

Faith

By David A. DeWitt

Occam's Razor [*or Ockham's Razor from William of Ockham (c. 1287 – 1347)*] is a principle of parsimony, economy, or succinctness used in logic and problem-solving. It states that among competing hypotheses, the hypothesis with the fewest assumptions should be selected. In other words, **the simplest explanation, that supports the facts, is usually correct.**

To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false; while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true, so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is truth or what is false. ~Aristotle



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Our Purpose

Relational Concepts has been organized to provide motivational instruction for men and women interested in being used by God.

We believe that Christian doctors, mechanics, housewives, realtors, lawyers, secretaries, plumbers, businessmen, etc. are the most effective spokespersons the church has.

These people are generally not in a position where they can take the time to go to a Bible college. Our purpose is to bring quality instruction to them, where they are, to be applied in their families, churches, businesses, and schools—the communities in which they live.

Foreword

There are two basic definitions of faith. Both understand faith as trust. But one definition says faith is a blind leap, the other says it is trust based upon reason applied to evidence. In this book, I will make a case for rejecting the blind-leap idea and accepting the reason-and-evidence idea. But I decided to do it with a process that I have never done before. Half of the book (every odd-numbered chapter) is a novel. The other half (every even-numbered chapter) is a more academic discussion of what happens in the novel. So every other chapter will be the continuing progress of the novel and every other chapter a discussion of what the main characters of the story are encountering, as they develop a relationship with each other, and a definition of faith. Enjoy.

David A. DeWitt

Chapter 1

A Week of Faith

A Class on Comparative Religion

Thursday Morning

I suppose one day Virginia Miller will tell her grandchildren this was the most significant week of her life. And she could never have predicted it. Her story began on a Thursday in September when she was 21 years old and a university student attending a more-or-less boring, or at least ordinary, class on world religions.

“**F-A-I-T-H.**” Professor Randolph Jorgensen, a tall, slightly overweight, balding man in his mid-50s, spelled the word slowly as he wrote it in large blue letters on a white board. Then Jorgensen pronounced the word, with a contemplative frown. The word served as his usual introduction to his first lecture in the class called “Comparative Religions 201” at the State University. This was actually the second day of class, but the first day was just about assigned reading, papers due, the exam schedule, and the professor’s grading system. It was a fairly large class, 230 students in an auditorium-shaped room that seated 300. The Sociology Department required the class, but some juniors, seniors, and grad students took it just to fill in some needed credits.

“Faith.” The professor reiterated the word, as he walked around the front of the large desk that otherwise separated him from the students. “It is the foundation of all the world’s religions. Over the course of the semester, we shall study the five major world religions—Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. We shall compare their similarities and contrast their differences. But we shall see that they all define faith exactly the same way. Of course, the particulars of their faith will differ, but their faith, the way they define faith, is exactly the same. So we shall commit a few classes to the study of faith. Would anyone like to suggest a definition of faith?”

One student said, "Belief."

Another student said, "Trust."

Someone else said, "Self-deception."

And another, "Believing something without proof."

Another, "Believing what you know ain't so," followed by a few chuckles.

The professor walked back around the desk and wrote each suggestion down on the white board. Then he turned back to the class and asked, "And what do all the world's religions place their belief in?"

"Something without proof," one student declared.

"Exactly," the professor continued. "Faith allows us to escape the bonds of reason. It allows us to get outside the confines of the box the rational world creates for us. Faith allows us to leave proof and evidence behind and use our imagination to soar beyond this three-dimensional prison and escape into a world of myths and stories that stretch our thoughts and develop our imaginations and our hopes. And our ancestors have evolved these myths into five major world religions, all of which are worthy of study, and all of which have the same magic called 'faith'."

"Excuse me, Dr. Jorgensen. Could I ask a question?"

The professor was not expecting participation at this point in the lecture. He looked three rows up to see a young lady with her hand raised. "Yes, of course, Ms....?"

"My name is Virginia Miller, but I go by Gin."

"As in cotton gin, gin rummy, or gin and tonic?" The professor's question was followed by laughs and chuckles.

"I'm kind of a dry, boring person, so I'd say cotton gin."

"And what's your question, Ms. Cotton Gin?"

"Is the belief in Santa Claus a religion?" The question was followed by some murmuring among the students.

"World religions are stories built upon ideas that have evolved over generations. Story has been built upon story to complete a myth of such a proportion that it captures the imagination of a whole race of people like the Jews, or a whole nation like India." The professor glanced back at his notes, "Let's see. Where was I? Oh, yes. Faith is the underlying..."

“Um, excuse me, Dr. Jorgensen, but I don’t believe you answered the young lady’s question.” This came from a young man seated two rows behind and three rows over from Gin. He was half asleep until Gin asked her question. And his first response to her interruption had nothing to do with the nature of faith. Looking at the thin beauty with big brown eyes and long silky brown hair done in soft curls, his real question was more like, *Where have you been all my life?*

“This class is about world religions,” Jorgensen responded. “We need to confine our discussion to the area of religion.”

“But you brought up the subject of faith,” the young man continued. “Ms. Cotton Gin asked a serious question, and I’d like the answer. Is faith in Santa Claus a religion?”

Surprised by the support, Gin turned to put a face with the deep voice that reiterated her question. That led to an even greater surprise. He was strikingly handsome, a little older, maybe a senior or a grad student. He had sharply defined features, with a body that looked like it spent a lot of time at the gym and jet-black hair long enough to curl around his collar. She could see he was tall, even though he slouched in his seat.

“It’s ridiculous to compare a child’s belief in Santa Claus with the sophistication of our major world religions,” the professor returned.

“Yeah, maybe,” the young man persisted, “but that wasn’t the question. The question was about faith. Is the faith the same?”

“It’s just not appropriate to compare a childish story to a world religion.”

“Why not?” Gin asked, rejoining the discussion. “It’s a pretty sophisticated story. Elves make toys at the North Pole, a place kind-a-like heaven. Santa magically knows who’s been naughty and nice, kind-a-like a god. Somehow he delivers them all over the world at midnight on Christmas Eve, kind-a-like a miracle. And he does it from a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer, kind-a-like Mohammed riding a magic steed to Jerusalem or the Hindu Krishna being a magic chariot driver. And Santa mysteriously comes down everybody’s chimney on

Christmas Eve, giving toys to good boys and girls, kind-a-like the rewards and blessings all religions promise.”

“And,” the dark-haired young man added, “it’s a story that has been developed by our ancestors for generations.”

The professor, now thinking that the room had become uncomfortably hot, began loosening his tie as he said, “The five major religions are complex belief systems that have governed the lives of their faithful followers for centuries.”

“But,” the young man persisted, “if faith itself is the same for Santa Claus and the major world religions, and Santa Claus is a childish fantasy to be rejected when one becomes an adult, isn’t the same thing true for all the major religions?”

“And,” Gin continued, “doesn’t the validity of the faith depend on the validity of what is trusted?”

“The validity depends upon the believer,” the professor insisted. “It takes the believer beyond his troubles, beyond his mundane physical, logical, rational world into a world of faith and hope.”

“Yeah,” the young man added, “like Santa Claus.”

Chapter 2

The Basic Issue

Every Day Faith

Where would you put your faith, on a scale of 0 to 100%?

I believe:

- My children will be obedient.
- We will win the game.
- The airplane will get me there safely.
- The roof will not cave in on me.
- Politicians are honest.
- I'm going to heaven.
- My spouse loves me.
- My social security # is...
- The Bible is true.
- I'll be home for dinner.

Faith is not a tangible thing. It's not detectable through our senses. Like hope and love, hate and fear, joy and sorrow, you can't see faith. You can't smell it, touch it, hear it, or taste it. Yet it's everywhere. There is no virtue in telling someone to "have faith." **We all have faith.**

Not only do we all have faith, but we all have a faith which takes us beyond the natural world. I recall a TV beer commercial showing guys doing crazy stuff (clapping, jumping around, leaning a certain way, doing some silly dance, rolling on the floor, rubbing each other's head) to help their favorite football team win. The comment was, "It's only weird if it doesn't work." As the people selling the beer knew, the faith of these football fans took them beyond their natural world into superstition. And I'm willing to bet atheists and agnostics do not have a problem with that commercial. Our faith can lead us to accept the supernatural, or the superstitious, the irrational or the illusory, miracles or mysticism. But faith cannot be avoided. **We are stuck with it.**

There are no animals with faith. But spiritual creatures all have faith. James tells us that *the demons also believe, and shudder*

(James 1:19). Our daily walk is governed by our faith, which gives us a certain mental perspective that functions like an aura, which surrounds us and allows us to assign meaning and significance (or insignificance) to everything we encounter. The reason we spiritual creatures cannot operate without faith is because we cannot escape thoughts about our purpose and our destiny. Those thoughts create things like fear, anxiety, peace, joy, ...and faith. **Faith is universal, essential, and unavoidable.**

The existence of faith is obvious. But here are some things that are not obvious:

- What is faith?
- Where did faith come from?
- What happens inside me to cause me to believe?
- When is faith helpful or destructive?
- How is faith increased or decreased?

Biblical Faith

Near as I can tell, the Bible never gives us a formal definition of faith. Many knowledgeable Christians will find a passage they think defines faith (most refer to Hebrews 11:1, which I will discuss later). But if you examine those passages, you will find they usually tell us how to apply faith, not how to define it. What faith/belief is, biblically, must be determined from the use of the word in its various situations and contexts.

Biblical Faith vs. Secular Faith

This book is all about **defining** the word “faith” or “belief.” [For reasons I will discuss later, I will use these two words synonymously.] There are many good questions and answers that could be explored concerning the application of faith. But the issue before us is not application but **definition**. The question I will attempt to answer is a simple one.

**Should faith be defined
with or without reasonable evidence?**

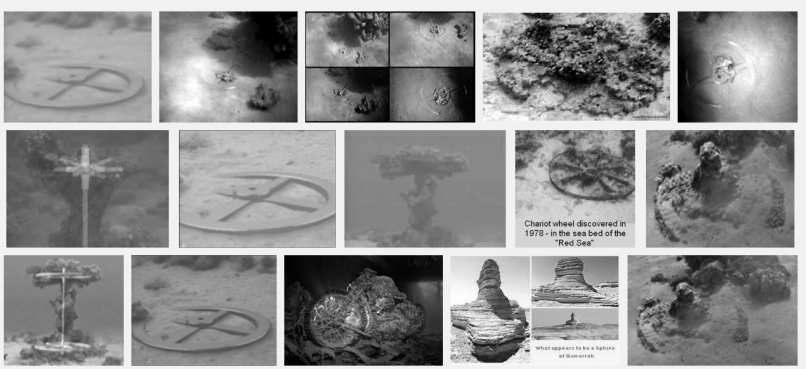
The world defines faith two ways: Secular Belief and Religious Belief.

Secular Belief is trust in reasonable evidence that does not include or consider the supernatural. If a businessperson says, “I believe this is a good investment opportunity,” or a coach who wins tells his team, “See what happens when you believe?”, he or she is not referring to anything supernatural. They are saying that if you apply reason to the available evidence, the probability is you will make money from this investment or win the game. The secular never includes the supernatural. If the businessperson or coach added, “Because a leprechaun told me,” you would not consider that a good reason to invest or believe the coach. The supernatural is destructive to secular belief.

Religious Belief is also a trust, but from there on it is the opposite of secular belief. Religious belief is trust without reasonable evidence. Religious belief is all about the supernatural and does not connect (say historically, biologically, physically, chemically, mathematically, economically, or archeologically) with the natural world. Of course, all religions attempt to apply their faith to the natural world, but none of them define it or establish it that way. For example, to say “Children believe in Santa Claus” is a supernatural belief, that has no connection to the natural world. One could not find Santa’s workshop, his elves, his sleigh, or flying reindeer in the natural world. There is no historical, biological, physical, chemical, mathematical, or archeological evidence for them. The same would be true of Zeus and Aphrodite on Mount Olympus, Krishna being a chariot driver, or Mohammed riding a magic steed to Jerusalem and then climbing a ladder into heaven. There is no connection between religious beliefs and the natural world.

There is the same evidence for “the angel Gabriel” revealing the Koran to Mohammed, and the “angel Moroni” revealing the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith, as there is for Santa Claus going from chimney to chimney.

By the way, I am often asked something like, “So how do we know Moses crossed the Red Sea on dry land and the Egyptians who followed them were drowned in the sea?” Answer:



Biblical Belief is totally and completely different from any other idea of belief/faith.

Biblical belief is always based in evidence.

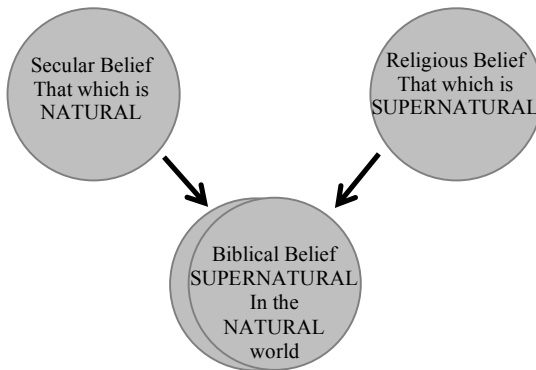
Let's consider two statements by the Apostle Paul:

- *The just shall live by faith* (Romans 1:17, KJV; quoted from Habakkuk 2:4).
- *We walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:6-9).

Paul saw the Christian life as one of faith. But suppose we were to ask Paul if he thought that the Greek gods, the Roman gods, and the Jewish Pharisees also lived by faith. He might say, “No, what they have is so different, it should not be called faith,” or he might say, “Yes, but it is a very different kind of faith.” At any rate, it's different.

When Paul said, *The just shall live by faith*, he was not just talking about the fact that the *just* had *faith*, but the kind of *faith* the *just* had. The apostle's faith was based on the historical, physical, biological reality, which they observed as *eyewitnesses* (2 Peter 1:16-18). They believed in what they had *seen and heard* and *touched* (1 John 1:1). Their faith was in what was substantiated by real, verifiable, reasonable evidence.

But when Paul said, *we walk by faith, not by sight*, he meant we live by the revelation from God, not by focusing exclusively on the natural world. In other words, biblical belief is totally and completely different from anything else. In the world, natural belief does not consider the supernatural, and religious belief does not consider the natural. The gap between the two requires a “leap of faith.” But biblical belief considers both. There is no leap or gap between the supernatural revelation of the prophets and apostles of God and the natural (historical, biological, physical, chemical, mathematical, or archeological) world. History is the course of natural events, penetrated by the supernatural events recorded in the Bible, which become a rationally verifiable part of the natural world.



Actually, the Bible condemns the whole idea of faith that trusts something that isn't actually real, something without rational, reasonable, logical evidence. The psalmist wrote:

*Their idols are silver and gold the work of man's hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak. They have eyes, but they cannot see. They have ears, but they cannot hear. They have noses, but they cannot smell. They have hands, but they cannot feel. They have feet, but they cannot walk. They cannot make a sound with their throat. Those who make them will become like them. Everyone who **trusts** in them (Psalm 115:4-8).*

Then by way of contrast, the next verse says, *O Israel, **trust** in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.*

Faith in idols of silver and gold was **trust without reasonable evidence**. There was no evidence they could speak or see or hear or do anything, or ever did do anything. But the Lord, the God of Israel, had proven Himself to be *their help and their shield*. When did He do that? How about when He led them across the Red Sea on dry land, fed them in the wilderness, defeated their Transjordan enemies, brought them across the Jordan River on dry land, knocked down the walls of Jericho, defeated the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. He gave them a law and prophets to help them become the most significant nation on the earth, in spite of their sin and rebellion. Then after centuries of supernatural evidence in natural world, the psalmist says, *O Israel, trust in the LORD*.

But many Christians ask, “What about Jesus? Didn’t He promote belief without evidence when He commended the faith of, say, the centurion in Capernaum when He healed his daughter, or the blind men in Jericho when He restored their sight?”

