

BLIND FAITH?

**“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”
- Hebrews 11:1**

INTRODUCTION

Many people, including Christians, have a wrong perspective when it comes to the idea and nature of “faith.” Is faith believing something in spite of the facts? Is Christianity true because we wish for it to be true, or maybe because there are more of us doing the wishing, or perhaps because we wish harder for it to be true than those of other beliefs? Are faith and reason compatible or must someone commit “intellectual suicide” to become a Christian? What is the biblical view of faith?

THE WRONG VIEW: “BLIND FAITH”

People often use terms like “blind faith” or taking a “leap of faith” to describe their Christian beliefs. This particular view of faith could be defined as “choosing to believe something independent of considering the evidence.” In other words, “faith” demands that you keep certain beliefs *regardless of the evidence stating otherwise*.



In essence, we should continue to hold certain beliefs only because we have “faith” that those beliefs are true. “Faith” is therefore entirely opposed to reason and contrary to fact. Where there is great reason, there must be no faith; and where there is great faith, there must be a lack of reason. Consequently, faith is reduced to wishful thinking- a type of silly daydream, ignorant of reality. This, as we shall see, is a wrong and unbiblical view of faith.

The danger of having an incorrect view of faith is twofold. First, it forces the person to suppress any genuine questions he may have about a difficult biblical issue or doctrine. “I guess I just have to have faith,” is how they answer any tough question. Such a person truly possess blind faith. Second, such a person’s defense for Christianity is reduced to only a subjective faith

that cannot be demonstrated to be true through reason and facts. The world asks, “Is Christianity true?” and this person says, “Absolutely.” But when the world asks, “How can I know it is true?” this person responds, “You just have to have faith.” The only evidence for the truth of Christianity ends up sounding like the line from the familiar song, “you ask me how I know he lives; he lives within my heart.” While this may be *personally* true for the believer, by itself it demonstrates to the world a subjective faith that is no different from any other religious belief.

Gregory Koukl accurately summarizes “blind faith” when he says: *“This view of faith reduces Christian conviction to wishful thinking. That is, what one is convinced of is the opposite of what one only hopes for. . . Don’t ask questions, just have faith. Just make it happen inside, just believe. My question is this: How is that notion different from wishing? Maybe more critically, what makes the Christian’s wishing any different from the Mormon’s wishing, or the Hindu’s wishing, or even the wishing of an atheist?”*

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF FAITH

Christian apologist Josh McDowell once said, *"My heart cannot rejoice in what my mind rejects as false."* His point is that if his mind is sustaining serious doubts about the validity of Christianity, he cannot honestly be enthusiastic about it. Biblically, *faith* can be defined as **"trusting in what you have reason to believe is true."** This can be seen, for example, in Hebrews 11:11's description of the type of faith Abraham possessed. Abraham "was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise" (NIV). In other words, Abraham did not just blindly believe a voice he heard, but rather placed his

faith in the One he knew was trustworthy (i.e. "faithful"). A few verses later (v. 17-19), it refers to Abraham's test of faith when he was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, even though God had promised future generations through him. So did Abraham just blindly accept God's command? Verse 19 says that he **"reasoned** that God could raise the dead..." (emphasis added). Abraham's faith was therefore not opposed to reason; it was *built* on reason. Based on all that he knew about God, he placed his faith in what he had reason to believe was true (the irrefutable object of God Himself!). Abraham demonstrated *intelligent* faith.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

