

# IS FAITH REASONABLE?



The Possibility of Life With God.



# Table of Contents

What is Faith? .....	4
The Limits of Reason .....	7
All Worldviews Require Faith .....	10
Clues and Evidence .....	15
Existence .....	16
Consciousness .....	17
Reason .....	18
Beauty.....	19
Freedom.....	20
Hope and Meaning .....	20
Goodness .....	21
Revelation .....	24
Jesus as Revelation.....	25
The Bible as Revelation .....	26
The Spirit and Revelation.....	28
Hide and Seek .....	30
Conclusion .....	33

# What is Faith?

I started university with a critical misunderstanding of faith that nearly ruined the possibility of a relationship with God. Although I would not have recognized it at the time, I equated faith with my feeling of certainty about my Christian beliefs. For me, faith was the confidence I had in my reasoning and not the confidence I had in God.

The lesson I learned from my philosophy classes was that nothing is certain. We cannot even rely on our five senses. The skeptic would say "how do you know that you are not just dreaming or part of some sort of computer matrix?" I found this thinking quite devastating because I bought into the idea that knowledge required certainty. I was led to believe that doubt was a terrible thing at the same time I was being shown that almost everything could be doubted.

One of the most helpful things that I have come to learn is that the biblical understanding of faith is not incompatible with doubt. Faith is not the assertion of certainty. Questions are not incompatible with trust. The biblical concept of faith is complex, but at its core it is more about relational trust or confidence than it is about intellectual ability or certainty. Faith or trust is most commonly applied to persons. We trust a person when we rely on their word or depend on their character and ability.

This uncertainty is inherent to the relational nature of faith. Even when we have a long history with another person and have shared many conversations, we cannot fully know them. Doubt naturally comes from the difficulty in understanding God who is invisible and whose ways are far above our ways.

The faithful characters in the Bible always face tests and challenges, whether it's Job who cannot understand his suffering or Abraham who is called to move to a far away land in following God's plan. These are not men who have it all figured out. To call them men of faith is not to say that they had no reason to doubt but rather that they chose to trust.

So first of all, faith in God is a commitment to trust God within the context of doubt and uncertainty. One can act in faith even when the outcome is not clear.

My favorite illustration which shows how faith is more than belief is the story of Blondin the tight rope walker which is part of Alpha series. The story tells of a tight rope walker who performs his act high above Niagara Falls. After doing many acrobatic stunts on the tight rope, such as wheeling a sack of potatoes across in a wheelbarrow, Blondin approaches the enthusiastic crowd and asks, "do you believe I could take a person across in this wheelbarrow?" Many in the crowd cheer and say that they believe he could do it. To this, Blondin asks for volunteers to get in the wheelbarrow. At this moment the crowd which finds it easy to believe that it can be done is unwilling to act on that belief and put their life in his hands.

So faith is more than a mental belief, it is a willingness to trust and act on that trust even in the context of uncertainty and doubt.

There are many today who are suspicious of faith, seeing it as contrary to knowledge and reason. Faith is spoken of as blind or as that which is held despite the evidence.

Richard Dawkins says "Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is the belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."

Peter Boghossian in his book entitled, “A Manual for Creating Atheists” redefines faith to be “pretending to know things that you don’t know” and “belief without evidence”. He calls faith “an unreliable way of gaining knowledge.

To be fair, sometimes religious people will use the term faith in this way. When challenged about what they believe a person might say, "I just take it on faith." The implication is that they don't have any justification for their belief, but just believe it anyhow.

These uses of the word faith that draw a sharp distinction between faith and reason or faith and evidence are not helpful. I have been defining faith as a commitment to God in the face of uncertainty. By this I would say that faith exists in an absence of proof but I would not say that it exists apart from evidence. Again we see this all the time in personal relationships. I may depend on your word, because you have been faithful in the past, but I cannot ultimately prove that that you will be true to your word at this time.

I would also say that faith is not the basis of knowledge. It is not a way of gaining knowledge. Faith is associated with the will. It is the choice to commit to someone or something. There may be an element of risk, there is likely a sense of uncertainty, but this does not mean that faith is blind or that it is not based on evidence.

In the end we need to see that faith is not belief without evidence. It is a commitment to actively trust based on evidence, but also usually entailing some risk because the evidence is not conclusive.

# The Limits of Reason

I have tried to establish that the biblical understanding of faith is not contrary to reason. Faith is more of an active commitment than it is a way of gaining knowledge. Therefore, it would be wrong to consider that faith is somehow the opposite of knowledge or that faith is in conflict with reason. In fact, reason and knowledge cannot avoid faith.