No, He didn’t. Jesus commended their faith because of their decision to trust Him. But their faith in Him was not without evidence. Why do you think they came to Jesus for healing instead of someone else? Do you think they asked for a healing miracle from everyone who passed down the road? Did they just pick Jesus’ name out of a phone book? No, they witnessed the evidence of His supernatural healing ministry in the natural world. Based on that evidence, they (unlike the Jewish leaders with the same evidence) trusted Jesus. Jesus commends their trust. He does not suggest it was a random choice made without evidence.

Notice how the Apostles Paul, Peter, and John define their faith in the supernatural as something tied to natural evidence, and warn against believing things without evidence in the natural world:

1 Timothy 4:7—*But **have nothing to do with worldly fables** fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness*

2 Peter 1:16-18—*For **we did not follow cleverly devised tales** when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses** of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased,” ...and **we ourselves heard this utterance** made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

1 John 1:1, 3—*What was from the beginning, **what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life ...what we have seen and heard** we proclaim to you also.*

Acts 1:3—*To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many **convincing proofs**, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

Chapter 3

Leaving Class

Thursday Morning

Professor Jorgensen continued his glorification of a non-reason based definition of faith, with no further reference to the Santa Claus question. During the remainder of the hour, Gin managed to twist awkwardly in her chair two different times, to glance back at the handsome guy that came to her defense. He was disturbingly good looking, but the most disturbing thing was the girl seated next to him. She was an attractive redhead with long legs, green eyes, and short hair. And she had her arm hooked through his. Each time Gin looked at him, he was already focused on her, which embarrassed her into quickly returning her eyes to the professor's white board.

When the bell rang, Gin got up slowly, stuffed her computer into her backpack just as slowly, then proceeded toward the door even more slowly, giving the good-looking guy a chance to catch up with her. He didn't. She made it all the way into the hall, with a disappointment she would never admit, before she heard his deep voice behind her. "Hey, Cotton Gin, wait up a sec."

She didn't resist the smile that accompanied her turn and a shove at her hair. "Thanks for the support in there, Mr.....?"

"Joseph P. Crowley, at your service, Ms. Cotton." He bowed dramatically. "And, even though it's not as creative as Cotton Gin, I'd like it a whole bunch if you'd call me Joe."

"Hi, Joe." Relieved that she didn't see the redhead, she extended her hand. He took it and held it a bit too long for social purposes, with no objection from Gin.

"I think you lied in there."

"What!" With that, she pulled her hand away. "I don't lie. Why do you think I lied?"

"I don't think you are a 'dry and boring person,' Miss Cotton Gin."

"Oh, well, I don't know, maybe I..."

“But since you don’t lie, I’ll just call you Cotton.”

“No, well, I mean people call me Gin.”

“Nope. From now on you’re Cotton. So tell me, Miss Cotton, if you’re so ‘dry and boring,’ why is it that while everybody else in the class was in an alpha state of hypnosis, you challenged our tenured professor and, I might say, quite effectively plastered the wall with his definition of faith?”

“You seemed to be focused on it, too.”

“No, you were focused on it. I was focused on you.” She was sure she was beginning to turn a bit red and wondered how she could make the subject more academic, when he continued with, “But then I heard what you said. And wow, what a terrific question. I wasn’t about to let him ignore it. So are you an atheist or an agnostic, or what?” Before she could answer, he said, “I’m an agnostic. Actually, I’m so agnostic, I can’t even be sure if I’m an agnostic.”

“I’m a Christian.”

“Really? A Christian? But then don’t you have to believe in stuff like Santa Claus?”

“No. Apparently, you do not know what a Christian is.”

“How about you tell me over a coffee at Starbucks?”

“Well, um, I...”

“There’s one on Elm Street, just across from the Preston Building.”

“Yes, I know, but...”

“Oh, come on, Cotton, I won’t bite. I just want to know how a smart girl can be a Christian.”

“No, it’s not that, it’s just that I have another class in 10 minutes. I could meet you there at 1:30.”

“I’ll be looking for you.”

Chapter 4

Faith, from the Dictionary and from God

In the English language, when it comes to God and religion, the words “faith” and “belief” are exactly the same. In the dictionary, one word will often be used to define the other. But that only tells us they are the same, not what they mean. To say “Faith is a belief in... something,” is like saying $X=X$. Sorry, but I’m an old mathematician, and it’s just meaningless to use the word you are defining in your definition. It’s no help to define “faith” as “belief.”

A more helpful word is “trust” or “confidence.” It’s interesting that most dictionaries define faith as trust, except in the area of religion, and then they define faith as belief. For example, the “New Oxford American Dictionary” defines faith this way:

faith |fāTH|

noun

1 complete trust or confidence in someone or something: *this restores one's faith in politicians.*

2 strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.

Notice that in the first definition we have a meaningful statement. Faith is “trust or confidence.” That gives us something to go on. The words “trust” and “confidence” give us a description, which allows us to understand and illustrate the word “faith.” But now look at the second definition. It says faith is “**a strong belief** in God or in doctrines of a religion.” So when it comes to God and religion, the definition changes to “belief” (whatever that means).

That’s like saying, when it comes to God or religion, faith is a strong faith. But what possible sense does that make?

X=X, or
X= a strong X

Huh? Faith is a strong faith? What does that tell me?

Nothing!

Surely, we need a better definition of “faith” than “belief.”

When defined outside the realm of God and religion, “faith” and “belief” get a better definition.

Let’s look at how the same dictionary defines “belief.”

belief |bi' lēf|
noun

1 an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists: *his **belief in** the value of hard work | a **belief that** solitude nourishes creativity.*

• something one accepts as true or real; a firmly held opinion or conviction: *contrary to popular belief, Aramaic is a living language | we're prepared to fight for our beliefs.*

• a religious conviction: *Christian beliefs | I'm afraid to say belief has gone | local beliefs and customs.*

2 (belief in) trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something: *a belief in democratic politics | I've still got belief in myself.*

Once again, we have some helpful words. “Belief” is an **acceptance** of a statement as true or real, a **conviction**, a **confidence** in someone or something, or better yet, a **trust** in something. Except when it comes to religion. Then belief is belief. The example of **belief**, in the area of religious conviction, is “Christian **beliefs**.” So once again, when it comes to religion or God,

Belief = beliefs
X=Xs

It is the view of this author that biblical Christian faith is not different from secular faith. Of course, the objects of biblical faith and secular faith are different. But the definition of faith is not. There is no need to use meaningless statements [$X=$ a strong X , or $X=Xs$] to define biblical Christian faith.

**Biblical faith is the same as
faith in math, science, history,
or any rational study based on evidence**

Consider the great theologians of the church: Augustine, Aquinas, Wycliffe, Hus, Zwingli, the Anabaptists, Calvin, Knox, the Wesleys, Edwards, Chafer, Lewis, Ryrie, and so on. These were men who saw faith as trusting evidence. The earlier ones defended a rational Christianity, and the later ones reformed the church away from mystical fairytale faith of the Middle Ages, back to the rational faith of the apostles.

The same goes for impacting evangelists and Bible teachers like Charles Haddon Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, Harry Ironsides, C.I. Scofield, Billy Sunday, J. Vernon McGee, and Billy Graham. This carries over to more current apologists such as Norm Geisler, Ravi Zacharias, and Josh McDowell. These are not men who believed that faith was private unverifiable “spiritual apprehension, rather than proof.” They are men who believe in the reasonable evidence for the Bible—internally, externally, exegetically, archaeologically, and historically. The Protestant Reformation was a back-to-the-Bible movement. But in doing so, the Protestants moved back to the rational faith of the apostles and abandoned the unverifiable faith which had developed in the Middle Ages.

Faith Comes From God

Acts 13:48 says, *...as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*

Before we go on, I want to bring up something else. Our faith is:

- In the sovereign plan of God the Father (John 10:27; Romans 8:28-29; 12:3, 6; Ephesians 1:3-11; 2:8-10)
- Paid for by God the Son (Matthew 20:28; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 John 2:2)
- Offered to us by the conviction of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 22:14; Romans 8:9-16; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:13; 5:5).

Ephesians 2:8 (*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*) more likely refers to salvation as *the gift of God* rather than *faith*. Nonetheless, both our salvation and our faith were foreordained by God *before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:4), *according to the good pleasure of His will* (Ephesians 1:5 KJV). It is not something I can manipulate or arrange.

Something foreordained by God is not something I am accountable for. But faith also includes something I **am** accountable for. I am called on to make a decision (John 1:12 *...as many as **received** Him...**believed** in His name*, John 5:24, *he who hears My word, and **believes** Him who sent Me, has eternal life*, Acts 16:31... *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*).

What I'm concerned about in this book is what I am accountable for. What I am discussing here is not what God does but what I should do. I believe everything is 100% in the sovereign plan of God, including our faith. But we also know that we have 100% free will to believe because we are held accountable for it (Revelation 21:8). There is no way for us to love God, serve God, praise God, worship God **or** have faith in God, without free will. God calls upon us to exercise our free will to decide to believe (Acts 13:48 *...as many as had been appointed to eternal life **believed***). So my question (in this book) is: "What do **we** do when we make a decision to believe?"

Some Christians emphasize the fact that those who come to faith in Christ are drawn by the Holy Spirit. That's also true. *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing* (John 6:63). It's the Holy Spirit that convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Those who believe are *enlightened* by God to believe (Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 6:4; 10:32).

But not everyone who is *convicted* is *enlightened*. *Many are called but few are chosen* (Matthew 22:14). What's the difference in the faith of those who are called and those who are chosen? If we assume that the faith of the chosen comes from the Holy Spirit, then what exactly is it that the Holy Spirit enlightens them to do, take a blind leap into the irrational, or trust reasonable evidence?

If we look at the kind of faith the believer needs in order to grow and mature in Christ, it is always based upon reasonable evidence. Maturing faith is always connected to applying reason and wisdom to knowledge and information (Ephesians 1:17; Romans 10:17; James 3:17; Hebrews 5:14; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). Spiritual growth is never defined as taking a blind leap that trusts something without reasonable evidence (1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Peter 1:16).

Does it make sense to say we are *enlightened* to one kind of faith for salvation and then *enlightened* to a completely different (totally opposite) kind of faith for maturity? If the work of the Spirit in applying our faith for spiritual growth must be based on a reasonable understanding of the Word of God, why would we expect the work of the Spirit to be different when it comes to believing in the first place? This would assume that we must completely abandon the kind of faith by which we were saved, for a diametrically opposite kind of faith for spiritual growth. Are we to assume that we get saved by a blind leap, and then grow by applying reason and wisdom to knowledge and information?

I suggest not. Actually, I suggest that many Christians have trouble growing in Christ because they came to Christ with a blind-leap-faith. Then they try to use that kind of faith to grow. This gets them to following charismatic figures with a false message, mystical experiences, superstition, hocus pocus events, and coincidental circumstances, rather than applying the Word of God.

Chapter 5

Having Coffee

Thursday Afternoon

Gin got to Starbucks at 1:20 P.M. Joe was already there. But he was sitting at a table with the tall redhead, the one who was hanging on him in class. Gin felt deflated. She was just about to leave, when Joe saw her and waved her over to their table. He introduced her to Sally Murphy, who greeted Gin in a cool but polite manner. Sally said, “Joe tells me you two are going to talk about the professor’s ideas on faith.”

“Yes, I’d love to have you join us.”

“That’s too heavy for me. Anyway, I have a class. But it was good to meet you. See you later, Joe.” Sally kissed Joe briefly on the lips and left.

“She’s pretty. Is she your girlfriend?”

“We go out off and on, but we’re not exclusive.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t have what you might call a regular girlfriend, I usually go out on weekends, but nothing serious, or even steady. Just thought I’d throw that in, even though you didn’t ask.”

They went up to the counter and ordered their coffees. He also got a piece of pumpkin bread and she got a caramel scone. When she took out some money, he said, “Oh no, this is on me.”

“But I can pay for...”

“Don’t be silly, Cotton. I asked you, remember? Besides, I’m loaded. Well, anyway, my family is. I’m one of those spoiled rich kids. I’m a spoiled agnostic rich kid. But at least I admit it.”

“I doubt that.”

“Doubt what?”

“That you are spoiled. It’s been my experience that spoiled kids don’t recognize it or admit it. Are your parents also agnostics?” she asked the question as they found a tiny table, a different one, one with only two chairs.

“No, Catholics. My mom’s afraid I’m going to hell, or at least destined for a long stay in purgatory. My dad’s too interested in the oil business to pay too much attention to what I believe.”

“Do you plan to go into your father’s oil business?”

“Yes, but not in administration. My major is chemistry. I’m a grad student working on a doctorate in chemical engineering. I plan to join my father’s oil company, but as a chemist, not as some sort of junior executive. My father pays my way through school and gives me a generous allowance in exchange for a commitment to go to work for him when I’m finished.”

“Why is a grad student in chemistry taking a 200 level course on comparative religions?”

“My advisor said I needed three credits outside of my major. I figure an agnostic should know something about what he doesn’t believe.”

“What do you believe?”

“Wait a minute. First, I want to know something about you.”

“What would you like to know?”

“What’s your major? What year are you? I’m guessing a senior. Actually, I really just want to know if you have a steady boyfriend.”

She chuckled a little, then she said, “I’m a history major with a minor in education, and I am a junior. I’m dating a guy named Bobby Gentry. He’s from my church back home. We dated in high school, then broke it off when I came to State and he went to JC. This year he transferred to State, and we started dating again. Is that what you wanted to know?”

“Are you committed to him? I don’t see a ring or anything.”

“No, we haven’t talked about any commitments. He’s a nice guy and a Christian. He’s...nice.”

“Cotton, I really do want to know about what you believe, but, well, I may be spoiled and rich, but I’m not a liar. I need to be honest with you. I want you to understand that my interest in you is not just academic.”

She looked down at her coffee and could feel the redness returning to her face before she said, “Yes, I know. I mean...I mean, I hope so. I mean, I hope not.”

Seeing he had unintentionally embarrassed her, he quickly followed up with, “So what do you want to do with history and education?”

“I want to teach children, but not at a Christian school. I want to confront secular education in the public school with the truth of the Bible.”

“Isn’t there truth in all religions?”

“Of course, there is, but that does not mean there is value in them. You’re a chemist. So tell me, if you mixed strychnine and water in a glass, there would be a lot of good water molecules in the glass, right? But that doesn’t make it a valuable drink.”

“So you are saying you believe the Bible is true. That’s your starting point?”

“Not at all. That’s my foundation, but I reached that foundation with real historical data.”

“The people I have met who believed in the Bible or the Koran or the Gita or the Book of Mormon or something just started with that belief, probably because they grew up with it. They sometimes say God predestined them to believe it, so they blindly follow what it says.”

“That’s called fideism. It says truth begins with belief. But if truth begins with belief, then all beliefs would have to be true.”

“And I think that’s what Professor Jorgensen wants to say, that all the religions are saying the same thing, or at least they all have value, so we should tolerate all of them.”

“But that’s logically impossible because the world’s religions contradict one another. For example, Jesus and the apostles both said He was the only way to God. Hinduism says there are many ways to God. If there is one way, there cannot be many ways. If there are many ways, there cannot be just one way. It’s a logical contradiction. Logic says a thing and its opposite cannot both be true. So it is impossible to say a religion, or a religious source book, is true simply because I believe it, or for that matter, because millions of people believe it.”

“So you don’t just start with the Bible? You start with logic and reason? How did such a pretty girl get to be so logical?”

“I took a course on logic, and found that the Bible fits logic perfectly.”

“But you did grow up believing the Bible. Right?”

“True, my parents and grandparents are Christians. My grandfather is my best friend. He just retired. He was a math and logic professor. I think I love my grandfather more than anyone. He and I have talked a lot about this.”

“But if you grew up as a Christian, how do you know that you don’t just believe the Christianity you grew up with and then use that belief to evaluate everything else?”

“I do use it to evaluate everything else. Just because I grew up with it doesn’t make it right, but it doesn’t make it wrong, either. I believe it because I investigated it rationally. It might surprise you to know I became a bit of an agnostic myself during my first year at State. The university is a doubt factory. But that’s okay. I think everybody should challenge what they grew up with.”

