

Faith and Reason
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Recently, I was discussing the evidences for God's existence and the Resurrection of Jesus with a Christian college student. In response to my apologetic approach, he asked if I provided this many evidences, where was room for faith? A recent visiting speaker to our church mentioned that she had taken theology and apologetics classes, but she "wasn't good at all this stuff." She then appealed to I Corinthians 1-2 as a reason why we do not need to come with wisdom, but instead our testimonies.¹ To top off my experiences, in a Christian essentials course book, the word "faith" was defined as "blind trust or belief; choosing to believe something without having tangible proof."² I do not mean to pick on these individuals or the book, but this anti-intellectual view pervades the Church. Faith and evidence (reason) are placed in opposition to one another. This is closely related to what counts as knowledge (e.g. spiritual knowledge) and ultimately our view of truth.

To be fair, this development is not the result of something new, but rather has been brewing for a few centuries and we are now reaping the consequences. Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and David Hume (1711-1776) altered our confidence in spiritual knowledge. Hume claimed that since we cannot experience God with the five senses (empiricism), the proposition that God exists cannot be taken as an item of knowledge. Kant also limited human knowledge to the five senses, which placed God outside of reason.³ Both of these philosophers have had lasting effects on both Europe and America. By the time we reached the 20th century, prominent theologian Rudolph Bultmann considered rational evidence not only irrelevant, but actually contrary to faith.⁴

Faith is now understood as a blind act of the will, while ignoring the evidence, i.e. you have to "check your brain at the door to the church." I will argue in this paper that biblical faith

is much different than this. Next, I will provide biblical evidence that faith and reason are not opposed. Third, knowledge, belief, truth and justification will be examined to understand their relationship. Last, the role of the mind will be shown to be important for spiritual transformation particularly for increasing one's faith.

First, what is faith? My assertion is that biblical faith is the "power or skill to act with the nature of the Kingdom of God."⁵ Faith is built upon reason. The writer of Hebrews is accurate when he says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). But most confuse something we cannot see (cf. Kant and Hume) with a blind leap of faith, rather than faith in the knowledge of the person of God, which is based upon reason (i.e. it is rational). Faith is trust (in something or someone) that we have reason to believe is true. I will continue to fill out this definition as the paper continues.

As a foundation, the Bible reveals God as a God of reason and revelation.⁶ One of God's characteristics is omniscience and as such he has perfect knowledge (including both actual and possible, cf. I Samuel 23:11-13, Job 37:16, I John 3:20). The Scriptures call him "the only wise God" (Romans 16:27) who cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and who is completely reliable (Romans 3:4, Hebrews 6:18). His word is true (John 17:17) and the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). Paul emphasized while preaching the gospel, that his words were true and rational (Acts 26:25). Since we are created in God's image, it follows that we are expected to use reason as well. Peter reminds us to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (I Peter 3:15). Biblical faith is not separated from reason, but rather is supported by it.

Since God is rational, when God chose to reveal himself to mankind through the Bible, he meant to disclose to us knowledge. This knowledge comes in the form of understandable,

objective true propositions. This means the Bible is a source of knowledge. Not only is God truth and his word is truth (John 17:17), but he has revealed other truths.

Many use the terms “believe” and “faith” interchangeably, and in the Bible, both words are derived from the same root word. Ancient Christians recognized that they are not always the same, so they used the words *notia*, *assensus* and *fiducia* to describe the differences.⁷ These words mean knowledge, assent and trust.

First, there are three different types of knowledge (*notia*).⁸ The first is *knowledge by acquaintance*. This is simple “seeing” – or being directly aware of something. This type of knowledge does not require the ability to think. A small child can have knowledge without thinking, such as seeing the color “red.” This is how we recognize places we have been to before, or know our friends. The second form of knowledge is *propositional knowledge* or knowledge of facts. This knowledge is true belief based upon adequate reasons. It requires having concepts before the mind that you judge to be accurate or true. It requires thinking or an interpretation of the mind and can be characterized as “seeing as,” or “knowing that.”

“Know how” knowledge is the third type of knowledge - also called skill knowledge. Examples would include riding a bike or playing an instrument. Christianity involves all three types of knowledge. Koukl explains, “There are certain facts or truths (know that) that when believed properly lead us into a personal relationship with God (know who), after which we grow in personal skill at living called ‘sanctification’ (know how).”⁹ *Propositional knowledge* is essential to Christianity (and my focus) as you cannot even begin a relationship with God without knowing key facts, such as who he is, what reality is, how we ought to live and how to fix it when we don’t live the way we ought to (cf. John 17:3). Assent (*assensus*) to propositional

knowledge, however, is not sufficient for Christian faith as it involves more than just statements of fact.

