Lesson 1
Faith and Knowledge—Part I
Apologetics Press Intermediate Christian Evidences Correspondence Course

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE—PART I

"There is not enough evidence anywhere to absolutely **prove** God, but there is adequate evidence to justify the **assumption** or the **faith** that God exists."

"Faith implies something less than knowledge…. Faith, by standing between knowledge and ignorance, certainty and credulity, in a sense partakes of the essence of both. It has some evidence, which relates it to knowledge, yet it has some uncertainty, because the evidence is indirect."

"Now we **believe**, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we **know** that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

Even a casual reading of the three statements shown above reveals that the first two stand in stark contrast to the third. The first two advocate the view that faith is based on unprovable assumptions that produce a personal belief system loaded with uncertainty. The third statement, from the pen of the inspired apostle John, describes some of the people of Samaria whose faith in the Lord's deity was based on the fact they **knew** He was the Savior as a result of credible evidence.

Obviously, both sentiments cannot be correct, for they represent mutually exclusive ideas of biblical faith. On the one hand, we are asked to believe that faith is an "assumption" made by a person who simply desires to believe something in a rather gullible fashion. On the other hand, the biblical record teaches us that knowledge is an integral part of faith, and that faith is not based on merely an educated guess or unfounded assumption.

WHY THE CONFUSION?

Through the years, faith has been defined by its opponents in various uncomplimentary ways, such as "the power of believing what you know isn't true," or "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable." Unfortunately, even some supposedly "neutral" authorities have added to the confusion. Reputable dictionaries, for example, suggest that faith is a "firm belief in something for which there is no proof" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*), "belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence" (*American Heritage*, fourth edition), or "firm belief especially without logical proof" (*Oxford Illustrated American Dictionary*). Modern dictionaries, of course, are not the standard for the definition of biblical terms. The **biblical** position on faith does not depend upon the **current** use of an **English** word.

As incredible as it may seem, some in the religious community itself have been responsible for much of the current confusion in regard to the definition of biblical faith. Renowned German theologian Hans Kung wrote, for

example: "Even in faith, then, there is no certainty entirely free from doubt. In faith, we must commit ourselves to something uncertain" (1980, p. 61). Popular televangelist Robert Schuller addressed the topic of biblical faith by suggesting: "Faith is a commitment to an unprovable assumption…. Both the atheist and theist are making a commitment of faith. The atheist believes in nothing. The theist believes in something. But both are making a commitment to an unprovable assumption" (1984). If these men are correct, faith is either something based on no proof at all or something composed of a **small** amount of knowledge and a **big** dose of uncertainty that allows men to "act like" they know something when, in fact, they do not. Is it any wonder, then, that there is so much confusion in today's world regarding the concept of biblical faith?

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A CORRECT VIEW OF FAITH

Ultimately, improper concepts of faith damage or destroy the effectiveness of Christianity. Unlike many other religions, Christianity always has been based on historical fact. From the historicity of Jesus Himself to the reality of His resurrection, Christianity has competed in the marketplace of ideas with factuality as its formidable foundation. While it may be true to say that some religions flourish best in secrecy, Christianity is not one of them. Rather, it is intended to be presented, defended, and evaluated **openly** in the public eye. As one writer noted: "Christianity is the religion of **knowledge** and **surety**" (Lewis, 1987, p. 47, emp. added). For someone then to suggest that Christianity is based on an unproven (and ultimately unprovable) belief system nebulously termed "faith" is to rob Christianity of one of its most important constructs—verifiability that is rooted in historical fact.

While almost anyone you ask will admit, in theory, that knowledge and truth are indispensable attributes of a sensible, everyday existence, in practice many people live out that daily existence as if knowledge and truth ultimately do not matter. Much of mankind lives according to an abstract, confusing, and largely inconsistent system of personal behavior. This is a bit odd, to say the least. In most matters, a man likely will insist upon complete **objectivity**. For example, in regard to his eating habits he might say, "I will not eat this food; it contains bacterial toxins that can kill me." In regard to matters of civil law, he might suggest, "That action is illegal; it violates my rights." Yet when it comes to religion in general, and Christianity in particular, **subjectivity** rules the day. People can be so certain about their beliefs in the physical realm, but so uncertain about their beliefs in the spiritual realm. For example, on occasion when a person who believes in God is asked if God does, in fact, exist, he may declare: "I **believe** He exists," or "I **hope** He exists," or "I **think** He exists." But rarely do you hear him say boldly, "I **know**

He exists." Or, if a Christian is asked the question, "Do you know you are saved?," the response may go something like this: "I **believe** that I am," or "I **hope** that I am," or "I **think** that I am." But rarely do you hear someone confidently assert, "Yes, I **know** that I am saved."