“You do?”

“Don’t you?”

“Well, yeah, I guess.”

“You grew up a wealthy Catholic, and you gave up the Catholicism. How about the wealth? Do you agree with your parents on the wealth part? For example, do you think they are too generous or not generous enough? Do they live modestly or do they spend too much on themselves?”

“They are definitely generous, but they also spend way too much on themselves. They’ve got two houses, a cottage on a lake, two boats, an airplane, and a condo at a ski lodge in the Alps. I have two older sisters who love that stuff, but there is no way I want to live like that.”

“So you didn’t just accept the way you were raised. Maybe you’re not so spoiled after all.” Gin smiled and looked at him. Her smile gradually faded, and their eyes became fixed. When she recovered, she asked, “W-W-What about the oil business that supplied the money? Is it bad, or corrupt, or illegal or illegitimate in some way? You seem to be willing to go into it as a chemical engineer.”

“No, there is no problem with the oil company. My father runs a clean business. The world needs fuel, and my father’s company supplies a legitimate need, and makes a legitimate profit.”

“But you did not just grow up saying, ‘Everything about my parents’ beliefs are true, so I will blindly accept that’.”

“Of course not.”

“You examined what they believed and found some of it right and some of it wrong.”

“That’s true.”

“So why not do that with the religion you grew up with? Maybe the religion is not a good foundation to stand on. But what if the Bible it came from is a such a foundation?”

Chapter 6

Faith-ism— Faith Precedes Evidence as a “Blind Leap”

Fideism

One of the most common ways the secular world defines religious faith is called “fideism.” The word *fideism* comes from *fides*, the Latin word for “faith.” It simply means “faith-ism.” It says that everybody must ultimately base his or her ideas on an unsubstantiated faith.

Fideism teaches that faith is independent of reason, that reason and faith are hostile to each other, and that faith is superior to reason for arriving at religious truth. The fideist teaches that religion must, without justification, take a blind leap into the realm of the irrational or super-rational. Fideists say we must begin by blindly trusting in something like the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Gita, or the Bible.

Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Kierkegaard was, in a sense, the classic fideist with his “leap of faith.” Kierkegaard taught that God's existence, or spiritual morality, cannot be known in the realm of reason. The decision to accept faith is neither founded on, nor should it be founded on, rational justification.

In “Fear and Trembling,” Kierkegaard focused on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac as an act of faith that was not based upon reason. He also taught that to believe in the incarnation of Christ was to accept the “absolute paradox.” Kierkegaard taught that reason cannot possibly comprehend such a phenomenon; therefore, one can only believe in it by taking a “leap of faith.”

Fideism says ultimately there is no evidence for anything. We

should honestly admit our own presuppositions and point out the presuppositions of others. So the fideist maintains that all reasoning is, by the nature of the case, circular reasoning.

Christian fideists also claim that faith alone is the way to God. Examples of Christian fideism include sayings like:

- “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.”
- “Only believe, only believe, all things are possible, only believe.”
- “Some may doubt that God’s Word is true, I’ve chosen to believe it, how about you?”

Reason and Faith

First of all, I should point out that Kierkegaard is flat-out wrong about Abraham’s faith. The same God who told him to sacrifice Isaac is the one who had repeatedly revealed Himself to Abraham. Abraham had spoken to Him on several previous occasions and witnessed the truth of God’s Word. This included his protection in Canaan, his wealth, and the prediction of the birth of his son Isaac, a miraculous event, given Sarah’s old age. Abraham did not make a blind leap. He obeyed God because of previous reasonable evidence.

There are serious problems with fideism.

1. A fideist must be asked if there is a justification for his faith. If no reason is given, then there is no reason to believe it. On-the-other-hand, if someone makes a justification and offers a reason to believe it (which they often do), then they are not fideists. For example, to say “the reason to believe in fideism is because presuppositions are unavoidable” is a rational, not a fideist, argument. Whenever I give reasons for my faith, my faith is based on reason, not on faith. There is no such thing as a faith-argument. The two words contradict each other. The fideist must deny his fideism to make a case for it. So either it offers no reasons at all or it offers self-defeating ones.

2. If we can simply believe without justification, then we must accept the beliefs of every idiotic or insane person. If truth is determined by faith, then there is no difference between sense and nonsense, sanity and insanity, or reality and mythology.
3. With fideism, one is faced with contradictions being true. If the Bible is true because it is believed, then so are the Koran and the Gita. But these books disagree with the Bible. It is logically impossible for both a thing and its opposite to be true.

There is no reason to assume there is value in something we leap to blindly, even though it is creative. If one's belief does not follow reason, then there is no reason to believe it.

Chapter 7

Coffee-Talk

Thursday Afternoon

Joe had to work at it to keep from staring at this stunning brunette sitting across the table from him at Starbucks. And how could any girl so enchanting date a boy who she could only describe as “nice”? She was not showy or flirty, or even outgoing. She dressed modestly, with only a little makeup, but with such a calm natural beauty, he couldn’t keep his mind from reiterating, *where have you been all my life?*

He knew she was interested in him or she wouldn’t have looked at him the way she did. But he also realized that, for some reason besides Bobby, she considered him off limits. Since she always responded enthusiastically when he stayed with theological questions, he said, “Let’s get back to the discussion in class. If Santa Claus is a faith, and Christianity is a faith, why aren’t they both fairy tales for children, but not part of the real world?”

“First, let me ask you a question, Joe. Do you believe we are safe here, sitting in this Starbucks?”

“What do you mean, ‘safe’?”

“For example, do you believe the ceiling will fall in on us?”

“No.”

“So you have faith that the ceiling will not fall in on us?”

“Uh huh.”

“Do you have faith that someone will not drive their car through that window over there and run into us? Do you have faith that a drive-by shooter will not drive by and shoot us? Do you believe it’s safe to sit here and drink our coffee?”

“Aaaaah, yeah. So?”

“Well, that’s why I believe in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. That’s why I believe the Bible is true. That’s why I’m a Christian.”

“You’re a Christian because I believe we are safe to sit at Starbucks?”

“Exactly.”

“Wait a minute, I got lost in the translation or something.”

“Well, why do you believe that the ceiling will not fall in on us?” She pointed up at it.

He looked up at it a few seconds before he said, “Beecause it never has fallen in on anyone before?”

“Good answer. Now, why do you have faith that a car will not come crashing through that window and kill us?”

“Beececause it would have to jump over two medians and run through two rows of parked cars to get here?”

“Another good answer. You are really doing well. And why do you believe a drive-by shooter will not drive by and shoot us?”

“We are on a university campus, not in a ghetto. There are cops everywhere, and the only street is two parking lots away. It would be virtually impossible to drive by and shoot in here.”

“Another good answer. Go to the head of the class. You get an ‘A’.”

“Cotton, you are anything but ‘dry and boring,’ but you lost me.”

“Well, when I asked you why you believed, you gave me logical, rational, fact-based answers. Your faith was based on evidence. And the evidence was logically tied to actual information in the real world. That’s why I believe in the truth of the Bible and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I get it, there are two different definitions of faith, and you don’t define faith the same way Professor Jorgensen does, when it comes to Christianity.”

“There are two definitions of faith, and they are nearly opposites. They are both about trusting something. But one is about trusting ideas that are supported by reasonable evidence, like the idea that it’s safe to sit here and drink our coffee. The other is about trusting ideas without reason or evidence, like Santa Claus and the world religions.”

“So,” Joe summarized, “you think Christianity is not a world religion?”

“It certainly has become one, and I suspect most Christians define their faith like the belief in Santa Claus, just like the

other religions. But the apostles didn't. They saw it as trusting rational evidence."

"But how can you verify the resurrection of Jesus? You weren't there. You can't repeat the event like a scientific experiment."

"Do you believe that Abraham Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theater?"

"Of course."

"Why do you believe that? You weren't there. You can't repeat it like a scientific experiment."

"I get it. I believe that because of the historical data, so I am placing my faith in evidence."

"You are applying reason to evidence. The apostles believed in the resurrection of Jesus the same way we believe Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theater."

"Wait a minute. Just exactly what was the evidence that the apostles had?"

"First, there is the generally verifiable empty tomb with the burial linen all still there. Where did the body go? The Jews and Romans could have easily put an end to Christianity right then and there. When Peter preached his sermons in Acts 2 and Acts 4, when thousands of people became believers, the officials didn't need to arrest him and command him not to preach. All they needed to do was to produce the dead body of Jesus. They knew what happened to all the dead bodies of everybody else who died on crosses. So where was the body of Jesus?"

"Couldn't the disciples have taken it?"

"That's what the officials thought they would do, so they put a guard at the tomb. It would be pretty much impossible for the apostles to steal the body. But if they did, it would assume they died for a lie. And notice what happened to the apostles. A group of rather ordinary guys, fishermen and whatever, became the most powerful group of missionaries of all time. The only rational explanation is that they saw Jesus alive from the dead, just as they claimed. And most of them died a martyr's death. People die for all kinds of things, but they don't die for what they don't believe in. Ever hear of Occam's Razor?"

“Yeah, something like: ‘The simplest explanation, that supports the facts, is usually correct’.”

“Right. And the simplest explanation that supports these facts is that the apostles actually saw Jesus alive, risen from the dead.”

“Did Jesus appear to other people?”

“There are 11 recorded reports of Jesus appearing to people after His death. Just a minute, I can Google these on my phone. Here they are:

1. To Mary Magdalene at the tomb
2. To some other women, near Jerusalem
3. To Peter somewhere in Jerusalem
4. On the road to Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem
5. To a group including ten disciples in Jerusalem (without Thomas)
6. To eleven disciples in Jerusalem a week later (including Thomas)
7. To seven disciples in Galilee
8. To 500 at one time
9. To his half-brother James
10. To the 11 in Galilee
11. To the 11 on the Mount of Olives just before He ascended

“There are also records of the historian Josephus, a non-Christian Jew writing Jewish history for the Roman government in A.D. 70. Josephus recorded the life, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”

Joe interrupted with, “If Christianity is the pursuit of real facts, like any other academic study, then in what sense is it based on faith?”

“All academic studies are based on faith. They look at information and make conclusions. To put it in legal terms, most of our historical and scientific conclusions are based on the preponderance of the evidence or beyond reasonable doubt. The same way you have faith this ceiling won’t fall in on us. Until we finish and walk out of here, it’s all a matter of faith. But we are sitting here because we are believers in the ceiling.”

“ I’d say nobody at this university would define religious faith that way.”

“No, because when it comes to religion, they change the definition of faith. They believe in reasonable evidence for everything else, but when it comes to religion, they define faith as trusting ideas without evidence, even contrary to evidence. Religious faith allows us to, quoting professor Jorgensen, ‘soar beyond this three-dimensional prison and escape into a world beyond reason’.” As she said it, she rolled her eyes and used her fingers to make quote marks. “It’s just nuts. It’s crazy. Apply that to anything else and you’re headed for disaster. It’s not creative, it’s just stupid.”

Joe began to realize his fascination with Gin was going way beyond her physical beauty. But before he could ask another question, she continued her socially-religiously-politically-incorrect lecture.

“Now let me ask you this. What historical evidence would you point out to verify the Muslim belief that Mohammed rode a magic horse to Jerusalem and ascended into heaven from the present site of the Dome of the Rock? What historical evidence would you suggest to verify that the rock on the top of that mountain began to rise up and an angel came and settled it back down as Mohammed went up into heaven?”

“I’m sure you are going to tell me.”

“ Zero, zip, none, nada.”

“Of course, they would say that’s a matter of faith.”

“Yeah, faith without evidence.”

“Hmmm. Like Santa Claus.”

Chapter 8

Defining Faith

It's time for me to state my formal definition of faith. This is what I would call good faith or biblical faith or how Christians should define faith:

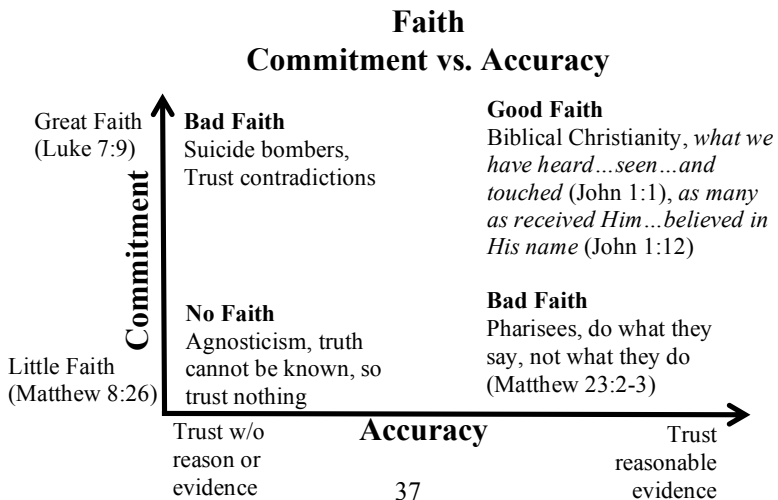
***FAITH IS A PERSONAL DECISION
TO TRUST REASONABLE EVIDENCE***

There are two aspects to faith:

1. Trusting reasonable evidence (being convinced **that** something is accurate) – Faith **that**
2. Making a personal decision (making a commitment to trust **in** what is accurate) – Faith **in**

You have probably heard the old story about the tightrope walker who pushed a wheelbarrow across a cable. When a spectator was asked if he believed the performer could do it, he said, "Yes." But when he was invited to get in the wheelbarrow, he declined. His faith did not include a commitment.

Let's put these two elements of faith on a graph:



Horizontally (across the bottom of the graph), we have the first aspect of faith, trusting **that** the evidence we have is reasonable (being convinced **that** something is accurate) – Faith **that**. This moves from trust without any evidence on the left, to trust based in reasonable evidence on the right. I am not suggesting that one’s faith increases from left to right, but that the probability of having faith in the right things (good faith) is higher toward the right. This is the Accuracy Scale.

Vertically (from bottom to top on the graph) is the second aspect of faith, trusting **in** something. Here we go from no faith, through what Jesus called *little faith*, to what He called *great faith*. Trusting **in** something is the Commitment Scale of faith.

The point of the graph is that both are needed, and neither aspect of faith is sufficient, by itself, to give us good faith.

The Pharisees are a good example of “trust that” without “trust in.” They applied reason to the historical evidence and trusted the fact **that** the Law was actually given by God to Moses. But they did not believe **in** the God who gave Moses the Law. They committed themselves to the Law of God, but not to the God of the Law. The comment of Jesus about this is interesting. He told His disciples,

The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them (Matthew 23:2-3).

Jesus seems to say that the scribes and Pharisees taught the Law (they believed **that** it was true), but they didn’t do what the Law said (they didn’t believe **in** the Law that they taught).

Suicide bombers, or parents who raise their children to become suicide bombers, are full of commitment. But they also have bad faith. The problem is, there is no reasonable evidence for their commitment. It’s a blind leap, which trusts stories and myths that have no basis in the real world. They trust **in** those

stories, but they have no reasonable evidence **that** those stories are true.

Biblical Christianity is the only “world religion” that calls us to trust **in** things **that** have reasonable evidence. The apostles ask us to receive what they have heard, seen, and touched. Paul defined the Gospel as not just the death of Christ for our sins but His resurrection. And as a proof for that, Paul lists five (of the 11 recorded) appearances of Christ alive, raised from the dead. Have a look at what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 & 19—

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.... If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Of course, we cannot witness the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, because it happened over 2,000 years ago. Just like we cannot witness the poisoning of Socrates, which happened about 2,300 years ago. But we can apply reason to the evidence and come to the conclusion (beyond reasonable doubt) **that** both of these things actually happened in the real world. It's not like the stories about Zeus and Aphrodite on Mount Olympus, which are meant to be myths and stories that nobody ever witnessed. They are given to entertain our imaginations, not give us historical facts. But the implication of trusting **that** Jesus rose from the dead is different from the poisoning of Socrates because Jesus said He was the only way to God (John 14:6). That implies we should make a commitment to also trust **in** Him.

