

## **Some Baseline Thoughts on Faith and Belief**

A belief is not true because it is useful. Henri Frederic Amiel.

If 50 million people believe a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing. Anatole France.

It is proof of a base and low mind for one to wish to think with the masses or majority, merely because the majority is the majority. Truth does not change because it is, or is not, believed by a majority of the people. Giordano Bruno (burned at the stake in 1600 because he did not agree with the majority).

Violence is the argument of falsehood; and to impose a creed by authority is the act and indication of a tyrant. Constantin Francois de Volney.

We do not speak of faith that two and two are four or that the earth is round. We only speak of faith when we wish to substitute emotion for evidence. Bertrand Russell.

Nothing, therefore, can be more derogatory to the Bible than the assertion that its doctrines are contrary to reason. The assumption that reason and faith are incompatible; that we must become irrational in order to become believers is, however it may be intended, the language of infidelity; for faith in the irrational is of necessity itself irrational....We can believe only what we know, i.e., what we intelligently apprehend... Faith involves assent, and assent is conviction produced by evidence, it follows that faith without evidence is either irrational or impossible... God requires nothing irrational of his creatures. He does not require faith without evidence. Charles Hodge.

Faith is not “the intention to believe what you want to believe in the face of evidence to the contrary” or “the power of believing what we know to be untrue.” ...When we exhort people to Faith as a virtue, to the settled intention of continuing to believe certain things, we are not exhorting them to fight against reason. C.S. Lewis.

Faith is the gift of God: but it does not in the least follow that the faith God gives is an irrational faith, that is, a faith without grounds in right reason....The Holy Spirit does not work a blind, an ungrounded faith in the heart....nor yet new grounds of belief in the object presented; but just a new ability of the heart to respond to the grounds of faith, sufficient in themselves, already present to the understanding. We believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in Him, not though it be irrational....We are arguing that faith is, in all its exercises alike [religious or secular], a form of conviction, and is, therefore, necessarily grounded in evidence. And we are arguing that evidence accordingly has its part to play in the conversion of the soul. B.B. Warfield

A man cannot acquiesce to the truth of the Gospel apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit. But, a man cannot acquiesce to that which he either does not know or believe to be true. It is thus an illegitimate separation of faith into either a “mind or heart,” “faith or reason” dichotomy. Biblically understood, faith and reason are intimately, completely and inseparably involved in one another. Thus, true biblical saving faith is not synonymous with credulity or having “blind faith.” Kim Riddlebarger

Most men would kill the truth if truth would kill their religion. Lemuel K. Washburn.

Faith is powerful enough to immunize people against all appeals to pity, to forgiveness, to decent human feelings. It even immunizes them against fear, if they honestly believe that a martyr's death will send them straight to heaven. What a weapon! Religious faith deserves a chapter to itself in the annals of war technology, on an even footing with the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the hydrogen bomb.... Faith... leads people to believe in whatever it is so strongly that in extreme cases they are prepared to kill and to die for it without the need for further justification. Richard Dawkins.

With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil—that takes religion. Steven Weinberg.

**Christian faith with its Biblical base should have rejected such unreasoning thoughts long ago.** “Come let us reason together,” God invites (Isaiah 1:18), in context of His rejection of meaningless worship and faith. God dismisses faith without thought. “Let us argue the matter,” He says, (Isaiah 43:26), wanting people to “know, believe, and understand.” (Isaiah 43:10 NIV).

“Should a wise man utter vain knowledge? Should he reason with unprofitable talk?” asks Job (Job 15:2-3). “I desire to reason with God,” he concludes (Job 13:3).

Similarly the wise man writes in Proverbs, “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.... The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.” (Proverbs 14:15, 18 NIV).

In summarizing the commandments, Jesus himself pointed to the use of the mind as essential in commitment to God: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37 NIV).

And on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appealed to evidence and reason as he spoke with the disappointed disciples, choosing not to reveal himself so that truth would not be confirmed by his personal endorsement or by appeal to divine authority (see Luke 24:13ff.)

Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of those who demanded unthinking obedience to human traditions. He appealed to thought and investigation, saying, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this,” (Mark 7:14 NIV), as he explained his reasoning.

The use of the mind is clearly encouraged by early Christians. Paul writes “I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind,” (1 Corinthians 14:15 NIV), while Peter advises “Prepare your minds for action,” (1 Peter 1:13).

The command is: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” (1 Thessalonians 5:21), for “God is not the author of confusion.” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Faith is defined (Hebrews 11:1) as “the substance of things not seen,” not as denying the senses or the use of the mind, but based on higher principles and revelation.

The requirement is to use the mind, to thoughtfully explain, to aim to understand: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

Ellen White concurs:

“...Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.’ Here is a test which all may apply if they will. None need be left in uncertainty and doubt. There is always sufficient evidence upon which to base an intelligent faith. But God will never remove from any man all occasion for doubts.” *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1886.

“He [God] gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence.... God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe.” *Testimonies*, Volume 5, p. 675. “God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His Word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant.” *Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

“The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is an intelligent faith.... Christ would have His followers use their intellect in spiritual matters as in business transactions, conscientiously weighing evidence irrespective of results. He desires them to think deeply.” *Signs of the Times*, July 28, 1898.

“Faith rests not on certainty, but upon evidence. Demonstration is not faith.” *Manuscript Releases*, Volume Sixteen, p. 112.

“You should walk by faith, not by feeling. We do not want a sensational religion; but we want a religion founded on intelligent faith.” *Review and Herald*, April 9, 1889.

“We may have an intelligent faith; we may not only say we believe, but we may in meekness and confidence be able to define what we believe, and why we believe as we do. We should exercise living faith, not a blind credulity.” *Signs of the Times*, March 31, 1890.

“The Lord does not want us to have a blind credulity, and call that the faith that sanctifies.” *Selected Messages*, Volume 2, p. 56

“In order to exercise intelligent faith we should study the word of God. The Bible, and the Bible alone, communicates a correct knowledge of the character of God and his will concerning us.” *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1888.

“We want that intelligent faith that has the word of God as its foundation, that leads in the path of righteousness, and makes every step a step Heavenward.” *Signs of the Times*, February 10, 1888.

“The Lord positively enjoins upon every believer the study of his word, that he may have an intelligent faith, built upon the knowledge of the word of truth.” *Medical Missionary*, May 1, 1892.

“It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example.” *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 4, p. 416.

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