Epistemology is the discipline within philosophy that is concerned with knowledge and how we know what we know. Over the years there have been a lot of different theories, but, like all the big questions in life, knowledge is not easily defined.

With the ascendancy of reason in our modern world, there has risen a great confidence in science and observation as the firmest basis of knowledge. Many contemporary atheists adopt the position that science and reason are the only sources of knowledge. It is easy to find YouTube videos which even dismiss philosophical deductive reasoning in favor of experimental or observational knowledge.

What many people fail to see is that knowledge cannot be limited to scientific discovery. Even the statement, "all knowledge is based on science", is itself a statement which cannot be proved by science. Sceptical thinkers have also pointed out that even the product of our five senses cannot be established beyond a doubt. It cannot be proven that we are not living inside of a computer matrix which is feeding us a false view of reality.

For this reason, almost everything we believe, or think we know, is not proven beyond all doubt. The tricky part of this is that we need to rely on our belief forming processes in order to establish our

belief forming processes. I need to rely on reason to establish reason. It is a circular process.

There are a number of assumptions, sometimes called first principles, which must be held despite our inability to prove them with reason. We need to commit to some beliefs, such as regularity of nature and the general reliability of our senses in order for reason to even function meaningfully. Pascal, a 17th century scientist and Christian thinker writes, "We know that we do not dream, however impossible it is for us to prove it by reason, this inability demonstrates only the weakness of our reason, but not, the uncertainty of all our knowledge. For the knowledge of first principles, as space, time, motion, number, is as sure as any of those which we get from reasoning. And reason must trust these intuitions of the heart." (Penses 282) Reason is therefore not self sufficient.

It is also clear that there are many aspects of the human experience that cannot be contained within scientific knowledge. Take for instance the idea that there is something outside our universe which created or caused our universe. Whether you consider this to be God or some other universe or multi-verse, this question cannot be investigated by science because science is confined to observations within our universe. "Because science's baseline methodology is to always assume a natural cause for every phenomenon, there is no experiment that could prove or disprove that there is something beyond this material world. (Keller, Timothy. Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical p. 35).

Consider also talk about values. It is difficult to appeal to science to tell us who to vote for, which policies are best, what should be legal or who to love. These sorts of questions are very meaningful to human existence but are not open to scientific discovery.



While we should have a strong respect for and science, it must be admitted that many of our foundational beliefs and the big questions in life cannot be settled by scientific reason alone.

An additional factor is that spiritual knowledge can be compared with knowledge of another person. While it is possible to learn about another person through observation, such knowledge would be incomplete. If you are getting to know someone on a date, you could observe their behaviour, get a sense of their style of clothing and learn about their physical appearance without having to interact with them directly. But to really get to know another person, you need to rely on revelation. The other person has to tell you about their thoughts, feelings, preferences, hopes and fears. Even if you had access to incredibly detailed brain scans, it would be impossible to scientifically gain access to the content of another person's mind and heart.

Religious thinkers have long considered that knowledge of God also requires revelation, because getting to know God is similar to getting to know a person. It is not that reason has no place in coming to know God, but it is insufficient. Commonly this is expressed in language that contrasts heart and mind. Life with God must be engaged on both levels and perhaps you could say that the heart is even more important than the mind. Pascal reflects on the interplay between faith and reason or heart and mind when he writes "It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason. (Pensees 278)

As valuable as reason and science are, they are not enough of a foundation for knowledge. The most important things in life are accessed by both heart and mind, reason and revelation.

# All Worldviews Require Faith

Given the limits of reason and the nature of faith discussed in the previous sections, we must conclude that all world views require a measure of faith. No matter what you believe about life and existence, you cannot stand on the foundation of reason alone and so are forced to live out commitments based on incomplete evidence. This is as true for the atheist as it is for the person who believes in God.

Sometimes I hear from atheists that there shouldn't even be a word atheism because it is just the lack of something. There's no word for not believing in fairies or not believing in Santa Claus so why do we have a word for not believing in God? They try to claim that atheism is not truly a belief system or worldview, but rather just the lack of a belief in God.

It is assumed that the burden of proof lies with those who are making a positive claim. In many cases this is true, however the burden of proof is not entirely related to whether or not the claim is positive or negative. In many cases you can rearrange the language in such a way that makes a negative claim into a positive claim.