Chapter 9

Sitting Together In Class

From Thursday Afternoon to Friday Morning

Gin suddenly looked at her watch and almost spilled what was left of her cold coffee. “Oh my! I’m late for my 3:00 class. Sorry, I have to run. Will I see you in religion class tomorrow?”

“Can I have your phone number?”

“I’ll give it to you in class tomorrow. I have to go. I’ll be late.”

“Where’s your class?”

“All the way across campus.”

“I’ll drive you. My car is parked right there.” He pointed through the window to a black Jaguar XJ. “It will get you there in three minutes. Now, how about that number?” She smiled, took a pen from her purse, reached out and took his hand. Then she opened it and wrote her number on his palm.

That night, at 10:07, she received the following text and gave the following response:

GOOD NIGHT COTTON

GOOD NIGHT JOE WILL I SEE YOU IN CLASS

TOMORROW

YEAH YOU WILL IF I CAN I SIT NEXT TO YOU

☺ THAT WOULD BE NICE

I’LL GET THERE EARLY AND SAVE YOU A SEAT

THANKS GOOD NIGHT JOE

GOOD NIGHT COTTON

When Gin got to Dr. Jorgensen’s class, Joe was sitting where she sat the day before, concentrating on some page on his computer full of lines and numbers.

“Is this seat taken, sir?” Gin asked.

“No, but I had to chase away three blonds and two redheads to save it for you.”

“I hate to deprive you of your blonds and redheads.”

“Boring and ordinary. Next to you, they are all boring and ordinary.” He took her hand as he said it. Their fingers laced together. But then Gin saw Sally walking in the door, and she quickly removed her hand. Sally sat on the other side of Joe, reached over and kissed him, on the cheek this time. The class bell rang, breaking the tension that might have been created.

“Today,” the professor began, “we will extend our idea of faith to various ways to believe. We will start with atheism.” He took a marker from his satchel and wrote a big blue #1 on the white board, followed by the word ATHEIST. “Atheists are not unbelievers, they are believers in natural matter and energy. It is a viable faith. And scientists have discovered things that atheists can believe in—like evolution and the big bang theory. Atheism is a worldview, not a world religion, but it’s a belief system that uses the natural world to create a morality, a purpose and a destiny for the atheist. The morality of atheism is to serve the natural world. Since we humans are the most highly evolved creatures, their purpose is to preserve and improve our lot. This faith is projected to hope in a future utopia on earth. So atheists are indeed people of faith.

“Next we shall consider the agnostic.” He wrote a #2 on the white board followed by the word AGNOSTIC. “The idea of the agnostic is to not believe in anything. Agnosticism says that truth cannot be known. A mild agnostic would say that someone might know something, but he or she does not. Their usual conclusion is, ‘since nothing can be known, nothing should be believed.’ But the agnostic does not realize that this is precisely the starting point for faith. Faith starts where knowledge leaves off.”

Joe elbowed Gin and whispered, “Apparently, I’m the foundation of all belief. Whatdoyouthink?” She just gave him a flat stare.

Jorgensen wrote #3 on the white board, followed by the word EXPERIENCE. Then, smiling, he announced, “This is the highest platform for faith. The key for believing is not out there in the facts and reasonings of the world but inside the human heart...” Jorgensen grimaced as he saw Gin raise her hand. “Yes, Gin, did you have a question?”

“How do you know this experience-based faith is not something stupid, immoral, or dangerous? In 1978, Jim Jones and more than 900 members of his People’s Temple committed mass suicide in the jungle of Guyana by drinking poison cool aid. How do know the followers of our world’s religions are not just cool aid drinkers?”

“The Jonestown cult was just that, a cult, not a world religion.”

“Isn’t ‘cult’ a word a larger group uses to describe a smaller group? What’s the difference when it comes to their definition of faith?”

“Following a crazy cult leader is not the same as following the precepts of established world religions that have been around for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.”

“So if we drink poison cool aid long enough, it’s no longer poisonous?”

“World religions,” the professor insisted, “consist of multitudes of people who have evolved their world religions into a stable morality.”

“Oh, I see,” Gin continued. “Modern religion is more evolved, like killing thousands of people by flying into the twin towers of New York, or poisoning people with sarin gas. You mean that kind of evolution?”

The professor was now fuming as he said, “The nature of faith cannot be judged by the misguided acts of a few foolish people. That overlooks all the good and all the stability those religions have given their followers. Christianity has just as many misguided acts as Islam.”

“True,” Gin persisted. “It’s the same as the ‘Christian’ crusades and inquisitions. The faith of those misguided Muslims and misguided Christians was the same. They trusted some hocus pocus story or irrational idea with all their **heart**, without applying reason to real observations.”

“Whatever you say about the world religions, you cannot deny they were effective in preserving their respective societies.”

Gin was too far in to back down. So she dug the trench between her and the professor even deeper. “So now it’s pragma-

tism that makes for good religion? It's good because it works? All the human sacrifice religions, both past and present, work pragmatically. We sacrifice our babies to a fertility god and our people are still fertile, so it works, right? Polygamy and the caste system work in the Hinduism of India. So polygamy and the caste system are good, right? It seems to me the worst religions are those that follow their heart."

"That idea is precisely what destroys faith," the professor continued. But his face had progressed from pink to red.

Then another girl sitting near the back said, "I think you are right, professor. Jesus speaks to me, and I don't need any reasonable evidence to prove it."

Another guy sitting near the front said, "Societies all need those irrational religions because most people are too emotionally weak or too mentally ignorant."

"But that kind of religious faith is detrimental to society," Gin argued.

The professor, now fearing he was losing control of the class, addressed Gin's comment. "Religion stabilizes society. What kind of evidence do you have for such a preposterous idea?"

"It seems obvious," Gin answered. "If you look around the world, the most foolish religions dominate societies that believe faith is about departing from reasonable evidence, like the Middle East Muslims, Central African and Australian tribal religions and Indian Hindus. If you look at the Jews, the British and the Western Europeans, like, say, the Germans, the Dutch, and the Scandinavians, they are people who define faith as something consistent with the evidence. And you might have noticed, they keep contributing to the world medically, educationally, technologically, scientifically, and culturally, while the people of non-evidential religions develop crusades, jihads, tribal wars, ethnic cleansing, and suicide bombers."

"That's just speculation," the professor interrupted. "There is no evidence for that."

"Maybe there is," Joe added, joining the discussion for the first time. "Somebody sent me an email about that." Looking at his computer screen, he said, "This says that Muslims make up

20% of the world's population. In the 20th century, they earned exactly seven Nobel Prizes, and none in the area of economics or physics. During that same period of time, the Jews, who make up .02% of the world's population, received 129 Nobel Prizes."

"That kind of religious bigotry might be acceptable with fundamentalist Christians or the Tea Party, but it is unacceptable in a university classroom. There is no evidence that Christianity is better for cultural improvement."

"I'm not a Christian," Joe came back, "I'm just saying that experiential, heart-felt faith can be a disaster." Without a pause, Joe continued, "It's just as much of a disaster in Christianity. The American continent was settled by Christians, more or less. Central and South America were settled, basically conquered, by Roman Catholics who believed that faith is something contrary to the evidence. For example, there is no evidence for protection supplied by rosary beads, the benefits of holy water, or the elements of communion becoming the physical body and blood of Christ. North America," Joe continued, "was settled, basically colonized, by Christians like Puritans, Separatists, Baptists, Brethren, and Reformed Calvinists. These people believed that faith was something based in evidence. So the question is, 'Which seems to have a more advanced culture, North America or Latin America?'"

"What about the witch trials in New England?" This, from a guy sitting to Joe's left, over by the wall.

"The North American Protestant Christians owned slaves and killed the Indians," said a girl sitting two rows in front of him.

"I'm not saying the Protestants were better people," Joe rebutted, "and I'm not sticking up for the Protestants. I grew up a Catholic. I'm just saying, if you look at the development of the reason-based faith of North America and compare it to the emotion-based faith of Latin America, which faith developed their societies more significantly? Whenever emotion took over the Protestantism of North America, they screwed up, too. It seems to me creative imagination is more apt to come from those with a rational faith, than from an experiential one."

“That’s just a bunch of racial prejudice,” a Latino student said.

“Both kinds of Christianity destroyed good societies,” another added.

“Look what the Christians did to the Blacks and the Native Americans,” another repeated.

“At least the other religions don’t go and force themselves on other people,” said another.

“And what about the religious traditions the Catholics destroyed in South America?”

“Christians are just a bunch of hateful bigots, opposed to every kind of progress.”

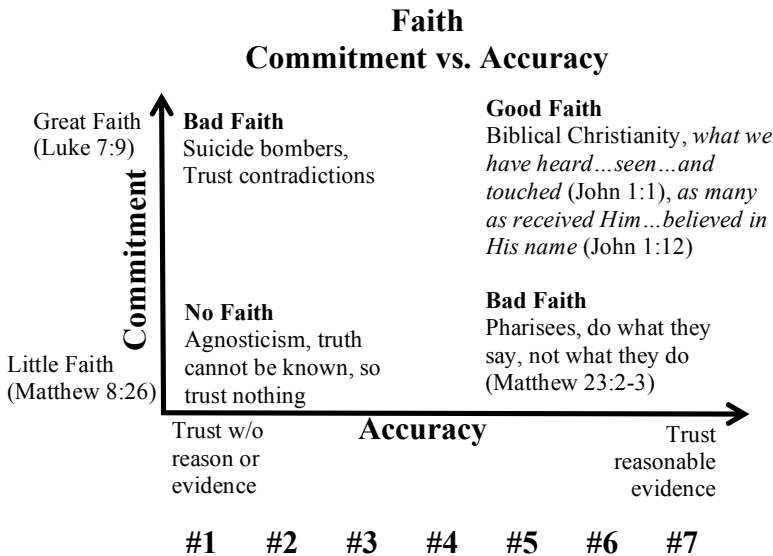
The professor finally had to dismiss the class, determined to start over next Tuesday.

Chapter 10

Determining What To Believe

Exploring the Accuracy Factor, the Horizontal Direction

We have learned that biblical faith is not a blind leap. Instead, we have discovered that it is some sort of trust. Faith is trust, but what kind of trust? Trust is confidence in the reliability of someone or something. But how should we establish that? Below are seven ideas about trust. I will go through them briefly, then I will suggest the seventh one as the best option.



If we placed these seven on the previous graph, they would go across the bottom of the graph in increasing accuracy from left to right, with #1 on the left and #7 on the right. Notice, I am not suggesting faith increases from left to right. Neither am I suggesting one has certainty on the far right. I am suggesting the odds of having accurate faith increase from left to right. To use legal terms, the further one moves to the right, the more

likely his or her faith will fit the preponderance of the evidence, or will coincide with what is beyond reasonable doubt.

1. Trust Nothing – Agnosticism, No Faith

Agnosticism says nothing can be known with any certainty. Therefore, nothing can be trusted. So according to agnosticism, we should not believe in anything. There are two kinds of agnosticism—hard and soft. Hard agnosticism says nothing should be trusted. The soft form says most things should not be trusted.

The hard form of agnosticism is immediately self-defeating. If nothing can be trusted, then the statement “nothing can be trusted” cannot be trusted. Therefore, there must be some things that can be trusted. So hard agnosticism eliminates itself. The soft form of agnosticism says most things cannot be trusted. But we all believe that. No sane person would say that everything should be trusted. Soft agnosticism is not helpful when it comes to determining trust. So agnosticism is either self-defeating or irrelevant.

2. Trust Natural Things – Atheism, Material Faith

Atheism says that there is nothing but natural matter and energy. So all questions must be answered with the scientific method. There are no miracles, no gods, and nothing supernatural. Man is just a highly evolved animal, and the only real answers to his questions are to be found in the material world. Atheism differs from the others in this list in that it is actually a worldview. As such, it offers something to believe in—natural matter and energy. But the discussion here is about the nature of faith, not the object of faith. Nonetheless, atheism is a consideration because it does trust something.

Nonetheless, when it comes to faith, the atheist is a step above the agnostic, because at least he does trust something—the natural universe. The basic philosophical problem with atheism is that it is a nothing-but-ism. If there is nothing but physical mat-

ter, then there is nothing to compare the physical matter to for identification. To say everything is matter is the same as saying everything is everything. But that doesn't tell us anything. If there is nothing spiritual (and nothing else), then the word "physical" has no meaning, since there is nothing to compare it to. If I looked in the window of an abandoned house and said, "There is nothing in this room but a table," you could disagree. There must be a floor, a ceiling, walls, air, or something besides a table. Otherwise, there would be no way to identify the table.

Then there is the general observation that people all over the world are incurably religious. From primitive tribes to world religions, from slaves to kings, everyone thinks spiritually. Atheists deny the supernatural, but they are usually superstitious. They wear their lucky shirt to the ball game, keep their lucky coin, wear their lucky ring, or buy a lottery ticket with a number that has come up three times that day. The Boston Red Sox are a baseball team, not a religion. Or are they? They believe they won the 2013 World Series aided by the fact that the players all grew beards. Apparently, they are superstitious, which is a form of the supernatural.

If the spiritual does not exist, then how is it that we can observe its effects—religion, civil laws, and moral codes? We believe in atomic energy, gravity, and electricity, not because we can see them but because we can see their effects. We have religions, superstitions, laws, and moral codes. Where did they come from? Why do we have them? Every effect has a cause. If humans are the most highly evolved beings, then how is it they have evolved into creatures who all demonstrate something that does not exist? Atheists believe they are evolving into a being without spiritual notions, but we already have such creatures. They are called animals.

3. Trust Your Experience – Experientialism, Awareness Faith

Experientialism says things like, “Trust your heart,” “Trust yourself,” or “Trust your feeling.” It’s a Jiminy Cricket faith—“Let your conscience be your guide.” What that really means is, trust the experiences that have made you who you are. Experience is the consciousness or awareness we have, caused by our personal involvement in life. So experientialists tell us that everything we know, we know by experience. Even reasoning, they claim, is just an intellectual experience. They suggest that everything involves a consciousness or awareness by someone about someone or something, therefore, experience is the only thing we can trust. For experientialists, there are no meaningful beliefs except those rooted in experience. For example, experiential Christians sing, “You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart.”

But experiences are not self-interpreting. They do not come with meaning labels on them. They are neutral and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Meaning must be brought to an experience, and experiences are capable of different meanings. For example, many Muslims are having dreams of a mysterious man in white. Charismatic Christians say it is Jesus. But Hindus can say it is Krishna. Muslims have said it is Isa. Atheists may say it is too much bad food too late at night.

When faith is defined as trusting an experience, then the only validity for the faith is the experience itself, such as when someone claims that God took them to heaven and allowed them to come back. The only proof of the experience is the experience itself. But an experience cannot be used to prove the truth of an experience. That’s circular reasoning. You cannot use the thing you place your faith in as the basis of your faith.

The problem is, no experience gives off meaning. Meaning always demands a context. So when the context changes, the meaning changes. Experiences have meaning only when interpreted in light of some worldview.

To say everything is an experience is the same as saying every-

thing is everything. To call everything an experience clarifies nothing.

4. Trust What Works – Pragmatism, Practical Faith

Pragmatism says faith must trust what is practical. “Religion is not to be judged by its roots [its sources] but by its fruits [its results]” (William James). Pragmatists believe we should trust what works in the lives of people. Is our faith livable? The pragmatists would also say we should not just trust what works for one individual for a short period of time. It’s what works in general, seen over the long haul, which determines what we should believe.

But success is not truth. Results may have been accidental or evil. For example, being honest on one’s tax return may be economically painful, yet right. Economic gain by oppressing the poor might work. It might even work over the long haul. But it’s not right.

It is impossible to know the long time consequences of anything (like providing servicemen in World War II with free cigarettes). Something may look like it works for a long time and yet be false (like assuming the world was flat or bleeding people with leaches).

On only pragmatic grounds, nearly any religion can work. You simply define what you are doing as something that works. Human sacrifices worked for the Aztecs. Infant sacrifices worked for the Canaanites who worshiped Molech. Suicide bombing works for the extreme Muslims. Polytheism worked well for societies all through history. Pantheism works for Hindus in India. Theism worked for Christians in Europe during the Middle Ages, now atheism works in the same place. But these religions contradict each other. So although they all “worked,” they cannot all be right. Pragmatism is not a valid basis for faith.

