordance with what the head and heart accept. Without these characteristics, faith becomes a shallow philosophy.

Faith is a choice. We choose to accept particular worldviews as valid, and we choose to reject others as unreasonable. Faith is something that every person exercises to one degree or another. Every worldview is accepted upon

some sort of faith. It is not exclusive to the Bible or to Christians.

In the truest sense, faith is trust. In discussions of faith, then, we should refrain from unreasonable definitions and unfair accusations. In this way, a better understanding of faith and worldviews will prevail.

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