This comes down to the fuzziness of our English language. Consider the following statement:

I do not believe there is a dog in my room.

This could be understood in two ways:

1. It could be a statement about the lack of belief, meaning that "I just don't have an opinion one way or the other." A more precise way to say this would be, "I don't have a belief regarding whether or not there is a dog in my room." Reading the statement in this

way takes a more agnostic approach, where judgment is not made on either side of the issue.

2. The statement however could be read in a more positive way meaning something more like, "I believe there is no dog in my room." This becomes a positive belief about the absence of something. The mere fact that it is about the absence of something does not absolve from the burden of proof. If I made this claim, you might ask me to prove it by going and looking and checking under the bed. It remains a belief statement that must be addressed with evidence. It is this sense which properly belongs to the concept of atheism.

It is suggested that all infants start as atheists, as if atheism is the default position which only changes upon the influence of others. I would challenge this notion by saying that atheism is not merely the absence of a belief in God, but rather the commitment to the belief in an absence of God. Babies might not believe in God in the first sense of meaning above. Because of their lack of experience they don't believe in a lot of things, like giraffes, Saturn or the Korean war.

Some atheists will claim that they are not holding a particular worldview, but are just being rational, requiring empirical evidence before they believe in God. If they are continuing to consider the evidence and withholding belief, this is fine, but again would be more fairly described as agnosticism. If they are trying to say that the default position is to not believe until evidence is provided, they are really just rejecting the evidence and have decided to not believe in God. Atheism cannot claim a privileged status as if it were neutral. One either believes in God or does not believe in God or continues to consider the matter with an open mind and heart.

The atheist cannot escape the need to supply evidence anymore than the theist. Both are making belief claims and should be asked to supply reasons for their belief. Neither side can be the privileged default position. Atheism is a world view, a perspective on the nature of life.

Perhaps the matter is clouded by the assumption that belief in the existence of God is something that is in principle open to scientific discovery. It is often reasonable to not believe in some claims about the physical world until evidence is provided. I do not believe in Bigfoot for example. Is belief in God in the same category?

Atheists sometimes compare belief in God to belief in Santa Claus, Bigfoot or fairies. Can a theist claim that it is reasonable to believe in an invisible God while at the same time say that it is unreasonable to believe in fantasy creatures?

When atheists make this sort of claim, they are failing to understand the definition of God and are making a category mistake. God is not a being within the world, an object that can be measured with scientific apparatus. We cannot obtain a jar of God and test it for its godliness. God is by definition not an object within the world, but rather the source of all existence and therefore separate from and not limited by space and time.

Santa Claus is in a completely different category. The claims made about him, such as his residence at the North Pole and his visiting rooftops at Christmas, are claims about a being within the world that can be investigated.

The difference is that the classical vision of God is not that He is merely a creature in this world, but a reasonable foundation for

existence, consciousness and goodness. God is a philosophical explanation why things exist, why minds exist and the definition of morality. Other mysterious creatures offer no such philosophical foundations.

David Bentley Hart, in his book *The Experience of God* writes, "Beliefs regarding fairies are beliefs about a certain kind of object that may or may not exist within the world, and such beliefs have much the same sort of intentional shape and rational content as beliefs regarding one's neighbors over the hill or whether there are such things as black swans. Beliefs regarding God concern the source and ground and end of all reality, the unity and existence of every particular thing and of the totality of all things, the ground of the possibility of anything at all. Fairies and gods, if they exist, occupy something of the same conceptual space as organic cells, photons, and the force of gravity, and so the sciences might perhaps have something to say about them, if a proper medium for investigating them could be found. We can, if nothing else, disabuse ourselves of belief in certain gods by simple empirical methods;...Belief or disbelief in fairies or gods could never be validated by philosophical arguments made from first principles;" (Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God* p. 34).

Belief in God is therefore a metaphysical question not a scientific question. It is a worldview question and therefore requires a measure of faith, because it cannot be resolved by experiment or observation.

Another common misunderstanding about belief in God is the view that God is an explanation for poorly understood natural processes. The atheist may accuse the theist of using God to fill the explanatory gaps which science has yet to address. Primitive people at one time could not explain the sun and therefore defined it as a god. Science has come to discover that the sun is a star and

has shown that such beliefs about sun gods are mistaken. They then conclude that whenever God is invoked to explain something that we cannot scientifically understand that it is equally naïve and perhaps one day science will learn enough to explain that which we cannot explain today.