5. Trust the Facts – Evidentialism, Factual Faith

Evidentialism says faith must only be placed in facts, distinguishable pieces of reality. Faith must be based empirically in facts or events, not in ideas or theories, or else it is not grounded at all. For example, “I’m from Missouri. Show me!” Evidentialists believe that facts stand by themselves, apart from the framework of different points of view. They say, “Some things just speak for themselves.” Faith should only be placed in things that are observable, and objective. Private subjective observations should not be trusted.

You’ve no doubt seen some form of this picture on the right. Is this, in fact, a picture of an old lady or is it, in fact, a picture of a young lady? Can you see both ladies? The only fact is there are lines drawn on a white background. But what do they mean? We would like to say they represent an old lady or a young lady or both. But to do that, we would still have to bring the idea of “young lady” and “old lady” to the picture.



I remember a TV commercial for a certain beer. It began showing a guy walking across a hot desert. Then the scene changed to someone pouring a cold beer into a frosted glass. The only words in the commercial were, “Some things just speak for themselves.” I thought about a conservative Baptist minister I know who would not bring the same meaning to that glass of beer as the guy in the desert.

6. Trust the Laws of Logic – Rationalism, Reasonable Faith

Rationalism says faith must only be placed in what is logical. That which is logical can be known with certainty because it can be tested with the law of non-contradiction, which says a thing and its opposite cannot both be true. $A \neq \neg A$. If it is true that you have brown eyes, then it is not true that you have blue eyes. If some pens write with black ink, then it cannot be true

that all pens write with blue ink, etc. Opposite things cannot both be true.

There are some truths innate in the mind and known independent of experience. (The mind is not a *tabula rasa*, i.e., a blank sheet). One of those truths is that the mind always evaluates logically. Whenever we say someone is wrong, we are saying he or she is either ignorant or illogical.

It's true that faith must trust reason, but reason alone cannot generate truth. The problem with logic is the rationally inescapable is not necessarily real. For example, consider the statement, "If mermaids exist, they live in the sea." This is a rational statement, but it does not establish the existence of mermaids, or therefore, that we should believe in them. Pure logic provides us with no way to eliminate the "if." It is valid to test faith with reason, but reason must be applied to something already established as real.

7. Trust Reason Applied to Evidence – Analysis, Accurate Faith

Accurate faith is trusting reasonable evidence (in other words, reason applied to evidence). Neither reason nor evidence alone are trustworthy, but together they can give us an analysis that, although not 100% certain, is beyond reasonable doubt, and therefore, should be believed (Acts 4:16.). For example, I believe, beyond reasonable doubt, that the world is a sphere (not flat), that Socrates was poisoned by hemlock, that Lincoln was shot in Ford's theater, and Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. This faith of mine comes through analysis (applying reason to evidence) in each situation.

Logic is undeniable. For example, to say, "Logic cannot be used to determine reality," is a logical statement about reality. To say, "God cannot be understood logically" is to make a logical statement about the understanding of God. Reason (the mental use of logic) is inescapable. It is also true that the mind

is not a blank sheet. We are all born with a brain that evaluates logically. But reason does not lead to reality until there are real observations (real evidence) to reason about. So both reason and evidence are necessary. Once again we see that, since evidence is something real, and since reason is unavoidable,

**Faith should be defined as
trusting reasonable evidence**

Suppose we follow an investor through these seven evidences:

1. The Agnostic would never invest.
2. The Atheist would only invest in natural matter and energy.
3. The Experientialist would invest when he had a good feeling about the investment.
4. The Pragmatist would invest with a scheme that worked before.
5. The Evidentialist would invest when the information was right.
6. The Rationalist would invest when it made sense.
7. The Analyst would invest by applying reason to information.

Chapter 11

The Double Date

Saturday Evening

After the chaotic class was dismissed, lots of students were standing around talking. Joe stood up, then stepped back where he could look at both Gin and Sally at the same time. “I have a proposal,” he said.

“For who?” Gin asked.

“For both of you.”

Then Sally responded with, “You are proposing to two girls at the same time? Isn’t that a little barbaric?”

“You know me, I’ve always thought the old ways were better.”

“There is nothing like a good old conservative,” Sally commented.

“Seriously, I propose a double date. Sally, you and I could go with Gin and her boyfriend Bobby to the football game Saturday, and then out for pizza afterward. And we can talk more about this faith thing.”

“Sure. Sounds good to me,” Sally answered.

“I can ask Bobby, but I’m sure it’s okay. We planned to go to the game anyway. But how are we going to sit together? Our student seats are in different places.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that, honey,” Sally said. “We won’t be sitting in our student seats. Joe’s family has a glassed-in box up by the moon. They’ve had it for years. Trust me, there’s plenty of room for everybody.”

State lost. But the experience gave Gin a chance to meet Joe’s parents, very friendly people named James and Margaret, and his two sisters, Jessica and Amy. Both sisters were tall, attractive young women. Amy was married to a guy named Larry. They were there with two well-behaved children. Jessica was single and came by herself. It was also the first time any of

them had met Bobby. At 5'8", Bobby was about Gin's height. He was thin, with short blond hair, very cordial, and easygoing. He got along well with everyone.

"They almost won," Sally commented as they left the stadium.

"That's one of the things losers do," Joe said. "They almost win."

"What a pessimist," Sally commented.

"I'm not a pessimist, I'm a realist. I can't help it the world sucks."

"Right. So are we going to FREDDIE'S for pizza?"

"Well, actually, I had another idea, if you don't mind a slight change in plans." The other three stopped and looked at Joe. "Well, I thought it might be better to eat somewhere a bit more quiet, so we could talk without yelling."

"And, sooo..." Sally prompted.

"And so, I booked us a table for four at the Waldorf downtown."

"The Waldorf?" Gin questioned, "Isn't that, like, the most expensive restaurant in town?"

"Of course, it is." Sally rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, but I'm paying for everything, and it's quiet," Joe repeated.

"And formal," Sally added. "Coat and tie, dresses and suits, that sort of thing."

"Well, yes, I'm afraid so, and we don't have to go if you don't want to. But my reservation is for 7:00. We have plenty of time to change."

"I, for one, think it's a great idea," Gin agreed. "It's like an adventure. I've never eaten at the Waldorf."

"I'm in," Bobby added.

"All right," Sally acquiesced. "Let's go change."

Chapter 12

Faith And Desires

Exploring the Commitment Factor, the Vertical Direction

Augustine actually suggested that reasonable evidence created faith, that it was impossible not to believe what we understood to be real. He even said that Plato would have been a Christian, if he knew what Augustine knew. Although I appreciate Augustine's commitment to reason, the Bible does not support the idea that reasonable evidence alone creates faith.

Believing **that** something is true is not the same as believing **in** that which is true.

In John 6, we see Jesus providing evidence **that** He was the Son of God by feeding the 5,000. The people who were fed then followed Him to the other side of the sea, where Jesus told them, *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves* (verse 53). He was asking them to believe **in** Him, because of the evidence He already gave them. *As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore* (verse 67), despite having seen the previous evidence. Jesus gave them reasonable evidence, and yet it did not produce faith in all those who saw it. Apparently, they wanted to believe in Jesus' healing and feeding miracles, but they did not want to believe in Him.

So Jesus said to the twelve, You do not want to go away also, do you? [Literally, Do you not also wish to go away?] Next, Jesus asked the 12 what they wanted do. They were being asked to extend what they could understand, verified by the things He had done, to what they could not understand, eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They were being asked to believe **in Him**. But the question Jesus asked was about their desires, if they *want to go away*.

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (verses 68-69).

Sometimes, faith is a tentative decision based on limited evidence and later confirmed (or rejected) by future evidence. Moses decided to believe the voice he heard from the burning bush was really God’s because of the evidence that he was speaking to an actual voice and the bush the voice came from did not burn up. Later, that faith was confirmed by the plagues in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea on dry land, manna and water in the wilderness, etc.

Having been given evidence from John the Baptist, and seen the evidence Jesus Himself provided, the apostles believed. Then, having believed, they followed Jesus and received more evidence that led them *to know that You are the Holy One of God* (verse 69). Now, Peter, speaking for the group, revealed why they believed **in Him** when the crowd did not. They **desired** to know the *words of eternal life*.

Next, *Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him* (verses 70-71). Judas knew what the other disciples knew. He saw the healings, the calming of the storm, Jesus walking on the water, and people raised from the dead. He knew **that** it was true, but he chose not to believe **in** the reasonable evidence available to him. Judas did not have the same desire the others had.

The gospel of John records Jesus doing miracles, including the raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 12. Yet despite all of this evidence, in 12:37, John says, *but though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him*. The people had all the evidence in the world, including seeing someone raised from the dead, and *yet they were not believing in Him*.

After Jesus ascended into heaven and the church age began, Peter and John healed a lame man and preached the Gospel in Jerusalem. Because of their preaching, Peter and John were arrested and put in prison. Then the *rulers and elders and scribes* got together and said to one another, *What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it* (Acts 4:16). The evidence should have led to faith. They should have chosen to put their desires in the direction of the evidence. Instead, they acknowledged the reasonable evidence, and tried to keep people from hearing it and believing. The *rulers and elders and scribes* did not believe because they would have lost their power. They didn't believe because they didn't want to.

James 2:19 says, *You believe **that** God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.* Demons believe **that** there is a God, so much so, apparently, they even seem to fear Him. But demons do not place their faith **in** the God **that** they believe exists.

I hate MRI machines! The first one I was told I needed, made me so claustrophobic I won't get in another one (even the so-called "open" ones). I believe **that** MRI machines are safe, but I'm not going to get **in** one. I don't believe **in** putting my body in an MRI machine, because I don't want to.

Why didn't the Pharisees believe in Jesus, when the apostles did? Both had basically the same evidence for His being the Messiah, but the Pharisees thought He was demonic. As I study the Pharisees, it seems to me the difference was, the Pharisees had a lot to lose if they accepted Jesus as the Christ. They had a lifestyle, a system of governing, a source of power and authority, all based in the rabbinic traditions, which they would have to give up if they believed in Jesus. They did not accept Jesus as the Christ because they didn't want to (John 11:47).

So there is another element in faith beyond the evidence—a desire to act in accordance with that evidence. When our desires are contrary to the evidence, we have bad faith, or at least we refuse to have good faith. So we can add this to our understanding of faith.

It seems that desire is one of the elements that causes us to make the commitment depicted in the vertical component of the faith graph given earlier. Going from bottom to top on our graph, we could list seven components of commitment (as we considered 7 categories of accuracy). Those seven might be something like: 1. Apathy, 2. Curiosity, 3. Interest, 4. Enthusiasm, 5. Eagerness, 6. Wishing, 7. Desiring. Again, I am not suggesting that one’s faith increases from #1 to #7, only that the likelihood of making a decision to believe increases.

Bad Faith occurs when our desires are contrary to the evidence. **Good Faith** occurs when our desires are in the direction of the evidence.



1. Agnosticism 2. Atheism 3. Experimentalism 4. Pragmatism 5. Evidentialism 6. Rationalism 7. Analysis

So there is both an objective and subjective element in faith.

- The **objective element** is the **reasonable evidence**.
- The **subjective element** is our **inward desire**.

Good faith occurs when we can turn our subjective desires in the direction of the objective evidence.

Chapter 13

They were the youngest foursome at the luxuriant Gold Stone Restaurant on the top floor of the Waldorf Hotel. The waiter welcomed Joe by name and escorted them to a table in a walled-off area to the side of the otherwise full room. As they settled in with some drinks, they chatted more about the game. Joe and Bobby talked about which teams State would have to beat to make it to a bowl game. After they ordered their appetizers and salads, Joe said, “Bobby, I suggested this evening to discuss the ideas about faith being presented in our comparative religion class. I realize this puts you at a bit of a disadvantage, since you are not in the class. Has Gin brought you up to speed on what happened yesterday?”

“No, she just asked me if I’d be interested in this double date, and it’s been great. And thanks for the invitation to your parents’ box. That was really special.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. Let me see if I can get you up to speed on this. I’ll just give you my understanding of what happened in class. Our professor believes that faith is a leap away from reason, or I think he’d say above reason, into trusting things that don’t adhere to the laws of reason.”

“Yes, I would agree with that,” Bobby added.

“He also... You would?”

“Sure, I’d say faith is a gift of God to believe things that you can’t get with reason.”

“But Gin doesn’t think so. If I understood her right, she thinks Christian faith is reasonable. Is that right?” Joe looked at Gin, without saying her name. He almost called her “Cotton,” but then realized that would be inappropriate in this setting.

“That’s right. Bobby and I disagree about what faith is,” Gin answered.

“Really, and you are both Christians. That’s interesting.”

“Gin’s grandpa is a retired logic prof,” Bobby added, “so they try to tie faith to logic, but I don’t think so.”

“Yes, she mentioned her grandfather.” Joe was now even more curious. “But I didn’t realize you disagreed. Tell us more about what you think, Bobby.”

“I think God gives us faith. We are chosen to believe and so we just do.”

“Do you believe in the same things you grew up with?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“So you believe God gave you the faith you grew up with?”

“Yes. I think God predestined certain people to be born where they will hear the Gospel and believe it. Those who don’t believe it were not chosen to believe it.”

Then Gin interrupted with, “And that is exactly what the Muslims believe, so the only reason Bobby isn’t a Muslim is because he wasn’t born one. But that means he has no reason for what he believes, which means there is no reason to believe it. So we can all just believe what we believe because we are born that way. Of course, all religions can’t all be right because they contradict. So we can just have jihads or crusades or whatever because there is no reasonable way to discuss our beliefs.”

Bobby added, “Gin and I have agreed to disagree about this.”

“I see,” Joe said. He thought a minute, then he asked, “Agreeing to disagree ends all discussion, doesn’t it? I mean when two people agree to disagree, then it seems to me they’re either saying the subject is not important, or they have a relationship that isn’t important enough to discuss an important subject.”

Gin sat silent, looking at Bobby. She had actually never thought of that. There was nothing more important to her than her faith in God, yet she had agreed to disagree with Bobby about what was most important to her. What did that say about their relationship? It meant she was willing to keep it shallow enough to not discuss what was central to her life.

Gin understood that she could not marry someone like Joe because he was an unbeliever, even though she had to admit she

was more attracted to him than anyone she had ever met. Yet, she had been willing to think about marrying Bobby because he was a Christian, even though they disagreed about the very nature of faith.

The waiter brought the salads and appetizers, then took their entree orders. After everyone commented on how fantastic the appetizers were, Gin brought the discussion back to faith with, “Sally, you haven’t said much about all this faith talk. I’d like to hear your thoughts.”

The question seemed to catch Sally by surprise. “Oh, um, well, I think I kind of agree with Professor Jorgensen. The world is full of religions, and they all seem to do some good for the people who believe in them.”

“So you are more interested in the fact that they are giving hope to their followers than whether or not they are right about what they believe.”

“Yeah, but, hey, I don’t want to argue about it.”

“No, I understand,” Gin continued, “you don’t want to make religion a divisive issue. But I’d really like to ask you another question.”

“Okay.”

“I have been saying that there is a rational case for the Bible, but not for any other religious source book. If the Bible is right, then all other religions are wrong and therefore destructive, which means they are bad for their followers. No matter how much hope they give them, it’s false hope. Now, since that’s what I believe, we would have to agree to disagree, is that right?”

“Yes, I guess so. You seem to be a nice person and all, but if you think all other religions are wrong or bad, then, yeah, I guess we would have to agree to disagree.”

Next, Gin looked at Joe and asked, “Do you think it matters whether or not religious faith is based on reasonable evidence?”

“Heck yes, it matters. If a religion teaches that we should blindly believe in nonsense, and it seems to me they all do, then we might as well believe in Santa Claus our whole lives.”

“So that means you and Sally have to agree to disagree about it?” Gin made the statement sound like a question and began looking back and forth between Joe and Sally.