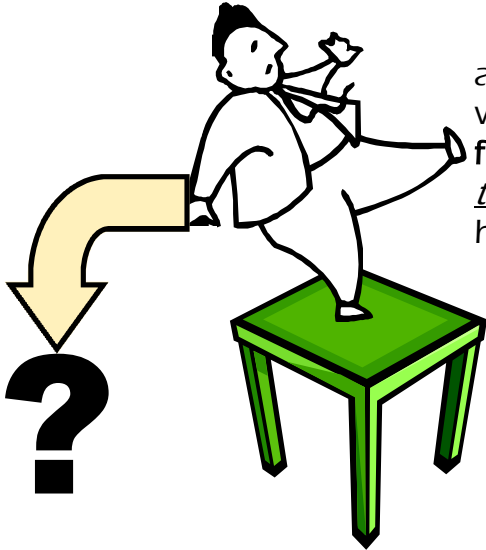
Often Christians will resist "apologetics" (i.e. giving reasons why Christianity is true) because they feel that evidence and facts will *substitute* faith, and, since God values faith, we should not deal with the evidence. Again let's determine what the biblical model of faith is. Is God concerned with giving us evidence to put our faith in? Consider these four additional examples:

- The calling of Moses (Exodus 4:1-9): The Lord gives Moses miraculous signs to perform before the Israelites and Pharaoh **"so that they may believe"** (not hope or wish).
- Jesus' healing of a paralytic (Mark 2:1-12): Jesus performs this miracle before the unbelieving Jews, stating, **"that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."**
- Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:29-36): Peter explains to the listeners that he is a witness to the *fact* of the resurrection (v. 32). Based on this fact he then says, **"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** The resurrection gave evidence to Jesus' divinity.
- Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17:31): Paul points out that God has set a day when Jesus will judge the world and has **"given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."** Again, the historical fact of the resurrection is the evidence in which we are to place our faith.

Why would God be interested in providing the evidence so that people could "believe," "know," "be assured", or have "proof" if He wanted them to just blindly hope in something? If anything, such as Christianity, is true, then it will always correspond with reality (i.e. the facts, evidence, etc.). While our faith may go beyond reason – like truly understanding the Trinity or God's omniscience – it will never go against it. Biblical (and intelligent) faith is therefore placing our trust in what we have reason to believe is true. This is why Peter said, *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty"* (2 Peter 2:16). He understood the importance of demonstrating the validity of Christianity's truth-claims through evidence.

Two Essential Parts of Faith

Now that we have a biblical definition of faith, let's examine the two elements of correct faith and why they are so essential. Consider the following illustration, which we will call the "*Trust Fall*"...



Imagine you are standing on the end of a table and about to fall back into the arms of six strong adults waiting below you. As the "faller," you portray the first element of correct faith – *the person doing the trusting*. Obviously for this exercise to work you must have enough confidence in the people below you to take some action and actually fall backwards.

But correct faith involves **one other element** – there must be *a trustworthy object* waiting there to catch you that you are placing your faith in! In other words, your *subjective* (or "personal") faith must be placed in something that is *objective* (i.e. outside of you) and trustworthy.

To understand the importance of this second element, imagine that we alter one feature of our exercise: the group standing below you is now six *toddlers*! Would you consider this an important detail that has changed? Obviously so! Your faith, no matter how *genuine* or *strong*, would matter little now because the object of your faith is no longer trustworthy.

Now let's apply the principle of our illustration to biblical faith. While we do not want to diminish the importance of a person's individual faith, this must be balanced with the presence of a trustworthy object in order to be a correct and intelligent faith. Mormons and Muslims as individuals, for example, demonstrate a great deal of subjective faith (the *first* part of correct faith). The important question, however, is whether their faith is in a trustworthy object (the *second* part of correct faith). If Mormonism or Islam is not objectively true, then all the wishing or sincerity in the world will not help or make it true. Like the individual who would fall into a crowd of toddlers, sincerely believing he will be caught, people of various religions can be genuine and wholehearted in their personal faith, yet *sincerely wrong* because there is not an object worthy of their trust waiting to "catch" them.

This is why apologetics is so vital. It serves to demonstrate that Christianity is a trustworthy object. In other words, it logically demonstrates that the Christian faith is objectively true and therefore worth placing one's faith in wholeheartedly.

Often people are offended when discussing religions because they think Christians are somehow preventing people from believing whatever they want. It is crucial at this point to explain that you are not questioning the **sincerity** of their faith, only the **object** of their faith.