This critique also misses the point. I would happily concede that to invoke God as the direct explanation for natural phenomena within the universe is mistaken. When it comes to God, however, we are talking about explanations that are essentially separate from scientific investigation. Scientifically informed theists do not look to God to explain how the universe operates. Instead, they look to God as the explanation for why the universe exists. God is a reasonable inference from the observation that our universe seems to be contingent and cannot explain itself.

If atheism rejects this idea in favor of an eternal or self sufficient universe this too is a metaphysical worldview. Atheism is therefore not a question that can be evaluated by science, because it makes claims which are essentially not testable. The same is true of theism. Because neither can be proved, each are commitments based on evidence and therefore each require faith. One view may be supported by a greater weight of evidence, but neither can be simply dismissed as unreasonable.

Timothy Keller, following the thinking of Charles Taylor concludes that "Western secularity is not the absence of faith but a new set of beliefs about the universe. These beliefs cannot be proven, are not self-evident to most people, and have, ..., their own contradictions and problems just as other religious faiths do." (Keller, Timothy. Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical p. 53)

All worldviews require evidence and faith.

## Clues and Evidence

How do we then answer these big questions of life, which cannot be resolved by observation and experiment? What counts as evidence when it comes to a religion or a world view? The answer I believe is to not give up on the principles of reason, but rather to admit a wider sense of observation. One further type of observation, is observation from within the human life experience. There is a subjective element to knowledge. Almost by instinct we believe in certain fundamental experiences such as morality, beauty and freedom. These things cannot be explained scientifically, but we need to account for them. Worldviews can be therefore evaluated based on their ability to explain these truths about human life which we cannot avoid. The same principle can be applied to our observation of the universe as a whole.

The evidence for God could be thought of in connection to what are sometimes called first principles. These first principles are concepts that we tend to take for granted and which cannot themselves be proved by reason. The possibility of life with God flows out of the need to explain these first principles. So let's look at several of these and consider how they are handled both by naturalism and belief in God. I will attempt to show that a belief in God is a reasonable foundation for many of these first principles and in fact is a more satisfying explanation than naturalism.

## Existence

It is undeniable that something exists, even if we can only affirm our own thoughts with full certainty. Most of us would however be quite willing to go further than Descartes' "I think therefore I am", and admit the reality of the outside world or universe. Furthermore it seems quite rational to believe that something cannot arise from nothing. To put it another way, it seems a fair conclusion to say that something has always existed.

With this in mind we are led to conclude that either this universe has always existed or something else independent of this universe gave it existence.

Naturalism (materialism) would be most comfortable in saying that either this universe is self-sufficient or was caused by other natural phenomena that is.

The religious perspective would say that this universe seems to be contingent. The way that it is organized could have been different. There is nothing inherent to matter, space and time which would suggest that they could be infinite or necessary. Furthermore, what we do know of the scientific discovery of the expanding universe is that space and time appear to have had a beginning in what is commonly called the Big Bang.

In addition, when we try to apply the concept of infinity to real things, like moments of time or numbers of atoms, it leads to absurdity. For instance, if there was an actual infinite number of minutes then there would certainly be an infinite number of seconds, but according to the mathematical principles of infinity, there would not be more seconds than minutes. If you look at paradoxes such as Hilbert's hotel, it seems evident that one cannot easily apply the concept of infinity to real things.



It is reasonable to conclude that if the universe had a beginning, that it also has a cause and this cause must itself be independent of the universe. The general understanding of the nature of God is that he is independent of time and space and entirely self-sufficient. It does not make sense to ask who made God because God is defined as that which is uncaused. He is self-sufficient.

The idea of God is a perfectly reasonable explanation for why anything exists.

## **Consciousness**

Another great wonder in this world is human consciousness. Our subjective experience of thinking, feeling, intending and imagining is the core of what makes us human. Again we are faced with a couple of competing perspectives. Is there such a thing as a mind or can it all be explained by brain activity? Few would deny that thoughts are brain events, but is that all that they are?

Scientifically we are in a difficult spot. While we can scan your brain and see that there is some activity going on as the neurons fire, science likely will never have the capacity to access the content of our thoughts. "Electrochemical events are not thoughts, even when they may be inseparably associated with thoughts, and no empirical inventory of such events will ever disclose for us either the content or the experiential quality of an idea, a desire, a volition, or any other mental event." (Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God* p. 159) It seems quite possible that minds are something more than brains and science cannot prove or disprove this.