To actually say that you “know” something involves belief. It would be hard to maintain that I know my truck is silver without believing it to be silver. All the facts that you know are facts that you believe as well. A belief is a kind of thought about something that you hold in a certain way. For instance, the belief that my truck is silver is believing something about my truck. The content of this belief is that the truck is a certain color (silver in this case). When you believe something, you are actually saying that what you believe is true.

This is important for Christianity because the tendency for moral and religious beliefs is to discount the truth of the matter, i.e. we say that we believe something, but we deny that what we are saying is true.¹⁰ It is odd to have something that you hold to be true, but yet renounce that you believe it to be true. This is the influence of our culture that limits knowledge to only empirical (or scientific) sources. To be sure, you may not *know* something is true, but your belief is that it is true; otherwise you would believe something else. Also note that you can believe something, but not have knowledge. Simply believing something will not make it correct. Having knowledge requires the truth of the belief.

The term “truth” has been the source of much confusion in our culture lately. Historically, truth is what corresponds to reality.¹¹ What makes a proposition true is when what it asserts happens to be the case. This viewpoint is the common sense position and does not require a degree in philosophy to understand. Aristotle put it this way, “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”¹² The Bible clearly presumes this view of truth (cf. Psalms 119:160, Proverbs 8:7, John 16:7, Romans 9:1, I Timothy 2:3-4). Our belief in something does not make it the

truth, but rather facts are what make a proposition true. But what gives us our confidence that our belief actually gives us knowledge (i.e. that it is true)? We turn now to justification for the answer.

Justification is the concept that provides our belief with the assuredness of its truth. People believe things for reasons, which provide the warrant for their belief. Without these reasons, you do not have knowledge, although you could get lucky in your belief. Guessing is not knowledge. If a belief is justified, then we have the right to believe it or ought to believe it or it is the rational thing to believe. A critical factor for this concept is that justification comes *in degrees*. The typical “straw man” argument against this view is to assert that since you cannot know something with 100% certainty, you cannot obtain the truth (or knowledge). Cartesian certainty is not necessary in order to have knowledge. As our evidence grows, our confidence increases. We might describe our belief as probable once our certainty reaches 51%, and as the justification increases, our belief becomes more confident. A skeptic may respond that without absolute certainty you could be wrong. Surely it is possible you could be wrong. But in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, just because I could be mistaken, does not mean that it is reasonable to think that I am mistaken. It seems self-evident that our goal in life is to know as many true things as we can while at the same time avoiding as many untruths as possible. Justification assures us of this by providing the foundation for a belief, which in turn gives us knowledge.

This brief journey into epistemology was done in order to show the relationship between faith, belief and truth. Christianity requires faith, faith requires belief, and belief requires truth.¹³ I have mentioned two of the three essential elements of biblical faith (*notia* and *assensus*), but the third is also required – *fiducia* or trust. This is not just a mere belief that you hold to be true,

but rather a trust that is characterized as knowledge in action. If you have this sort of faith, you are ready to act as if it were true. Notice how Paul incorporates all three of these elements in his letter to the Romans, “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This biblical faith involves knowledge (Jesus’ nature and the Resurrection) that you assent to - but more than that involves faith that the individual enters into.

It should be noted that faith alone does not save, because what you have faith in must be true. I can have all the faith in the world that a hypodermic needle I inject myself with has the cure to an ailment, but this faith is worthless if the needle is full of saline. Biblical faith is accurate knowledge combined with active trust.¹⁴ Faith and knowledge are not opposed to each other. Instead, faith is a kind of knowledge of the spiritual and immaterial realm. Although faith is opposed to sight in the Bible, it isn’t to knowledge. We should be willing to die for knowledge (justified true belief), as the prophet Hosea was reminded that “my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:9).

The last item to address is the role of the mind for spiritual formation as related to faith. An important passage for this topic is Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We must present our whole body including our soul and mind, to God for transformation and renewal. The Christian understanding of a person consists of a unity of two distinct substances – a body and a soul. Moreover, I *am* my soul and I *have* a body.¹⁵ The soul has thousands of capacities which can be developed, some of which are not currently being utilized. The mind is

one of these capacities that reasons and thinks (Romans 14:5, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:2).¹⁶ Moreland describes the mind as the “faculty of the soul that contains thoughts and beliefs along with the relevant abilities to have such things. It is with my mind that I think, and my mind contains my beliefs.”¹⁷

These beliefs are how we run our lives, i.e. the way we act matches our beliefs most of the time.¹⁸ First, the content of our belief (e.g. about Jesus, morality, life after death) will shape our lives and actions. As mentioned previously, sincerity of the belief is not what counts, but rather whether the belief is true. Second, the strength of the belief is determined by how convinced you are that it is true. The more evidence or justification you have for the belief, the more certain you are of it, and the more it becomes part of your soul. Third, the more central the belief is to your worldview, the greater the impact it will have on your entire set of beliefs. All three of these (content, strength and centrality) contribute heavily in determining a person’s character and behavior.