“Sure,” Sally answered, “but it’s not all that important, at least not to me.” Then she looked at Joe. So did everybody else.

Surprisingly, it was Bobby who asked, “So is that important to you, Joe?”

Instead of answering the question, Joe looked at Sally and asked, “I’m curious. Is there anything you don’t believe is right or good to believe in?”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, you know, like, leprechauns, Big Foot, the Loch Ness monster, aliens from outer space, ghosts, or any of the world’s religions or cults.”

“Not if they don’t hurt anybody, and they give their followers some hope or something to live for.”

Next, Gin broke in with, “Sally, what’s your major?”

“Business administration. Why?”

“Suppose someone made their business decisions based on poor management, or a Ponzi scheme. Would you say those were good things to believe in?”

“No, but that’s business, not religion.”

“So,” Joe interrupted, “that’s what you two would have to agree to disagree about. Your relationship with each other can be cordial, but not very deep or involved, because even though it’s not important to Sally, it is important to you. Right?” This time Joe was looking at Gin.

Chapter 14

Biblical Faith — Trust in Rational Evidence

What we have learned is that the world has two different definitions for faith—one for religion and one for everything else (like science, history, and everyday life). The one for religion says that faith is a blind leap, usually into the acceptance of some book (like the Bible, the Koran, the Gita, etc.) or a system (like Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism). Religious faith supposedly elevates us above reason and evidence to the peace and hope understood through the symbolism of the myths and stories of those established religions. Or, it can be a personal experience that does the same thing. Either way, it defines faith as trust without reasonable evidence, or even contrary to reasonable evidence.

When we turn to the Bible, however, we find that the faith God calls us to is the same as it is in rational studies like science, economics, history, and everyday life.

The Bible Does Not Restrict the Use of Rational Faith to a Belief in God

In the Bible, the same word used for believing in God is used for believing in people, things, and general information.

In The Old Testament

The word אָמַן (*aman*) is used for Abraham's *belief* in God, and the *belief* the Israelites should have in God.

Genesis 15:6—Abraham *believed* [אָמַן (*aman*)] *in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*. This is about Abraham trusting the revelation from God, who had already given Abraham evidence of Himself. In the next verse (15:7), God pointed to that evidence when He said, *I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it*.

Numbers 14:11—*The LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not **believe** [אָמַן (aman)] in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?* This is about believing God. And notice, God expected the Israelites to believe in Him because of the reasonable evidence He supplied in *all the signs which I have performed in their midst*.

But the same Hebrew word was used for belief (or disbelief) in people, things, and ideas.

Genesis 45:26—*Jacob did not **believe** [אָמַן (aman)] his sons.* That is, he did not trust their word as reasonable evidence for Joseph being alive.

Exodus 4:1—*Then Moses said, “What if they will not **believe** [אָמַן (aman)] **me** or listen to what I say?* Notice, this is about Israel believing Moses. God’s answer to that was to give them some reasonable evidence.

2 Chronicles 9:5-6—*Then she [the queen of Sheba] said to the king [Solomon], “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless **I did not believe** [אָמַן (aman)] **their reports until I came and my eyes had seen it.** And behold, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me. You surpass the report that I heard.* The queen of Sheba *did not **believe*** the evidence she had been given about Solomon’s wealth and wisdom. But when she saw it, she had the reasonable evidence she needed to believe it.

Job 39:10-12—*Can you bind the wild ox in a furrow with ropes, Or will he harrow the valleys after you? Will you trust [אָמַן (aman), believe] him because his strength is great and leave your labor to him? Will you have faith [אָמַן (aman), believe] in him that he will return your grain and gather it from your threshing floor?* When God spoke to Job out of a storm, one of the things He talked about was the animals. In this pas-

sage He asked Job, two times, if he believed in (or had faith in) the wild ox. The word for “faith” or “belief” [אָמַן (*aman*)] is the same word for *believed* used in Genesis 15:6 (*Abraham believed* [אָמַן (*aman*)] *in the Lord*). So God used the same word and the same definition for believing (or not believing) in God, that He used for believing (or not believing) in the wild ox. Clearly, God did not change the definition of faith between the two passages, only the object of faith.

In the New Testament

In the New Testament, faith was always based upon reasonable evidence.

Luke 24:17-24—This is the account of the two on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus when Jesus came up to them, and they were prevented from recognizing Him.

And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days.” And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene...

In other words, the things that happened. The death and resurrection appearances of Jesus were generally recognized, publicly verifiable events. Apparently, the whole city was talking about it to the extent that Cleopas was amazed that this supposed stranger walking down the road had not heard of it. Today, he might have said, “What! Are you from Mars, or living in a cave? How could you possibly even walk through Jerusalem without hearing about it?”

John 4:22—Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “*You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews.*” In other words, the faith of the Samaritan religion was without reasonable evidence. It was something without knowledge. There was no evidence for it.

But the Jewish faith was based on the knowledge that came through reasonable evidence.

Acts 4:19-21—The reason Peter and John gave for proclaiming the Gospel was not that they had some new religion for people to accept, rather they said, *we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard* [that is, what they had observed from reasonable evidence.]

Hebrews 2:3-4—The author of Hebrews told us our salvation is based upon evidence, which was *spoken through the Lord*, and then *was confirmed to us by those who heard* with the evidence of *signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

1 John 4:16—The Apostle John said, “...*we have come to know* [that is from reasonable evidence] *and* [based on that evidence] *have believed the love which God has for us.*”

Chapter 15

The Encounter

Saturday Night

The two couples enjoyed a dessert after the meal. The conversation jumped from subject to subject—their majors, their favorite music, and some professors they liked and disliked. It was after 10 when Joe drove everybody home. First, he dropped Sally off at her apartment. He walked her to the outer door of her apartment building. They kissed briefly and cordially just outside the door. Joe waited until she entered the building before he returned to the Jag. Next, he drove Bobby and Gin to where Bobby's car was parked near the stadium. As Joe stopped the Jaguar, Bobby asked, "Joe, would you mind taking Gin home? I have to go to the chemistry lab yet tonight. The lab is closed tomorrow, so I'll have to pull an all-nighter to get a report done that's due Monday morning."

"Sure, if that's okay," Joe turned to look at Gin, sitting with Bobby in the back seat.

"No problem," Gin answered. Then Bobby kissed her, even more briefly than Joe had kissed Sally, and said he'd pick her up tomorrow for church. Then he closed the door, hopped in his own car and headed off toward the chemistry building.

Joe got out and opened both front and back doors on the passenger side of the Jag. "How about sitting up here with me? I don't want to feel like your chauffeur. Besides, I have another question, and I don't want to be looking over my shoulder at you. And I do want to look at you. And I don't think it's safe."

As she got out of the back and slid into the front seat, she said, "What's not safe, looking backwards or looking at me?"

"Definitely, looking at you. Driving while looking backward, no problem. Looking at you, driving or not, big problem."

"I hate to be the source of problems for you."

"Yeah, well, it's too late for that." Joe began to drive away from the stadium parking lot before he said, "It seems to me almost everybody defines faith like Bobby and Sally and the

professor, some sort of blind leap or experiences devoid of evidence. My question is, how many Christians think like you do? Of course, I guess the only ones I knew well were the Catholics I grew up with. But, like, historically are there others who think like you?"

"The history of Christian faith is quite simple. The apostles of the first century held to faith as trusting reasonable evidence. Although some, especially in North Africa, were more mystical, the idea of reason-based faith continued through Augustine in the 400s. Then faith became more and more mystical until, by the Middle Ages, it was all about experience, fables, and stories.

"Before the Reformation the humanists began using reason to attack Christianity. So when Martin Luther initiated the Reformation in the 1500s, he rebelled against reason, saying it was against faith. But during that same time, the Anabaptists re-baptized each other, declaring their infant baptism in the Roman Catholic Church to be illegitimate because infants can't reason, hence they can't have faith. Luther and the Anabaptists never agreed on that.

"But then evidence for the reliability of the Bible and the resurrection of Jesus, together with archeological support for many biblical events, led to a return of the apostles' definition. This was true especially among the Puritans, Separatists, Brethren, and Baptists of the 1600s. By the time of the Great Awakening in the 1700s, men like Jonathan Edwards taught what the apostles taught, that faith should only be based on reason. But most of the Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox continue to believe in a leap of faith, and in the 1900s, the charismatics did, too. So, today, we have both camps. I'd say, today, over 80% of those who would identify themselves as Christians believe in a leap of faith."

It was not a long drive to Gin's apartment. They arrived just as she finished her answer. As he shut off the engine, Joe said, "So it's reasonable faith through the 400s, mystical faith through the Middle Ages to the Reformation of the 1500s, then a return to reasonable faith until recently, and now it's a mixed bag, with most Christians being mystics. Is that about right?"

“Sounds about right.”

“You are amazing. How do you know all that?”

“I told you, my grandfather. He’s a solid Christian and a retired logic professor. Apologetics, making a case for Christianity, is kind of like his hobby. We’ve talked about this for hours. We’ve almost been banned from Thanksgiving, Christmas, and other family events because we just sit and talk about this. Now, Joe, I have a question. What do you think about this? Does it make sense to you?”

“I’m thinking about it.”

“Any chance you might reconsider your agnosticism?”

“Maybe. Actually, agnosticism, by definition, has to be reconsidered. It doubts everything, so it has to doubt itself. But I’ve never considered the Bible to be, like, real history.”

“I really wish you would, Joe. It’s important. If the Bible is right, you are headed for hell, and I don’t want you to go there. And I... It’s personal. I want... I don’t want...” She stopped talking and stared out the window.

He took her face in his hands and turned her toward him. “It will stand between us, won’t it?”

She didn’t say anything, but he could see tears begin to form in the big brown eyes he was watching.

After maybe a whole minute, she said, “I should go now.”

He released her, walked around the car, and opened her door. When she stood out of the car, he slipped his arm around her and pulled her close. They stood for a minute, neither of them talking or moving. Then he said, “What’s the problem, Gin? You know I won’t hurt you or violate your Christian standards. If you don’t want me, just say so.”

She looked into his eyes through tears in her own. “The problem? The problem is... the problem is, I want you too much.” With that she turned and ran toward her apartment building. Before she opened the door, she turned back and looked at him again for a few seconds. He was still standing in the same place, outside the Jag. Then she hurried inside. He waited until she disappeared in the hall. Then he got back in the car and slowly drove away.

Since her roommate was gone for the weekend, Gin knew she could invite him up. And she trusted him. It was herself she didn't trust. Before opening her apartment door, she got out her phone. She wanted to call him and to ask him to come back. She stared at it a long time before she decided to open her door first. As she opened the door, she reached for the light switch. When the light came on, she closed the door, turned back toward her kitchen area, and gasped. There was a man sitting at her kitchen table with a ski mask on, holding a gun, and it was pointed at her.

Chapter 16

A Brief History of Christian Faith

As outlined above, the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles defined faith as trusting reasonable evidence. The next major theologian in the church was Augustine. Augustine clearly based faith upon reasonable evidence.

Augustine (354-430), and the Relationship between Faith and Reason

Augustine's view of the relationship between faith and reason can be summed up in the following:

1. Reason discovers true authority.
2. True authority demands faith.
3. Faith rewards with understanding.
4. Reason helps explain faith.

According to Augustine, reasonable evidence was the basis of faith because “no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed.” He thought that reason is the means of discovery and, as such, is a prerequisite to faith. He understood that faith was a decision based upon reason. For Augustine, reason led to understanding and knowledge, which in turn led to what he called “authority.” And then that authority (such as the Bible) demands belief. So Augustine taught that reason applied to evidence led inevitably and automatically to belief. To Augustine, it would be impossible to not believe something you discovered to be reasonably true. And that inevitable faith gives one an understanding, which further explains faith. So, according to Augustine, reasonable understanding both creates faith and explains the faith it creates.

In *City of God*, Augustine argued:

It is indubitable [impossible to doubt] that the resurrection of Christ, and His ascension into heaven with the flesh in which He arose, is already preached and believed in the

whole world. If it is not credible, how is it that it has already received credence in the whole world?

Whatever you think about Augustine's evidentialism, the fact is, he believed the resurrection of Christ to be a physical, bodily, historical reality. For him, faith in Christ was no blind leap. It was trusting reasonable evidence of something that happened in the real world. Actually, he argued that if Plato had the evidence that was available to him (Augustine), even Plato himself would have become a Christian.

Bourke translated Augustine as follows:

Reason, therefore, in the form of analyzing the evidence of miracles and prophecy, and by philosophically demonstrating Christianity's plausibility, helps to discover true Authority to the end that one might bow to that Authority in the humble submission of faith (*Augustine's Quest*, 58).

Augustine understood that once reasonable evidence had established what he called "Authority," then that authority (such as the Scripture of the Bible) became the foundation of further reasoning.

Authors R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley point out that to Augustine,

Reason may establish authority as a whole. Once that authority source is discovered, however, its individual teachings are accepted on the basis of its authority and only clarified by reason (44). [From answers101.org]

The only problem I have with Augustine's concept of faith is that it does not automatically follow the understanding of reasonable evidence. Many who have seen that evidence did not believe (like Judas, the Pharisees, and the disciples who left Jesus in John 6). Rational evidence still requires a commitment decision.

Luther (1484-1546) and the Anabaptists

Luther and the Anabaptists (like Menno Simons, founder of the Mennonites) began what became the Protestant Reformation (both in the early 1500s). Luther was in Germany and the Anabaptists, who broke ranks with Zwingli over infant baptism, were in Switzerland. There were many others involved in the Reformation, of course, but for our discussion, I want to focus on Luther and the Anabaptists because of their views on faith. The Anabaptists were so named because they were re-baptizers. They did not believe that the infant baptism they received from the Roman Catholic Church was legitimate, because as babies they had no understanding about what they were doing. Babies may go to heaven because they are unaccountable, but they cannot have faith in Christ.

The Anabaptists rightly understood that faith had to be based on a reasonable understanding of the knowledge that we are sinners separated from God, that Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, and that we need to make a decision to receive Him as our God and Savior. So for the Anabaptists, faith was trust, based in reason, applied to knowledge.

But not for Luther. Luther was a fideist. He believed that faith was devoid of reason. He said,

The Anabaptists pretend that children, not as yet having reason, ought not to receive baptism. I answer: That **reason in no way contributes to faith**. Nay, in that children are destitute of reason, they are all the more fit and proper recipients of baptism. For **reason is the greatest enemy that faith has**: it never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but—more frequently than not—struggles against the Divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God. If God can communicate the Holy Ghost to grown persons, He can, a fortiori, communicate it to young children. Faith comes of the Word of God, when this is heard; little children hear that Word when they receive baptism,

and therewith they receive also faith (Luther, *Colloquia Mensa*, paragraph CCCLIII).

To summarize, Luther said,

- “Reason in no way contributes to faith.”
- “Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has.”
- Reason “never comes to the aid of spiritual things.”
- Reason “struggles against the Divine Word.”
- Reason is “treating with contempt all that emanates from God.”

Luther was reacting to the rationalists of his day, who were attacking Christianity. Specifically, the rationalists were attacking the Christianity that had been presented by the Catholics in the Middle Ages, a religion without evidence. And Luther was defending the medieval idea of faith. What Luther did not realize is that reasonable evidence was on his side. Soon the biblical text would be proven to be reliable, the evidence for the resurrection of Christ would be proven undeniable, and archeology would prove that many biblical events actually happened in real history, exactly as the Bible claims.

According to Luther’s claims about faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and all the cults could be believed. One might point out to Luther, if “reason in no way contributes to faith” in Christ, then there is no reason to believe in Christ. Luther’s statement, “Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has” is the basic teaching of the conservative Muslim Imams. So why is Luther not a Muslim?

If reason “struggles against the Divine Word,” then how on earth could Luther or anyone possibly understand the Divine Word? One might ask Luther, “Are these statements you just made (the ones I outlined in the bullet points above) reasonable? If not, then there is no reason to believe those statements. Certainly, one should not believe unreasonable statements. But if they are reasonable, then, by his own standard, Luther’s own

statements “in no way contributes to faith.” They are “the greatest enemy that faith has,” and they are “treating with contempt all that emanates from God.” Luther’s anti-reasoning argument is self-defeating.