Our personal experiences seem to be greater than the mere data that is being presented to our senses. We may experience the

effects of lighting in a sun set and ascribe to it a sense of meaning or a feeling of wonder and peace. There is more going on in our minds than mere perception. Is this a clue to suggest a reality that is different than the material world?

Naturalism takes the perspective that consciousness is nothing more than complex brain activity. It is a biological phenomenon and nothing more. The religious perspective considers that consciousness seems to be anything but mechanistic. Our thoughts seem to have intention and abstraction which is nowhere else found in this material universe. As we reflect on our interior life, the life of our minds, it may seem surprising that impersonal matter and energy could create something so different and unique as consciousness. The religious perspective invites us to see that just as God is the best foundation of existence he is also the best foundation of mind.

## **Reason**

Reason is one aspect of our conscious mind. We are quick to assume that our belief forming processes are adequate for apprehending the truth. Although we've seen that reason is not all-powerful, we believe that it is mostly accurate in describing reality.

Alvin Plantinga, however, has argued that this conclusion is better founded upon a belief in God. If God exists and is our Creator then we have warrant for believing that our reason is well aligned with truth, for our belief forming processes would be designed to access truth. But what if our reason is as naturalism suggests? If this is merely brain activity that has evolved in humans without the direction of any higher intelligence, what kinds of brains would we expect to have? Evolutionary naturalism would suggest that our brains are adapted for survival and reproduction. Why should such brains be effective in abstract thinking, higher reason or the

holding of true beliefs. Is there any adaptive advantage to metaphysical thinking such as we are doing in this article. The truth of beliefs are not always relevant for survival. For instance, a greater sense of paranoia may in fact help some people watch out for dangers even if the dangers do not always exist. Could we have any confidence that advanced monkey minds are effective in advanced mathematics or coming to conclusions about the origin of the universe or the nature of reality.

"Indeed, Darwin himself expresses serious doubts along these lines: 'With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?'" (Plantinga, Alvin. *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* p. 316)

It seems that if we assume naturalism, we have greater reason to doubt our reasoning.

## **Beauty**

Beauty is an aspect of the human experience that seems out of line with the natural world. We are strongly attracted to beauty in nature and art and often feel that they are pointing to something significant. A sense of beauty is somewhat like a sense of morality in that it is a testimony to how things ought to be. Naturalism would have to explain beauty as somehow a connection to survival. Beautiful landscapes would be a remembrance of safety or the provision of food. Certainly physical beauty in the human form could be explained by reproductive instinct, but it seems difficult to explain our experience of the combination of colour in a painting or notes in a music. Our sense of beauty seems

disconnected from mere utility. We value some things beyond their ability to help us live. Is this a hint of something transcendent or merely an odd feature of our brains?

Scientific naturalism has created a culture that prioritizes utility. Things become meaningful only if they are useful and measurable. Yet something in us rebels against such a thought and wants to agree with Keats who writes, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Is not the human experience of beauty a testimony to something greater?

## **Freedom**

Naturalism is committed to the perspective that the only thing that exists is the material world. From this perspective all things must be explained physically. Human choices therefore are nothing more than brain activities. All brain activities are biological, all things biological are physical and all physical things are determined by cause and effect. Therefore our experience of freedom must be an illusion because our choices are completely caused by past events. Again this perspective seems hard to accept for the so-called illusion of freedom is very powerful. We all experience life as if we can choose otherwise. Our loving relationships seem meaningful and not just the results of forces beyond our control. So once again the rejection of God compels us to reject a foundation for a concept that seems incredibly important to our human experience.

## **Hope and Meaning**

Death is the one thing that we cannot avoid. It is also the one thing that threatens to destroy all meaning in life. If death is the end then what does it matter as to how we live? Is there a significant difference between collecting spoons and serving the poor? If

human life is merely organized out of randomness and is only a blip in the history of the universe can any achievement be considered meaningful? Yet we long for significance and feel that there must be more to life. Is this feeling out of touch with reality or is it a clue to something more? Is the desire for a happy ending and a hope beyond death a clue to its possibility? If hunger and thirst have a fulfilment in food and drink could that not suggest that this hunger for meaning has a true fulfilment in God?

## **Goodness**

Perhaps the strongest clue within ourselves is our conscience. All humanity has a sense of moral feelings which lead us to strongly conclude that these feelings are obligations.