This is indeed a sad state of affairs. We now have progressed to the point where in matters as mundane as food choices or legal wrangling, objectivity has become practically an absolute requirement. Meanwhile, in the much more important area of spiritual matters, we not only expect, but in many cases actually insist upon, a subjectivity that we would not tolerate in any other sphere of our lives. Apparently, some among us either once knew but long since have forgotten, or never really understood in the first place, the proper relationship between truth and faith. Similarly, we either have forgotten, or no longer care, about the damage that an improper concept of truth and its relationship to faith can cause.

The time has come for Christians to embolden themselves once again with the same high regard for truth and faith that Jesus expressed when He remarked: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Christianity is not an "I-hope-so/pie-in-the-sky/by-and-by" kind of religion based upon some mysterious, fairy tale-like concept known as "faith." Rather, it is rooted and grounded in the provable existence of the one true God, and the verifiable nature of the historical testimony surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. When the apostle John wrote to comfort and reassure first-century Christians who found themselves in the midst of numerous trials and persecutions, he said: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may **know** that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emp. added). Thus, according to both Jesus and John, a person not only can **know** something, but he can **know** that he knows it.

There are certain undeniable, critically important implications standing behind this kind of firm, confident declaration. Consider the following. If a person cannot **know** (with certainty) that God exists, then he cannot know (with certainty) that the Bible is His inspired Word. If a person cannot know that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then he cannot know that Jesus is God's Son, for the Bible provides the basis for such a claim. If a person cannot know that Christ is God's Son, then he cannot know that he is saved. Yet John specifically stated: "These things I have written to you...that you may **know** that you have eternal life."

Christians are not agnostics! The agnostic says, "I **cannot** know whether God exists." Christians, on the other hand, **know** that God exists (cf. Psalm 46:10). Consider the alternative. Do Christians serve a God Who "may" or "may not" exist? Do Christians believe, and ask others to believe, the testi-

mony of a Bible that "may" or "may not" be inspired? Do Christians place their faith in, trust, and obey a Christ Who "may" or "may not" be the Son of God? Hardly!

FAITH'S RELATIONSHIP TO BELIEF, FEELINGS, AND SINCERITY

It is not uncommon to hear someone say, in regard to a particular belief that obviously cannot be proved, "It's just a matter of faith." Or, if someone is soliciting advice about a specific course of action, the recommendation from friends and associates might be, "Just launch out on faith." How many times have we heard the comment that a particular belief or action is just "a leap of faith"? While it is true that the word "faith" frequently is used in such a fashion, and while each of these statements may express a certain "belief," the fact remains that such usage is neither representative of nor consistent with the concept of **biblical** faith.

Faith and Belief

Is faith belief? Yes, faith is a type of belief. The issue, however, centers on the **kind** of belief that is biblical faith. Belief refers primarily to a judgment that something is true. But belief may be either weak or strong. If I say, "I believe it may rain tomorrow," that is an example of a weak belief. It is an opinion I hold that, while I hope is true, and thus believe to be true, nevertheless is one that I cannot prove. However, if I say, "I believe the guilty verdict in the criminal's trial is correct and just," that is an example of a strong belief because I am able to present factual reasons for my belief, based upon available evidence. In addressing the idea of "weak" versus "strong" beliefs, philosopher David Lipe stated that "...the difference in these two types of belief turns on the **causes** of the beliefs" (n.d., p. 3, emp. added). A strong belief is a rational act based upon adequate evidence, whereas weak belief is produced by such things as emotion and vested interest.