We all owe Luther a great debt of gratitude. He paved the way for the Reformation, especially in the area of salvation (from grace alone, by faith alone, through the Bible alone). But Luther clung to the old view of the Middle Ages on infant baptism and faith, which the Anabaptists were willing to challenge, based on biblical authority. The Anabaptists helped bring the church out of the mysticism and darkness of the Middle Ages.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) on the Problem of Faith and History

The following is an excerpt from an article by John Piper, published in the “Scottish Journal of Theology,” Vol. 31, pp. 217-228:

Edwards does not diminish the role of reason or of valid evidence even in the case of uneducated people. As we shall see, Edwards believes that “truly gracious affections are attended with a conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things” (p. 288, col. 2), and that this “certainty” is founded on “real evidence” and “good reason” (p. 289, col. 2)... Edwards explains, “By a reasonable conviction, I mean conviction founded on *real evidence*, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction” (p. 289, col. 2). In other words, **it is not sufficient that one have a strong conviction of the gospel’s truth; the conviction must proceed from a just or reasonable ground.** If one is persuaded of the truth of the gospel merely because one’s fathers, neighbors, or nation believe it, then one has an unreasonable persuasion, for that is why the “Mahometans” are strongly persuaded of the truth of their religion....

Notice, Jonathan Edwards acknowledged:

- The role of reason placed in valid evidence, even in the case of uneducated people
- A conviction of the reality of divine things, founded on “real evidence” and “good reason”
- A reasonable conviction...founded on *real evidence*, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction
- That conviction must proceed from a just or reasonable ground

After the Great Awakening of the 1700s, most Bible-oriented Christians held to the apostles’ idea (and Jonathan Edwards’ idea) that faith was based upon trusting reasonable evidence. Then the liberalism of the 1800s joined Kierkegaard’s idea of a leap of faith. The charismatic movement of the 1960s and the New Apostolic Reformation of the 1990s embraced a non-evidential (blind leap) view of faith, while the Bible-oriented churches, Bible colleges, and Bible seminaries held to a more reasonable definition. So today, we have a mixture of the two, with the majority of those who call themselves Christians holding to a blind leap.

It seems that what happened in the history of the Christian view of faith is:

1. The apostles taught it was trusting reasonable evidence.
2. This lasted through Augustine in the 400s (except in North Africa).
3. During the Middle Ages, that deteriorated into a blind leap of trusting stories detached from rational evidence.
4. In the 1500s, Luther clung to the medieval idea of faith, but his contemporaries, the Anabaptists, returned to the apostles’ idea that faith trusted reasonable evidence.

5. When we get to Edwards in the 1700s, the return to the apostles' view is complete. Faith, he said, is a "conviction [which] must proceed from a just or reasonable ground."
6. Then the charismatic movement of the 1960s and the New Apostolic Reformation of the 1990s joined the Kierkegaardian (liberal) idea of a leap of faith.
7. Many of the pastors and professors in the Bible-oriented churches, colleges, and seminaries stuck to a rational view of faith. But they have fallen to a minority, so that today most "Christians" hold to faith as a blind leap.

Chapter 17

Being Threatened

Saturday Evening

After Gin saw the man with the gun sitting at her kitchen table, she gasped, then froze. “Come over and have a seat,” he said. Gin just stood there, staring at the gun. “Oh, don’t worry about the gun,” the man added. “It’s just here to keep you calm.”

“It’s not working,” was all Gin could think to say.

“Sure it is. Without the gun you’d be screaming, telling me I shouldn’t be here, demanding that I leave, things like that. Now, instead, you are quiet, and you are going to come over to the table and quietly sit down.” He waved her over with the 9 mm semi-automatic handgun, as if it were an extension of his hand. She did exactly that—walked over to the table, pulled out a chair opposite her intruder, and sat.

“What’s this about?” Gin inquired. “I assume that, if you came to shoot me, I’d already be dead, and if you came to rob me, you would have already done so and left, although I can’t imagine why anybody would want to rob me. I don’t have anything of value. So what’s this about?”

“Very perceptive.” The man then took a piece of paper from a folder in front of him and slid it across the table. “I’d like you to read this.” The letter read as follows:

To: Dean Alistair Menden

From: Professor Randolph Jorgensen

This is to inform you that I am exercising my professorial authority to expel one Ms. Virginia Miller from the class “World Religions 201.” She has repeatedly disrupted the class to the point of creating chaos by insisting that her views of the Bible be heard. Last Friday, I had to dis-

miss the class to restore order. I perceive her to be a dangerous, far right, Bible-believing radical who has attempted to terrorize and monopolize, with outbursts that will not allow the class to proceed as scheduled. Please consider Virginia Miller to be permanently expelled from "Comparative Religions 201."

Sincerely,
Randolph Jorgensen, BA; MA; Ph.D.

Gin was in shock. "This is insane. All I did was ask some questions, join the discussion, and respond to the professor in a orderly manner."

"I don't know what you did or didn't do, Ms. Miller, nor does it matter. The fact is, this letter will not only expel you from the class, it will prevent you from graduating with your current major, since this class is required for graduation. And if you planned to teach in the public schools, I suggest you change your plans because this letter will be part of you permanent record. I cannot imagine any public school hiring someone expelled for being a Bible thumper who terrorized her class."

"Who are you? Why are you doing this?"

"Money."

"Money?"

"Of course, money, what else? But his letter does not need to be sent. It is right now, as we speak, sitting on Professor Jorgensen's computer, ready for him to hit the 'Send' key. Or, he can hit the 'Delete' key. The delete key will cost you \$40,000."

"What! That's crazy."

"If I get the money 24 hours from now, he hits the 'Delete' key, and all this disappears, and you graduate with no blemish

on your record. If not, say good-bye to your graduation and hopes of teaching in the public schools.”

“I don’t have \$40,000. I’m here on a student loan. I can barely pay my half of the rent on this apartment. Most days I don’t even know if I can afford to eat lunch. Where do you think I would get \$40,000?”

“From your boyfriend.”

“Are you kidding? He’s almost as broke as I am.”

“Not your old boyfriend, your new boyfriend, Joseph P. Crowley. Forty grand is pocket change to the Crowleys.”

“He’s not my boyfriend. I could never...”

“Sure, he is. You have a thing for each other. We’ve been watching.”

“You’ve been watching?”

“Closely, for several days now.”

“If you’ve been watching, then you know there is nothing going on between us.”

“Nothing but a lot of flirting. Trust me, he’ll come up with the money in less than an hour. Have some faith in him. You are the ‘faith’ girl. As I recall, somewhere Jesus said if you had the faith of a mustard seed you could move a mountain. So move the Crowley mountain to fork over forty grand.”

“Jesus was talking about having faith in what God was doing, not faith in anything someone just conjures up.”

“Whatever.” With that, the man took back the letter and replaced it in the folder. Then he got up, put his gun in the holster on his belt, and walked to the door. Before he left, he turned back toward the kitchen table. “In 24 hours, someone will contact you. If we don’t have the money by then, the letter becomes part of your permanent file. Oh, and you do realize that if you go to the police, the letter will be sent, and you will be labeled as even more of a dangerous trouble causer, one who not only disrupts serious classroom studies but tries to create legal trouble for those who disagree with her.”

With that, he made his exit.

Chapter 18

Mustard Seed Faith

On two occasions, Jesus said the apostles could do miraculous things, move a mountain and replant a mulberry tree in the sea, if they had faith the size of a mustard seed—a seed as small as a grain of sand. We shall look at these two examples.

The First Example, Mustard-Seed Faith and Little Faith

Matthew 17:20—*And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.* In Matthew 17, the disciples were told that the littleness of their faith was keeping them from mustard seed faith, which, though tiny, was enough to move a mountain. The word He used here for *littleness of your faith*, usually translated *little faith*, is a word He used on five other occasions. It is one single word ὀλιγόπιστος (*oligopistos*) combining the word for *few, little, or small* with the word for *faith*. This word is not defined in the context of Matthew 17, but it is defined in the other five places where it is used.

Matthew 8:26—*He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.* Here *little faith* refers to the disciples’ inability to trust Jesus’ capacity to calm the storm. And this is after they had just witnessed His healing a leper, a paralyzed girl, Peter’s mother-in-law, and many who were demon possessed (recorded earlier in Matthew 8). So their *little faith* was their failure to trust the evidence Jesus had given them about His capacity to supernaturally control natural events. They had faith, but it was ὀλιγόπιστος (*oligopistos*), *little faith*.

Matthew 14:28-31 is when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water. We read, *Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of **little faith**, why did you doubt?”* Peter wanted reasonable evidence (natural evidence of the supernatural) that it was Jesus, not some ghost or spirit, walking on the water in the dark of night. Peter figured it would be solid evidence that it was really Jesus if He could command Peter to walk on the water, too. Jesus encouraged Peter’s quest for evidence by inviting him to *Come!* So Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water. So far, so good.

But when Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and began to look at the wind blowing the water, he began to doubt. When he took his eyes off the evidence Jesus had given him (of the supernatural in the natural world), Jesus said he had *little faith*. Peter was being asked to place his faith in all the evidence—not just the natural evidence but also the supernatural evidence provided by the fact that Jesus, and Peter himself, were both walking on the water.

The evidence was real and had to be understood rationally. It was not observable scientifically because it could not be repeated. But it was true historically. It actually happened with reasonable verification. The other apostles also witnessed it. So Peter had to change his definition of faith from reasonably trusting what was natural, to reasonably trusting what was true, because what is true is not restricted to what is natural. When Peter was unable to maintain that definition, he began to sink, and Jesus said it was because he had ὀλιγόπιστος (*oligopistos*), *little faith*.

Matthew 16:8—*But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? On this occasion, Jesus had metaphorically referred to the leaven of the Pharisees, and the disciples thought He was reprimanding them for not bringing bread for them to eat. Jesus said that was because they had ὀλιγόπιστος (oligopistos), little faith. Then He went on to explain what He meant. He said, Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread (verses 9-11)?*

Notice that their faith was *little* because they did not trust the reasonable evidence that Jesus had previously given them of the supernatural in the natural world, when He fed the five thousand and the four thousand, with food left over.

Luke 12:28—[The same discussion is in Matthew 6:30] *But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith!* In the context, Jesus told His disciples, *do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on* (verse 22). They were not to worry because of the reasonable evidence of God’s care for natural things. If God takes care of nature, is it not reasonable that He will take care of you? *Little faith* is worrying because of not trusting the reasonable evidence God has provided, in this case, through nature.

- *Little faith* does not sufficiently trust the reasonable evidence God has provided.
- *Mustard seed faith* is better than *little faith* because, although small, *mustard seed faith* trusts the evidence.

The Second Example, Mustard Seed Faith and The Plan of God

Luke 17:5-6—*The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a **mustard seed**, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.* In Luke 17, the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. He did not answer their question, but He seems to be telling them, that’s not their problem. If they had even a tiny faith, as small as a mustard seed, they could replant a mulberry tree in the sea. So what is this mustard seed faith that could move a mountain or replant a mulberry tree in the sea?

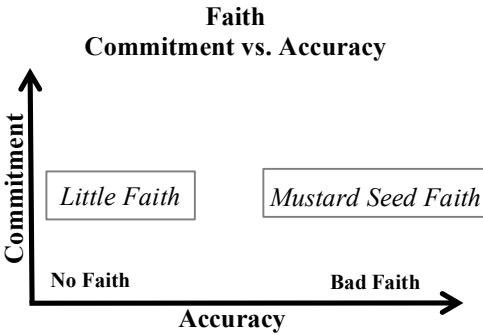
I know of no examples where anyone ever moved a mountain or replanted a mulberry tree using only their faith. But there were some miracles as dramatic as that. Moses did not move a mountain but he did have faith that God would part the Red Sea. So, how did Moses’ faith part the Red Sea? It was easy. Faith the size of a mustard seed would do it. Why? Because that’s what God was doing— leading His people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea on dry land. But all the faith in the world would not have let Moses part the Nile River. Why? Because that’s not what God was doing.

Joshua’s faith knocked down the walls of Jericho, just by the people marching around it for seven days. Joshua believed God, trusted the evidence he had seen with Moses and the crossing of the Jordan River on dry land, therefore he was able to see the walls of Jericho fall down. So why not just march around every city in Canaan until the walls fell down? All the faith in the world would not have led to the walls of Ai, Gibeon, or Hazor falling down by marching around them. Why? Because that’s not what God was doing. All it took was the faith of a mustard seed to see the walls of Jericho come down, because that’s what God was doing, there, then. It seems,

The faith that moves mountains is any faith in what God is doing.

Little faith trusts a little of the evidence. It has some commitment, but it does not trust all of the evidence.

Mustard seed faith trusts in all the evidence. It may lack commitment, but its commitment is to all of the evidence.



Chapter 19

Decisions

Sunday Morning

About the time the clock went from the last minutes of Saturday to the first minutes of Sunday, Gin made a decision. Actually, she made two decisions that night, one at midnight and one in the first hour of the morning. And, although they were unrelated, one seemed to help the other.

From the time the hooded man left, Gin began pacing the floor of her small apartment. She didn't sit down for hours. Her mind went through every possible action she could think of and the scenario that would most likely follow each choice. Then she would stop and pray about each one before going to the next one.

If she didn't give them the money, the professor would send the letter. That would prevent her from graduating with her current major, and virtually destroy any possibility for a teaching career in the public school. If she gave them the money, that would end it. But for how long? And where would she get the money? She thought about offering them something less, like maybe a thousand dollars. She could get her landlord to give her some slack on her rent, skip some meals, and maybe in a month or so she could scrape together a thousand. But that was absurd. She probably couldn't save that much, and even if she could, they wouldn't accept it. And even if she paid them off, they could blackmail her with it again in the future. And if it came out that she paid them off, she could be accused of bribing them, which would amount to admitting she was guilty of their accusations.

She wanted to talk to someone about it. Her parents? Not a chance. They would go nuts and call the cops. Her presently-out-of-town roommate? Suzy was one of the best friends she had, but there was no way she could handle this. She really wanted to talk to Joe. But that was impossible. He would give them the money and go to the police. But she refused to take

his money or involve him in this. And if this became a public affair, it would make her look like a religious Bible-thumping nut case, no matter how it turned out.

Finally, she called the only person she could think of who could give her godly wisdom without going berserk. Her grandfather. And after talking with him for a half-hour on the phone, from 11:30 until midnight, she made a decision. She would not give them anything.

Then she made a second decision. One thing about her first decision surprised her. She never once thought about calling Bobby or talking to him about it. Not once.

Finally, at nearly one o'clock Sunday morning, she lay down on the coach and fell sound asleep, with all her clothes on.

At 9:00 A.M., Gin was up, showered, and dressed. At 9:10, Bobby picked her up for church as usual. She was polite, mildly friendly, and quite calm. Actually, Bobby noticed she was unusually calm, and a bit distant.

Her mind was not on the church service. She mumbled through a few songs she didn't know, written by the church's "Worship Leader." This was followed by an annoying ritual, where everybody had to shake hands with everybody around them. She didn't hear the public prayer, but she did pray by herself, thanking God for a peace that passes understanding. She ended her silent prayer by quoting Philippians 4:6-7—

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

She was reading the Bible on her cell phone instead of listening to the sermon, until she heard the word "faith." As she tuned in on the pastor, she heard, "...and the definition of faith is clear. It is defined for us in the book of Hebrews chapter eleven, the first verse. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* So we know what faith is. Our hope creates our faith. Whatever we hope for becomes what we believe in. If your hope is in this world, you

will believe in this world. If your hope is in God, you will believe in God. So when we hope for eternal life and long for the things of heaven, things we cannot yet see, then we will have the faith, a faith which God will give us to believe in those things.”

“What a bunch of nonsense,” Gin mumbled. She wasn’t aware she had said it out loud, until she realized she was receiving disapproving stares from everyone around her, including Bobby. She sheepishly looked down and refocused on the Bible app in her iPhone.