Naturalism would have to explain morality as either a human creation or a conclusion that can be drawn from scientific exploration of the world. The trouble is that if our sense of morality is but a human creation then its content can be freely changed and adapted. If human opinion changed so would morality. This leads to the problem that morality would just be the preference of the majority or the powerful. Even secular people, however, want to say that human rights are objective whether or not a government recognizes them in law. We also want to say that moral reform is possible. But if morality is merely defined by humanity then moral reform would not be a move towards something more true, but only a push to change opinion. Do we not have a sense that some things are always right and some things are always wrong?

One might say that morality makes sense as a social contract, that we have evolved to cooperate with larger society because it's best for our survival. But morality is rarely this practical or tied to our

survival. Often our sense of right and wrong would lead us to make a decision that is not in our best interest like risking ourselves to save someone else. If morality is merely a social contract, then the highest value would only be to cooperate as much as possible until it seems to conflict with my own best interest.

The social contract theory of morality tries to ground goodness in self interest, but this is self defeating. If I agree to be good because my cooperation will be what is best for me, it will all fall apart when I am faced with an opportunity to cheat. Self interest cannot be the highest good or rationale for morality.

Furthermore our sense of goodness, especially the protection of those who are weak, seems completely out of touch with the natural order. Nature is defined by survival of the fittest. The animal kingdom only knows kill or be killed. Scientific investigation into nature cannot clearly observe a preference for kindness and love. Morality transcends what we see in the world around us.

Again, the belief in God does not struggle with belief in an objective morality, for this morality would be grounded in the nature or character of God.

The reasonableness of faith in God is found in the fact that it is a better explanation for all the things that we experience as humans. Naturalism has a very difficult time explaining existence, consciousness, reason, beauty, purpose, freedom and morality. All of these things are powerful movements within each one of us and are difficult to accept as mere illusions or natural forces.

For a fuller treatment of all of these things you can consider Timothy Keller's book "Making Sense of God." Keller concludes, "All these arguments and signs that we have been reviewing are

not so strong as to force belief, but they do make it completely rational to believe. In fact, these arguments are that it is more rational and takes less of a leap of faith to believe in God than to not believe. If your premise that there is no God leads most naturally to conclusions you know are not true— that moral obligation, beauty and meaning, the significance of love, our consciousness of being a self are illusions— then why not change the premise?" (Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* p. 227).

At this point I have not proven that God exists but I have given powerful pieces of evidence to suggest that it is quite reasonable for you to be open to the possibility that God does exist. Atheism does not rest on a superior foundation. It is a belief system like any religion. Scientific discovery cannot decide metaphysical matters. Furthermore our personal experience in the human race shows many possibilities of a transcendent reality. Our mind and reason cannot get us all the way to God, but they can and should open the way for us to be willing to engage the heart.

Remember that Pascal says that "It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason. (Pensees 278) Reason can lead us to the point that we are open to revelation, to a more subjective and personal interaction with God. It is to this that we now turn.

# Revelation

Christians have always understood that if you are to get to know God, he has to reveal himself to you. We considered this earlier (page 9) when we recognized that the only way to get to know a person is if that person is willing to share her thoughts and feelings. Imagine further that you're trying to get to know someone famous and important like the Queen. One cannot just call up Buckingham palace and set an appointment. You have to put yourself in a place where it was possible to meet, but even then you could not guarantee an interaction. Probably the only way to get to know someone like that would be for them to take the first step and initiate a conversation with you.

The same is true for God, we are utterly dependent on him revealing himself to us. Of course God does not need to reveal himself, he could just leave us in the dark, but thankfully he has done this and continues to do this in several different ways.



## Jesus as Revelation

Christians understand that the greatest self revelation of God came in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus is given many titles like the "Word" (John 1:1) or the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) and Jesus himself declared that to see him was to see the Father (John 14:9). Jesus is God taking on human flesh so that we could better understand who God is and what he is doing in this world.

It is hard to argue with the idea that Jesus has had a profound impact on history. His ideas have shaped cultures and his followers continue to grow in every culture in this world. Jesus has been used and abused, but he has changed lives for thousands of years. Is very difficult to explain the rise of the Christian faith apart from a historical Jesus. How could a small band of Jews in an out-of-the-way province in the Roman empire rise so quickly to such influence? The most reasonable explanation is that followers of Christ truly did witness his resurrection from the dead. If they were just inventing some religion, why would they be so willing to give up their lives testifying to its truth? If this is only a legend how is it that so many have been transformed through the message?

At the very least this is a clue suggesting that one ought to consider Christ very carefully. If anyone in history can lay claim to be God's revelation, then certainly Jesus rises to the top.