Biblical faith is a strong belief based upon adequate, credible evidence. Although the word "faith" is used only twice in the King James Version of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakkuk 2:4), the idea of "faith" is presented throughout the text via the use of words such as "trust" (Psalm 4:5; Isaiah 26:4), "believe" (2 Chronicles 20:20), and "fear of God" (Genesis 20:11; Psalm 111:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13). In the New Testament, the word for "faith" is *pistis*, the noun form of which is defined by Greek scholar W.E. Vine as "firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing...used in the New Testament always of faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual" (1940, 2:71). In the Bible, *pistis* is used most often in the sense of trust or confidence, which is why Peter commanded Christians to "always be ready to give a

defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). Such a defense corresponds directly to a **cause for belief** because sound arguments can be offered in its support.

Faith, Feelings, and Sincerity

But what part do feelings and sincerity play in the role of biblical faith? Certainly there can be no doubt that we live in an age in which feelings and emotions often are elevated above the teachings contained in the Word of God. Many people desperately seek a "better felt than told" type of religion. The simple fact remains, however, that where there is no Word from God, there can be no faith since "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Personal feelings and emotions simply are not a reliable spiritual guide. When Samson violated his oath to God and subsequently lost his strength, he boasted: " 'I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!' But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him" (Judges 16:20). Samson "believed" that God was still with him when, in fact, He was not. When Jacob left his father's tent, he apparently "thought" that he had left God behind. Yet, after dreaming of what is commonly called "Jacob's ladder," he awoke and exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). Jacob's experience with his **feelings** was just the opposite of Samson's. Samson felt God was with him, but God was not. Jacob thought God was not with him, yet God was. In both cases, their **feelings** were unreliable guides. Later, Jacob sincerely felt that his son Joseph was dead (Genesis 37:34), but his feelings were an unreliable guide because approximately twenty-two years later he discovered that Joseph was alive and prospering in Egypt (45:26-27). While biblical faith may (and often does) generate within a person certain feelings and/or emotions, the reverse is not true. That is to say, faith itself—since it is evidence based/knowledge based—is neither generated, nor increased, by feelings or emotions.

Nor is sincerity alone to be equated with biblical faith. Yes, a person who desires to build and sustain a rock-solid faith certainly would **want** to be sincere in every aspect of that faith. And again, while faith may (and often does) generate within a person a certain sincerity (1 Timothy 1:5), faith is not the same as sincerity.

Consider the case of Uzzah, as recounted in 2 Samuel 6. The Israelites had won back the Ark of the Covenant from the evil Philistines who had captured it during an earlier battle. King David had commanded that the Ark be placed on an oxcart (driven by two brothers, Uzzah and Ahio) so that it could be moved to Jerusalem. The text states that "the oxen stumbled" (6:6b). Uzzah (apparently fearing that the precious cargo was about to tumble from its perch on the cart and be damaged or destroyed) reached up to steady the

Ark (6:6a). But God had commanded that the Israelites were not to touch His holy things (Numbers 4:15). And so, the moment Uzzah touched the Ark, God struck him dead (6:7).

Was Uzzah sincere in what he did? Unquestionably. And would he, personally, have considered his action on that fateful day to be one sincerely "borne of faith"? Undoubtedly. But neither his sincerity, nor the "faith" he had constructed perilously upon it, counted for anything or was able to save him from God's wrath. Uzzah had ignored the Word of God on the subject, which, by definition, ensured that his action was **not** one "borne of faith" (cf. Romans 10:17), regardless of how well-intentioned or how sincere Uzzah may have been. It is not by accident that the Bible specifically states: "God struck him there **for his error**" (2 Samuel 6:7, emp. added). Faith—biblical faith—is not merely **sincere**, but also **obedient**.

And so, while faith may affect the emotions in a positive fashion, and may simultaneously increase a person's desire to be sincere, faith itself is neither the end result of, nor sustained by, personal feelings or declarations of sincerity. Something more must be involved. That "something" is reason coupled with knowledge.