Scripture holds us responsible for our beliefs, but upon examination it is apparent that we cannot choose our beliefs directly.¹⁹ No matter how hard I try, I cannot make myself believe that there is a pink elephant in the room right now. I do not have direct free will over my beliefs, i.e. I can’t make myself believe something. I also cannot just tell people what to believe or exhort them to believe it.

But if I don’t have free will over my beliefs, how can the Bible hold me responsible for them? The answer lies in the fact that I do have responsibility as to where I choose to focus my mind. I have free choice in body movements and where to place my attention (what you choose to think about). I have to choose to be preoccupied with something to change my belief or increase my certainty in that belief (philosophers call this *Indirect Doxastic Voluntarism*).²⁰ I

can start asking questions or researching it (reading, discussing with others). This brings us back to biblical faith. *If you want your faith to grow, you must expose yourself to gain more knowledge.* So although I cannot directly change my beliefs or their strengths, I can indirectly affect them by choosing to investigate or place before the mind evidence for them. This might be a course of study, meditation, or reflection which will help change the content, strength or centrality of a belief. This *renewing of your mind* should be a regular part of spiritual formation.

I began this paper with some examples of anti-intellectualism that is infused in the Church. Faith in the modern sense now means a choice to believe something in the absence of evidence or knowledge. This idea has faith covering the difference between the evidence. Rather, faith in the biblical sense means trust or confidence - confident in what we know to be true. Next, I demonstrated that the Bible reveals God as a God of reason and as image bearers of him, we are expected to use reason as well (I Peter 3:15). I then provided a brief epistemology lesson to define knowledge, belief, truth and justification and to demonstrate the relationship between them. An important point is that we do not have to be 100% certain in a belief for it to count as knowledge.²¹ I further defined biblical faith as consisting of not only knowledge (*notia*) and assent (*assensus*) to certain propositions, but also active trust (*fiducia*) in that belief. Trusting faith alone does not save, but instead what is trusted must be true.

Last, the role of the mind was shown to have a vital role in faith as it is the faculty that reasons and thinks. By choosing to focus your mind with the intention of gaining knowledge, you can increase your faith. Faith grows the more you know of the object. Faith is also an expression of trust that you have from knowledge. Faith is not opposed to reason or knowledge, but rather faith is built upon both. The faith Jesus had was not an absence of knowledge, but was

based upon an intimate knowledge of his Father. We too can gain knowledge to make our faith richer.²²

¹ The sermon overall was a great message about being a testimony, but she seemed to prioritize our witness above reasons for Christianity. Rather than an either/or, a both/and approach would be more appropriate. Paul in this passage (I Corinthians 1-2) is not speaking against reason, but instead a prideful use of reason. Otherwise this passage would contradict Paul's practices in Acts as well in this same epistle where he argues and gives evidence for the Resurrection (I Corinthians 15).

² Brad Carr, Bruce Reed, Bruce Miler and the Discovery Teaching Team, *Discovering How to Share Your Faith* (Richardson, Texas: Center for Church Based Training, 1996), 7.11.

³ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress, 1997), 22-5.

⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984), 25.

⁵ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-5.

⁷ Information for this section from Gregory Koukl, "Truth Is a Strange Sort of Fiction Part II: Belief & Faith," *Solid Ground* (November/December 2006): 2.

⁸ Lecture by J.P. Moreland at Biola University, October 26, 2006.

⁹ Gregory Koukl, "No Title," *Solid Ground* (September/October 2006): 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ I do not have the space to justify this viewpoint, but would refer the reader to Part II in Moreland and Craig's book, *Philosophical Foundations For a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹² *Metaphysics* 1011b25.

¹³ Gregory Koukl, "Truth Is a Strange Sort of Fiction Part II: Belief & Faith," *Solid Ground* (November/December 2006): 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, 68.

¹⁶ Due to space limitations, I am unable to go into a full metaphysics lesson, but would refer the reader to chapter 3 in J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸ Points take from J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, 73-75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰ Lecture by J.P. Moreland at Biola University, October 26, 2006.

²¹ This has huge implications to those that express doubt, as this is normal. One can work on their doubt indirectly by choosing to bring before the mind information that will build up justification for their beliefs.

²² Points contained in Lecture by J.P. Moreland at Biola University, October 26, 2006.