Get to know him and you will like what you see. He is the perfect mix of grace and truth. His teachings are wise and good. He is powerful and gentle. His compassion reaches out to all people. His self sacrifice is the best example of love.

The problem for us today is that Jesus is no longer around physically. Our access to Jesus is mediated through the Bible and the Holy Spirit and to some degree the testimony of others.

## **The Bible as Revelation**

Christians understand the Bible is an inspired set of writings that focus on Christ. The New Testament describes his life, death and resurrection and the Old Testament is filled with preparations, prophecies and promises which look forward to Jesus the Messiah.

Although it is beyond the scope of this booklet to cover this in detail, the Bible has a good reputation as historically reliable. The text of the Bible, in particular the New Testament, has thousands of manuscripts which show it to be accurately preserved. The gospels bear many marks of eyewitness accounts and arose far too early to be legendary.

One need not be fully convinced of every aspect of the Bible in order to encounter Christ in its pages. Take the opportunity to read one of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, and be introduced to Jesus. Read with an open heart and invite God to speak to you through the text and you may find yourself being attracted to him. There is no one else in history who not only claimed to be God but convinced millions that his claims are true.

The Bible has both objective and subjective elements in its role as revelation. As a book, it represents the testimony of other people and holds itself as the record of their experience with God. As with all forms of testimony it is objective in that it is outside of us and not within our control. It requires faith, because we do not have direct access to those same experiences. All history requires faith

in the testimony of others. If you experience God directly, I could trust your report, but I cannot live your experience.

Christians understand, however, that all people have opportunity to experience God in the text. One way that God does this is to prompt an inner yes. In other words, God works within the heart of a person to attract them to himself through the story.

The story of the Bible tells of humanity being created in the image of God. It tells of how we in turn have walked away from God seeking to define good and evil on our own terms. The resulting mess has led to misery and chaos ever since. The good news is that Jesus Christ has come to rescue us from ourselves and give us an opportunity to live with God. His death serves as payment for the penalty of our sins and his resurrection offers us hope for eternal life. This is the ultimate story of a happy ending. This is the ultimate love story of a God who made us for himself and would stop at nothing to win us back. Countless people who have considered this story have received it as revelation from God.

J.R.R. Tolkien in his essay on fairy stories recognizes that humanity has a great love for creating worlds and stories. He suggests that this is because we were made by a creative God. One feature of the stories we create is the happy ending. He coins the word "eucatastrophe" as the sudden happy turn towards the good, a sort of opposite to catastrophe. He reflects on the Christian story, saying " this story has entered History and the primary world; ... The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation." He finds it a great joy that the human story has this happy ending.

The story of Jesus is beautiful, joyful and full of hope. It speaks of a God who is gracious towards us even though we do not deserve it. It speaks of a God who loves us enough to die for us. Many who

have read this story have, like Tolkien, had an inner sense that this story resonates with our deepest desires. Christians would not call this objective proof, but when one reads the Bible and feels their heart saying yes, it is understood that this is a way in which God shows himself to us.

## **The Spirit and Revelation**

Christians also accept that God continues to deal with people by directly revealing himself in a variety of ways to those who are open to him. In the Bible God invites us to seek him and promises that if we do so, we will find him.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7:7

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

People have experienced God in many different ways. Sometimes it is in unexplained circumstances or answered prayers. Some experience more elaborate visions and dreams. Many sense an impression in the heart which calls them to pursue God. Many experience an inner sense of direction or confirmation of God's

presence. It may, in connection to the experience of wonder in nature or through reading the scriptures. God cannot be put in a box. There is no predictable formula for spiritual experience. And although these experiences may not be powerful for those who observe from the outside, they can be a powerful evidence for the person who experiences them directly.

The Bible also makes it clear that faith in God is a gift of grace. While we must earnestly seek God, it is as equally important that God draws us to himself. God does not make himself obvious to all people, but will reveal himself to those who are ready.

Because God is not at our command, the best we can do is put ourselves in a place where we might receive this grace. To seek God is to spend time in spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship, fasting and reading. It will certainly include putting aside of distractions and busyness. It is hard to notice God when our life is full of work and entertainment.

Many people wonder why God is not more obvious. Why not write fire in the sky? Why not create a predictable pattern of experience? If we must rely on God's revelation, why does he seem to be hiding?

## Hide and Seek

With every investigation into truth, it is important to put yourself in a spot where you can properly evaluate what is going on. If I tell you there is a dog in my office, you would only be justified in rejecting this idea if you took the time to investigate. You would need to go to my office and look in the door. In fact you would have to step in and check under my desk and behind the table. Only after putting yourself in a proper position for evaluation can you draw the correct conclusion.