FAITH AND REASON

While it **is** true that the Bible and Christianity both emphasize building and sustaining faith, it is **not** true that such an emphasis occurs at the expense of either reason or rational thought. In fact, within the pages of the Bible, faith and reason are interconnected. Consider Luke's statement about the Berean Christians: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The faith of the Bereans was not divorced from reason. Whether they knew they were doing so or not, each and every day they used what is known as the Law of Rationality to draw only such conclusions as were warranted by adequate evidence—and for that they were commended! The implication for other Bible believers is inescapable: the Lord expects us to use our God-given abilities of reason and rational thought to examine the evidence so that we might "test all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), and "hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Faith and reason, if used properly, will arrive at identical truth. Consider, for example, the Universe. It exists, and reason (e.g., the Law of Cause and Effect) says that it must have an adequate antecedent cause. It is reasonable, then, to believe that this intricately designed Universe had a Designer. The choice is between matter only, or more than matter, as the fundamental explanation for the existence and orderliness of the Universe. Thus, the dif-

ference between the two models is the difference between: (a) time, chance, and the inherent properties of matter; or (b) design, creation, and the irreducible properties of organization. The evidence that we possess speaks clearly to the existence of a non-contingent, eternal, self-existent Mind that created this Universe and everything within it. Atheists expect us to believe that this highly ordered, well-designed Universe (and the complicated life it contains) "just happened." But such a suggestion is unreasonable, irrational, and unsupported by the facts at hand.

In similar fashion, it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is God's Word. There is no other book like it on the planet. Evidence to substantiate the Bible's claims of its own inspiration can be drawn from both external and internal sources. External evidences for inspiration include such things as historical documentation of biblical people, places, and events, or archaeological artifacts that corroborate biblical statements or circumstances. Internal evidences are part of the actual biblical fabric itself. The Bible's unity, predictive prophecy, and scientific foreknowledge (to list just three examples) are unparalleled in human history and bear testimony to the fact that the very existence of the Holy Scriptures cannot be explained in any other way except to acknowledge that they are the result of an overriding, superintending, guiding Mind.

Is faith opposed to reason? Hardly! Reason is faith's silent-yet-stalwart partner.

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Questions—Lesson 1

TRUE OR FALSE

DIRECTIONS: Write TRUE or FALSE in the blanks before the following statements.

_____ 1. Biblical faith is based on certain unprovable assumptions.

_____ 2. Christianity is intended to be presented, defended, and evaluated openly in the public eye.

_____ 3. Belief may be either weak or strong, depending on the evidence.

_____ 4. Personal feelings and emotions are a reliable spiritual guide.

_____ 5. Everyone in the religious community has a proper concept of faith.

_____ 6. Improper concepts of faith can damage or destroy the effectiveness of Christianity.

_____ 7. The Bible teaches that we can **know** that we are saved.

_____ 8. Uzzah was killed when he touched the Ark.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the correct answer(s).

1. Faith is based upon all of the following *except*:
   (a) Knowledge   (b) Reason
   (c) Word of God   (d) Emotion

2. This person **believed** that God was still with him when, in fact, God had departed.
   (a) Samson   (b) John   (c) Noah   (d) Abraham

3. This person **thought** God was not with him, yet God was.
   (a) Jacob   (b) Isaac   (c) Samson   (d) Elisha

4. Which group of people "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily" (Acts 17:10-11).
   (a) Thessalonians   (b) Romans
   (c) Bereans   (d) Ephesians

5. Based upon the evidence, it is reasonable to believe the Bible is:
   (a) A fairy tale   (b) God's Word
   (c) A book written by liars   (d) A book written by lunatics

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Knowledge is an integral part of _____.

2. Christianity always has been based on historical _____.

3. A strong belief is a rational act that is based upon adequate _____.

4. A weak belief is produced by such things as _____ and _____ _____.

5. Biblical faith is not merely sincere, but also _____.

6. The Bereans used the Law of _____ when they drew only those _____ warranted by adequate _____.

COMPLETE THE BIBLE VERSE
(NEW KING JAMES VERSION)

1. John 4:42: "Now we _____, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have _____ Him and we _____ that this is indeed the _____, the Savior of the world."

2. John 8:32: "And you shall _____ the _____, and the _____ shall make you _____."

3. 1 Peter 3:15: "But _____ the Lord God in your hearts, and _____ be _____to give a _____ to _____ who asks you a _____ for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

4. Romans 10:17: "So then _____ comes by _____, and hearing by the _____ of God."

5. 1 John 5:13: "These things I have _____ to you who _____ in the name of the Son of God, that you may _____ that you have _____ _____, and that you may continue to believe in the _____ of the Son of God."

NOTES/COMMENTS

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