

REASON AND FAITH

HOW DO WE KNOW that Christianity is true? Some suggest that reason alone provides what is necessary for belief. If you cannot see it or touch it, it should not be believed, for the only truths worthy of belief are those that the senses can test or examine. Others argue that faith alone, absent all rational inquiry, is the basis of Christian belief. If you have reasons for your faith, then it is no longer faith, for faith is certainty of those things that are not seen. Reason says follow the evidence; faith says simply believe. How can we reconcile what appears to be very opposing positions?

REASON AND FAITH DEFINED

People can know about God by His general revelations and special revelations. *General revelation* speaks of those things revealed by God in the natural world that can be known by reason, while *special revelation* are those things revealed by God in His Word that can be known by faith.

What is Reason?

Reason is the ability to think. It is the God-given facility, power, or instrument by which we can understand the world, make proper judgments, and discover truth. Physics, logic, philosophy, and mathematics are all examples of disciplines that use reason to aid us in finding or discovering truth.

There are many things God has revealed to man by virtue of human reason. One of the things we learn about God is that He exists. The psalmist declares that “the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the works of his hands” (Psalms 19:1). God’s glory is seen by all people as the heavens bear witness of his righteousness (Psalm 97:6). In other words, the psalmist declares that by examining the world around

us, we can discover that God exists. For it can be reasoned that everything that has a beginning has a cause. The universe had a beginning; therefore, the universe had a cause (God).

Human reason not only helps us know that God exists, but it also helps us learn what God is like. Paul declares that even the unbeliever knows and stands guilty before God, “since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:18-20). Our arguments for the nature of truth, the reliability of the Bible, and the existence of God are all demonstratable by reason.

However, human reason is not without its limits. Reason can demonstrate that God exists or that the Bible is historically reliable, but it cannot convert the soul.

What is Faith?

Faith is not the excuse for our ignorance. Faith is not blind. We are not called to believe just because we need to believe. This view is called fideisms. Fideism is the view that no rational proof is necessary for belief. Personal commitment, not reason, is all that is necessary for truth. In short, fideists place their faith in faith itself.

Fideism, however, fails as an adequate test for truth. First, fideism as a worldview offers no test for truth.. It is simply an unsubstantiated belief. Second, to simply believe something will never actually make that belief true. Third, some people have contradictory beliefs, but two contradictory points cannot both be true. Hence, by belief alone, no truth can be established. There are many claims that are mutually exclusive, but

mutually exclusive claims cannot all be true. If it is true that Jesus rose from the grave, then it is not true that Jesus did not rise from the grave. Both views can be believed, but both views cannot be true in the same way at the same time. Fourth, either fideists are making a truth claim or they are not. The best question to ask a fideist is why he believes a given view. If the fideist attempts to provide you with reasons for his beliefs, then he is not a truly consistent fideist.

THE ACT OF FAITH

The act of faith involves the whole person. It is a personal commitment and trust in someone or something. Thomas and Richard Howe summarize several aspects in the acts of faith: These include emotional, intellectual, and volitional assent.

The emotional aspect of faith involves the feeling of assurance, trust or confidence in a person. It is not merely wishful thinking. The intellectual aspect of faith is belief. It is when at times our emotions fail us. The volitional aspect of faith involves the will. It is when we live out our convictions on the basis of our beliefs. This is also characterized in the Bible as faithfulness. We must stay faithful to that which we believe, even when at times our mind and emotions try to sway us otherwise.

The Subject of Faith

The subjects of faith are those things that are being believed. For the Christians, these are truths that God has revealed by special revelation, through the Bible and through his Son, Jesus Christ. Special revelation speaks of those things revealed by God which are known by faith. They are truths about God, such as original sin, salvation, redemption, the Trinity, and the incarnation, that cannot be known or discovered by reason.

The Object of Faith

Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. We must place my faith in the proper object, and the proper object of our faith is God. The writer of Hebrews tells us that “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. He is called the Word, the Truth, and the Light of the world. His words were carefully recorded and have been preserved through the ages in the Scriptures.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REASON AND FAITH

Reason Without Faith

Reason alone is insufficient for several reasons. First, the Bible teaches us that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Second, reason alone cannot produce faith. Reason can show us *that* God exist, but it cannot produce faith. This is because faith involves the will, and reason cannot force the will to believe. Third, there are some truths that cannot be known by reason. They are simply beyond reason’s ability to understand. Therefore, faith completes reason in that it provides the truths that are necessary for salvation, for it is “by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Faith Without Reason

If someone claims to have faith without reason, would he not have an unreasonable faith? While reason does not produce faith, it does support faith. If we have

faith without reason, then how do we know the object of our trust? Even the Bible teaches us that we must examine all things carefully and hold firmly to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus taught that the greatest commandment in the law is that we should love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:36-37).

Reason and Faith

The best way to understand the relationship between reason and faith is to see each in its proper role. First, we must realize that because God is the author of both reason and faith, there need be no disagreement or contradiction between them. Reason and faith are two distinct ways of knowing truth about God. Both reason and faith cooperate in bringing a person to Christ. Faith goes beyond reason, but is not contrary to it. Second, both reason and faith are important. Reason is given to us by God. It is one of the ways that we reflect His image. Therefore, it should not be overlooked or undermined. Faith is also given to us by God.

The Place of Reason in Faith

Faith uses reason. Because faith and trust require an object in which to be committed, one must inquire into the things that are to be believed before they can be believed. In this case, faith uses reason in the first act of knowing those things that are to be believed.

Reason supports faith. While reason is not sufficient to produce faith, it does support it. For example, reason can be used to help remove barriers of unbelief. The Bible exhorts us to “be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15). It is by reason that we can discover

truths about the existence of God, the historicity of Jesus, and the reliability of the Scriptures.

Reason can also be used to show the faith is reasonable. While by faith we believe things that go beyond reason, that does not make them unreasonable. For example, the Bible teaches that God is triune. This expresses the idea that within the one nature of God, there are three co-equal persons--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While the Trinity is believed by faith in the authority of the Scriptures, it goes beyond our reason to fully grasp. However, by the aid of reason, we can understand that not everything that can be apprehended can be fully comprehended. We can observe the function of an electric light without really understanding how that light works.

The Place of Faith in Reason

The nature of faith demands that it involves the personal response of trust and commitment in someone or something. In Christianity, the object of our faith is Jesus Christ, Himself. For this reason, evidence alone can never be a sufficient basis for our love and trust for God. If that were the case, then we would not love God. Further, knowledge alone cannot produce love. While it is evident that we can *know* others whom we don't love, it is impossible to *love* those whom we do not know. For this reason a genuine relationship with God can never be gained by reason alone. Reason must take its place under faith

Reason and faith are two ways in which Christians know truth about God. One speaks of those things that can be known by reason, while the other speaks of those things revealed by God that can be known by faith. By faith we know some things are

true because God said them. In the case of faith, our certainty does not rest on our reasons, but rather, on our faith in God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aquinas, Thomas. *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*. Trans. Paul E. Sigmund. New York: Norton, 1988.

Beckwith, Francis J. , William Lane Craig, and J.P Moreland, eds. *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.

Geisler, Norman L. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999.

_____. *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991.