If we listen to the scriptures quoted above, it is important to be diligent in our search for God. It's not about just praying a prayer or laying a challenge to God. There needs to be a sense of earnest desire and a willingness to seek God with all one's heart.

The pursuit of God is like the game of hide and seek. If God is hidden, and in many ways he is, it is not because he is being eternally evasive but rather because there is a special joy in seeking and finding.

Are you putting yourself in a position to see God? Have you given up on the game too early? Discovery only happens when you put yourself in the right place to make the find. The point of the game is to go to open the doors, to lift the covers and to check behind the furniture. If you just stay in your starting position and claim you can't see, then whose fault is it? God may be hidden, but are we looking for him?

It's not enough to just look around briefly and say that there is no evidence. One must take the time to ask, seek and knock. Have you really taken enough time to notice God? We briefly consider the possibility of God, watch a few sceptical YouTube videos and then boldly claim that faith is foolish. Have you ever really sat in silence and pondered? Have you ever attempted to talk with God?

Have you read any part of the Bible? So often we say that we are open to hearing from God but we never take the time to listen. We assume that God must always shake us up and get our attention, but what if God only shows himself to those who are looking? What if he only rewards those who earnestly seek him? If it takes effort and discipline to make a scientific discovery or appreciate a piece of art, why would it not take some effort to connect with God?

This game of hide and seek with God is about attitude and spiritual development. God only reveals himself to people who are ready for him. Thomas Morris suggests that humility is required before God can more fully reveal himself. He suggests that brushes with greatness can often inflate our pride. We feel more important when we have even second hand experiences with celebrities. If these experiences lead us to overestimate ourselves, how much more would the glory of God?

"Were God to reveal himself to people improperly prepared to come to know and love him, such revelation would be more of a curse than a blessing. In order to allow us to develop to the point at which the knowledge of him would be the extraordinary positive thing it can potentially be, God must govern his public manifestation in accordance with the needs of the least developed of his human creatures. Only within the heart of the properly formed individual can more be safely offered. And there such people claim, it is offered." (Morris, Thomas V. Making Sense of it All)

Before we can be trusted with the revelation of God we must have a more accurate sense of our frailty and inability understand the ways of God. Doubt creates room for humble faith and doubt creates room for willing love.

Pascal has an interesting saying that is quite profound. He says, “God wishes to move the will rather than the mind. Perfect clarity would help the mind and harm the will.” (Pensees 234)

Imagine a king looking for a wife. If the king comes to a maiden in perfect clarity, leaving no doubt about his power and his riches, that maiden would likely responded not in love, but rather in reluctant coercion. She may feel obligated, or desire his wealth more than the relationship. She may have become his wife, but always held a secret affection for the life she left behind. When it comes to relationships even God desires a willing heart and not merely a compelled mind.

Yes God is hidden but he is not impossible to find. Will you make the effort to search and take hold of the possibility that God will show himself to you?

Often the rejection of God is not about reason, but rather a choice to love other things. If a person wants to follow their desires and pursue an unrestrained freedom, then the concept of God would be unappealing. Be careful that you do not miss God just because you are in love with other things. Be careful that you do dismiss God because you are not open to his grace.



## Conclusion

Yes faith is reasonable. Every worldview including the belief in naturalism requires a step of faith. As powerful as reason is, it is not the only source of knowledge and truth. There is precious little truth that we can establish with complete certainty.

Furthermore, belief in God helps us make sense of the world that we experience. It provides a foundation for existence, consciousness and goodness among other things.

The possibility of God should create within us a sense of openness to revelation. Christians suggest that history has shown that God has revealed himself in Jesus and through the Scriptures. God also invites us to make the effort to seek him, promising that he will show himself to those who ask, seek and knock.

Are you willing to humble yourself and become open to God? Is this not the most reasonable thing you can do?

This booklet was written by David Dawson.

For more detailed engagement with these ideas I recommend:

Making Sense of God: An invitation to the Sceptical by Timothy Keller

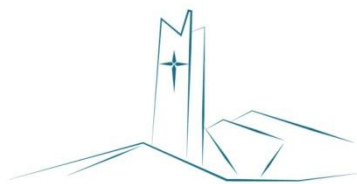
Making Sense of it All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life by Thomas V. Morris

The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness and Bliss by David Bentley Hart

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism by Timothy Keller.







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