

Prologue

The Rational Basis for Christian Faith

People embrace the Christian faith for a variety of reasons. Most of us, however, including myself, became Christians through a process of cultural indoctrination. We were raised in Christian homes and became Christians because we wanted to be Christians. We wanted to please our parents and we enjoyed the sense of belonging that comes with membership in a Christian group. A variety of emotions and motives were involved. Some of us were attracted to the warmth and love we received from our Christian brothers and sisters, and we enjoyed the security of the group membership. We also enjoyed the sense of privilege that comes with belonging to an exclusive organization. And, of course, we all want to go to Heaven when we die. Who wouldn't? Basically, we embraced Christianity because we wanted to be Christians for emotional, rather than intellectual reasons.

The rational basis for our faith tends to be subjective, rather than deductive in nature. Through a process of highly subjective reasoning we seek validation for our belief system, rather than arriving at our belief system through an objective process of logical deduction. We like to think that there is a strong, rational basis for our beliefs, but the truth is, we believe mostly because we want to believe. For most of us, Christian apologetics (defending the faith) takes the form of a highly selective process of evaluation, when studying the evidence. If the findings of science conflict with the Bible, rather than alter the way we interpret the Bible, we alter our interpretation of the scientific data. When confronted with a logical inconsistency within our theological belief system, rather than seeking a resolution to the problem, we live with the contradiction and call it a paradox, instead.

For people like us, the prospect of starting from scratch, as it were, and objectively examining all the evidence is almost unthinkable. It would be tantamount to abandoning our faith without any assurance that our investigation would yield a happy result. Because of this, all our well-intentioned theological and scientific investigations are tinged by faith-colored glasses. In all honesty, as much as I would like to think that my theological investigations over the years have been impartial, and my conclusions based on pure deductive reasoning, that is simply not the case. It is impossible to completely remove from one's mind all presuppositions prior to embarking on a quest for truth.

I will say this, however. Because I am basically analytical and rational by nature, rather than intuitive and emotional, the process was a bit easier for me. My faith was never rock solid to begin with. It was full of intellectual holes that I could not fill. I was plagued by many serious doubts. When I began a serious process of investigation about ten years ago, it was easier for me to at least temporarily let go of many sacred cows in my belief system for the sake of objectivity. I earnestly prayed every day for God to lead me to the truth, no matter where it led.

Our emotional attachment to our faith is a two-edged sword. On the positive side, we enjoy the comfort and security of an unquestioned faith. On the negative side, there are many unpleasant

aspects of that faith that we must live with. For my efforts, I was rewarded with the comfort and security of a revised faith, without the nagging doubts and contradictions. My view of God has been greatly expanded, and I have a renewed appreciation for the scope and extent of God's love.

Recognizing and admitting contradictions in our current belief system is how we grow morally, ethically, and spiritually. If you feel that your beliefs do not have to be "logical" in order to be true, why do you believe that? What arguments would you present to prove that logic is not necessary? All belief systems have at their root basic logical assumptions, even religious beliefs. "Blind faith" is not really blind at all. It is a decision one makes, with eyes wide open, to accept someone else's belief system, rather than one's own, without necessarily understanding the logic behind it or the underlying premises on which it is based. Why would any rational person want to become a Christian if there are no good "reasons" to do so? Sadly, most people cling to illogical and harmful belief systems mainly due to emotional dependence and fear. Reason, common sense, and logic should lie at the foundation of your religious belief system. My faith in the Gospel of Christ is stronger today than it was years ago, mainly because it is no longer illogical and self-contradictory. According to the Bible, perfect love casts out fear, and God is love. If you can believe that, then you don't need to be afraid to ask the tough questions. Don't be afraid of the answers you might find. All truth is God's truth. Jesus is the way, the TRUTH, and the life. If God is love, He will continue to love you, no matter what.

Hebrews 11:1 *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*

Faith is not a prerequisite for salvation; it is simply the means by which God enables us to experience it. We can't see God, Heaven, or the Age to come. During our earthly walk, we can experience them only by faith. We cannot see God's love. We cannot see the mind of God or His emotions and attitudes towards us. Jesus said that the experience of being born of God is like feeling the wind. You cannot see it, but you know it is there by its affects. When you unfurl the sail of faith, you tap into and are carried along by it. God's unconditional love and acceptance of all of us, is like that wind. It is there for everyone. It already belongs to everyone. The wind is not turned on or off by our belief in its existence. In order to experience its effect on us, what I would call Christian salvation, we need to raise the sail of faith.

When I was young, I was unsure of my salvation, because I wasn't able to muster up what I believed was the necessary amount of faith. No matter how hard I tried, I could not rid myself of intellectual doubts about God's existence and the inerrancy of the Scriptures. I had trouble fully embracing the apparently exclusionary doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ alone. I had trouble believing that a supposedly loving God would send people to endless torment in Hell, simply for not believing the correct religious doctrines. Despite my doubts, I was drawn to the positive aspects of the Gospel, so I confessed Christ as Savior and Lord anyway, hoping that one day I would be able to muster up the kind of faith that seemed evident in the lives of other believers whom I envied. I wished with all my heart that I could have the same kind of unquestioning faith that they had. I felt that I was somehow cursed with a questioning intellect that prevented me from exercising complete faith in God.

Eventually, God rewarded my efforts, as I came to the understanding that the strength of my faith was not nearly as important as the strength and trustworthiness of the One in whom I had placed my faith. As I hoisted my feeble sail of faith, the winds of God's Holy Spirit did in fact take hold. As time went by, I was able to let out more and more sail, as God revealed more of His truths to me. Eventually, as I discarded many false beliefs about God and substituted more of the truth, I found myself being carried along not just by an occasional breeze, but by the higher and much stronger trade winds. Instead of muddling along in a little dingy, I now feel like the captain of a mighty clipper ship.

If you at times find yourself floundering on the rocks of confusion and doubt, please don't despair. If you don't believe anything else about God, just try and believe this. God is love. He is all powerful. He is omnipresent. He loves everyone, including you. Like the wind, He is there for everyone. If you sincerely desire to experience the love of God, put up your little sail of faith and do the best you can to live your life according to the teachings of Christ. Don't be afraid to ask all those good questions, and God will provide you with the answers you need. As you exercise the little bit of faith that you already possess God will multiply your efforts, and the size of your sail will grow. Don't worry about all the negative stuff. For now, just immerse yourself in the good stuff, the love of God.

Please do your best to read this book with an open mind, as difficult as that is to do. The worst that can happen is that you reject my arguments and settle back into your comfort zone. The best that can happen is that you will discover some very satisfying and believable answers to questions that up until now may have been a hindrance to your faith.