They were barely out of the church door before Bobby started in on her. “What do you think you are doing criticizing the pastor out loud during his sermon? For heaven’s sake, Gin, I think you are going a bit overboard on the criticizing thing. It’s the influence of your grandfather. You need to cool it.”

“I didn’t mean to say it out loud.”

“And calling the pastor’s sermon ‘a bunch of nonsense.’ What’s with that?”

“Okay, so maybe I shouldn’t have said it in church, but what he said **was** a bunch of nonsense.”

“He was just teaching the Bible, Gin. You got a problem with that?”

“Did you hear anything he said? He told us that Hebrews 11:1 defines faith. He said *faith is defined as the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.*”

“Yeah, so?” Bobby asked, as they both got in the car.

As they began to drive out of the parking lot, Gin answered, “Hebrews 11 tells us what faith does, it’s what faith accomplishes. Once we have faith, it gives us *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* But that does not define faith, or tell us how to get it. The chapter is full of examples, like, by faith Noah built an ark. Building the ark was the evidence of Noah’s faith. His faith built the ark. Building the ark did not create his faith.”

Bobby said nothing. He just began driving back toward campus. They rode in silence for a while, then Gin said, “Bobby, pull over in that little city park just before we get to the campus. I need to talk to you about something.” Bobby looked

over at her with concern. But all he said was, “Okay.” When they stopped, he turned off the car and said, “You didn’t say we had to talk, you said you needed to talk **to** me, so talk.”

Gin looked down for a few minutes at a Kleenex tissue she had twisted into shreds. Then she looked over at Bobby. “This isn’t working.”

“What isn’t working?”

“You and me dating. It isn’t working.”

“Gin, we’ve been dating since high school. Why is it all of a sudden ‘not working’?”

“We dated **in** high school,” Gin corrected. “We haven’t seen each other in two years. And when you came to State this year, we started again. It’s been what? Two weeks now? Bobby, you are a nice guy, and you are good to me, and I like your family and all, but Bobby, we... I...,” She looked down again, then up again. “I just don’t... I can’t commit the rest of my life to you. I can’t... commit myself to you.”

“Gin, I didn’t ask you to.”

“I know that’s not what it’s about right now, but either it will be someday, or we are wasting our time. And for me, that can never be.”

“It’s Joe, isn’t it?”

“No. Not... exactly. I mean, there is nothing going on between Joe and me.”

“You mean nothing physical or sexual—yet.”

“Okay, I mean nothing physical, and this is not about Joe... per se. But I feel something for him I didn’t know I could feel. And whether it’s Joe or somebody else, I have to be able to feel that way. You are a great guy, Bobby, I like you, but I don’t feel that way about you. I’m sorry. I just don’t.”

Chapter 20

Does Hebrews 11:1 Define Faith?

NASB: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

KJV: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

NET: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.*

Literal: *Now [or but, or and] faith is the hoped for (things) essence, [of the] things [or works (pragmatics)] not seen.*

If faith is defined by the assurance of things hoped for, then faith in Santa Claus might be true. A child's faith in Santa Claus is the assurance of his or her hope that Santa will come down his or her chimney and the conviction of that being true, even though it is something not seen. If Hebrews 11:1 defines faith, then there is no connection between faith and truth.

But Hebrews 11:1 does not define faith. The reason most Christians think it does, is because the word *faith* is followed by the word *is*. But when we use a word in a sentence, we usually assume a definition for that word. We don't usually define every word we use. For example,

- If I say, "For me, **joy is** flying my airplane," am I defining joy?
- If someone selling gold coins says, "**Peace is** knowing my money will not lose its value." Is he defining "peace"? No. They are giving an example of it.
- I might say, "**Pain is** passing a kidney stone." A woman might say, "**Pain is** having a baby." Are we attempting to define pain?
- There is a Christian song entitled, "**Happiness is** the Lord." Is that a definition of happiness? The song includes the statements, "**Happiness is** a new creation." "**Happiness is**

to be forgiven,” and “**Happiness is** to know the Savior.” So which is it?

In these examples, people are not attempting to define joy, peace, pain, or happiness. They are assuming a definition and then illustrating it.

Faith gives us the present assurance of the things we hope for in the future, and the conviction for those hopes, which are not yet seen. The NASB word *assurance* (KJV *substance*) is the same word that compares Jesus Christ to the *nature* of God the Father in chapter one. *And He* [Jesus Christ] *is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature*. The word for *nature* [ὑπόστασις (*hupostasis*), *nature* or *essence*] in Hebrews 1:3, is the same word translated *assurance* in Hebrews 11:1.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us what faith does, but not how we get it in the first place. It says faith produces assurance (Faith => Assurance). It does not say assurance defines faith.

First Corinthians 15:17 says, *and if Christ has not been raised, your **faith is** worthless; you are still in your sins*. This connects faith to the reality of the resurrection. If the resurrection of Christ is not real, then your faith may be real, but it is worthless. So, in the case of your faith in Christ, the only way to define faith in a true way is by trusting the evidence for the resurrection.

A common error made in the use of this passage is found in a chapter called “Walk By Faith Not By Sight,” Don Dickerman. He wrote:

“The Bible gives us a definition and then proceeds to give us many examples to clarify the definition. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is called the faith chapter of the Bible...Based on the examples of faith given in Hebrews 11, I believe an accurate scriptural **definition of faith is this, a commitment to God that does not waver regardless of**

circumstances.” [From his book, “Keep the Pigs Out,” emphasis mine.]

This is a typical definition, based upon the assumption that Hebrews 11 is defining faith. Dickerman’s quote is actually a good statement of the **application** of faith in God, if you have already defined faith and are now talking about the faith in the God of the Bible. Our faith in the God of the Bible should be “a commitment to God that does not waver, regardless of circumstances.”

But this is very inadequate as a **definition** of faith. For example, if this is a definition of faith, what “God” should I be committed to? The definition does not say. If my faith is “a commitment to God that does not waver regardless of circumstances,” then why not believe in the “god” of Islam, the “god” of Mormonism, or one of the gods of Hinduism? Before faith can be a commitment, I need some way of determining the validity of that commitment. Of course, Dickerman means the God of the Bible, but how do I know that I should be committed to the God of the Bible? If we start with faith in the Bible as our foundation, then why not start with faith in the god of the Koran as our foundation? My definition of faith has to exist apart from faith in the God of the Bible in order for me to know that the God of the Bible is a good object of my faith.

As we saw on the accuracy/commitment graph, commitment is only part of it. Commitment is only valid when we are committed to truth. Biblical commitment is about trusting **in**. But first you have to know **that** you have something biblically valid to trust in.

Dickerman’s definition is not even valid if you assume, as he does, that we are only talking about biblically valid faith. The heroes of Hebrews 11, the apostles, and all the heroes of the faith for 2000 + years of Christian history, did what they did because of their faith. What they did was an application (or illustration or evidence) of their faith, not a definition of it. For

example, Paul's faith was already defined, when he went on missionary journeys. He did not have faith because he went on missionary journeys. The missionary journeys did not define Paul's faith. The martyrs were killed because they had already had faith, they did not have faith because of their martyrdom.

The rest of Hebrews 11 confirms the fact that the author is saying faith gives hope, not hope defines faith. First look at verses 3-7:

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

- Verse 4 tells us that Abel's faith allowed him to offer a better sacrifice to God. The faith created the *more excellent sacrifice*, the *more excellent sacrifice* did not create Abel's faith.
- Verse 5 tells us Enoch's faith caused his translation, not that his translation caused his faith.
- Verse 6 says we cannot please God without faith, but it does not tell us how to define that faith.
- Verse 6 assumes we have the right definition of faith in mind when it says we cannot please God without it.

- Verse 7 says Noah built the ark because he had faith, not that building the ark created his faith.
- Verses 8-19 are about Abraham. Because of his faith he: left his country, had a child in his old age (together with the faith of Sarah), attempted to sacrifice that child, and looked forward to a heavenly city. But those things are the **result** of his faith, not the cause of it. The only clue we have to the source of Abraham's faith is in verse 8, where it says, *when he was called*. Abraham's faith was based upon the evidence he received from that call (Genesis 12:1 says God spoke to him).

**Faith comes from revelation
(Romans 10:17), not application**

The rest of Hebrews 11 tells us about the works of the faith of many Old Testament saints. At no time does the chapter tell us that their works created their faith. But their works were definitely created **by** their faith. The chapter is a list of illustrations of verse 1, **what faith does, not how faith is defined.**

Chapter 21

The Response

Sunday Afternoon and Evening

After the break up, Bobby drove Gin to her apartment. She got out in front of the building, leaned back in through the car's open door and said, "Good-bye, Bobby, I'm sorry." Bobby didn't look at her or say anything. When she closed the door, he quickly drove off.

Suzy was not due back until late that evening, so Gin decided to go to the library to study. She sent a text to Joe, to see if he wanted to join her, and was disappointed with a response that said he was busy the next two days, but he would plan to see her in class on Tuesday.

As she sat in the library looking at her computer screen, her mind continued to replay her situation. She had been preaching to everyone about faith, but what about her own faith? She was in the middle of what most Christians would call a trial. Most seemed to think trials strengthen your faith. 'What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger' and all that sort of thing. But for Gin, it didn't seem like it. Her trial was not making her faith stronger. Quite the opposite, the strength of her faith was giving her what she needed to get through her trial. The trial was testing her faith, not making it stronger.

Her wandering thoughts finally came back to her homework, and she spent a few hours working on a paper for her "European History" class. At about 5:00 P.M., she realized she was hungry. She had skipped lunch and only had an apple for breakfast, so a burger and fries started to sound pretty good. She packed up her computer and left the library, walking in the direction of her apartment. It was a nice afternoon, so she decided to walk the whole way, rather than take a campus bus. As she began to cross the main street, which served as a border between the campus and the city, a car pulled into the pedestrian crosswalk. It stopped with its back door directly in front of her. The door opened and someone she had not realized was

behind her, pushed her head down while another arm came out of the car and pulled her in. Then the man behind her got in, closed the door, and the car drove off.

Gin found herself sitting between two hooded men with ski masks. The driver was hooded but never turned around or said anything. Gin surmised, from size and mannerism, that the driver was female.

“So, are you going to add kidnapping to your list of crimes?” Gin asked.

“Oh, no,” said the man on her left, with the same voice that had threatened her in her apartment the day before. “Not yet, anyway. No, we are just giving you a lift home. And just to pass the time with some light conversation, I would like to remind you that you only have a few hours to get the forty grand. And this little ride can serve as a reminder that we can get to you any time.” Gin said nothing more until they reached her apartment building. As they let her out, the same man said, “Forty grand tonight or the professor’s letter goes to the dean in the morning.”

Gin began to walk away but then, while the back door was still open, she turned toward the car and said, “You’re not getting one cent. Send the letter.”

Chapter 22

Trials and Faith

There is nothing in the Bible to confirm the idea that “trials strengthen our faith.” And that’s important because that very common idea leads people to the wrong source for strengthening their faith. Let’s take a look at some examples. Just what can *trials* do, and not do?

Jesus said to Peter:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-32; see also 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

If Peter’s faith didn’t fail, he would be better able to **strengthen his brothers**. But we read nothing about the trial strengthening Peter’s faith. Quite the contrary! His faith might fail. His faith was being tested, not strengthened. If his faith was strong enough going into the trial, he would be able to strengthen his brothers after the trial.

Later on, Peter wrote:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The testing of a believer’s faith (*the proof of your faith*) may **result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ**. But Peter says nothing about trials resulting in more faith. Trials prove our faith (one way or the other), but they do not strengthen our faith.

James wrote:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

James said you should rejoice in trials because *the testing of your faith produces endurance*, and the completion of your maturity. But that is true if, and only if, you have good faith going into the trial. If you have good faith, you can rejoice about trials.

James said, Faith + Trials => Maturity
Not, Trials => Faith

James says nothing about trials producing more faith or improving our faith. We can, therefore, see that:

- Trials can improve our capacity for ministry (Luke 22:32).
- Trials can result in greater rewards in heaven (1 Peter 1:6-7).
- Trials can produce endurance (James 1:2-4).

But trials, per se, do not improve our faith.

Trials are like tests in school, they test our existing knowledge, but their purpose is not to give us more knowledge. Of course, those of us who have taken a lot of tests over the years understand that we can learn something from the test itself. But that's not the purpose of the test. As a result of being tested, we may be qualified for a better job or position, but the test was never about giving us more or better knowledge. In the same way, tests of our faith are not about giving us more faith. Faithful people have trials and come out stronger and more mature. Weak-faith people have trials and doubt their faith.

True, we can learn more about life and acquire new understanding from trials (just like we can learn something from a test at school). Then we have new verifiable evidence which

we should decide to trust. In that case, trials might improve our faith. But so might pleasures. So might exciting things and boring things, tedious things and new things. So might almost anything. It has nothing to do with trials, per se. Once we believe in the truth (the way things actually are), it brings us to a new level of awareness that opens the windows of new understanding and hence the possibility of more faith. As Peter said in John 6:69, *And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.* But there is nothing particularly faith-building about trials over any other experience.

It is as if a first-time flyer and an airline pilot are both passengers on a flight from, say, Chicago to LA. In route, there is a lot of turbulence. The airline pilot (mildly irritated because he spilled his drink) has faith in the airplane. The first-time flyer (gripping the seat handles and gritting his teeth) does not. When the airplane reaches LA, the airline pilot thinks: "See, I knew these planes could be trusted." The first-time flyer thinks, "See, I told you these planes were not to be trusted." The faith going into the turbulent flight determined the outcome for both of them. The turbulence did not create faith in either one of them.

What About the Idea... "That Which Does Not Kill Us, Makes Us Stronger"?

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) famously said: "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." Nietzsche's ideas include things like the "death of God" and existentialism. Nietzsche meant that the suffering events we encounter in life make us more able to withstand the other events of life, develop ourselves, and contribute to others. His "makes us stronger" idea has been popularized in movies and songs. However, in spite of the popularity of the idea, **Nietzsche was wrong.** There is no evidence that adversity makes us stronger. Quite the opposite! Noam Shpancer, Ph.D. reported the following in "Psychology Today," August 21, 2010:

The bulk of psychological research on the topic shows that,

as a rule, if you are stronger after hardship, it is probably *despite*, not because of, the hardship. The school of hard knocks does little more than knock you down, hard. Nietzsche—and country song—wisdom notwithstanding, we are not stronger in the broken places. What doesn't kill us, in fact, makes us weaker... Developmental research has shown convincingly that traumatized children are more, not less, likely to be traumatized again. Kids who grow up in a tough neighborhood become weaker, not stronger. They are more, not less, likely to struggle in the world... Mayhem and chaos don't toughen you up, and they don't prepare you well to deal with the terror of this world.

So, it's not "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," but more likely, if you were not killed, you were already strong.

We become physically stronger with exercise (to a point), but planned, organized, physical training is not a traumatic event. Exercise is not a trial, it's not actually even a time of suffering. If you pamper your children their whole lives rather than make them work, they will be like a flabby body without exercise. But that does not mean trials (like disease, divorce, or abuse) strengthen your children. Going through suffering may allow you to **realize** you have the toughness to endure it. And you can call that realization "stronger" if you like, but it does not help you advance your life or contribute to others. Our strength going into trials will determine how we emerge from the trials, but our suffering does not contribute to our strength.

For example, someone may say, "My divorce made me stronger." But they really mean that their divorce made them realize they were tougher than they thought they were. They realize they had the endurance to survive without their mate. In the liberal, progressive, evolutionary mind, that's "stronger." But it did not help them advance or contribute to others. Divorce is one of the biggest boat anchors on society. It creates financial chaos, unruly children, sexual immorality, and mental anguish. In what sense is that "stronger"?

Consider those who live in war zones, tough neighborhoods, and ghettos where we see more suffering. Do we have more, say, doctors, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and teachers coming out of those places, or do they yield more chaos, prison inmates, addicts, psychopaths, and socially dependent people? Did the Christian Reformation, Great Awakening and Bible distribution efforts come from third-world countries or first-world countries? Survival habits may help us adapt to survive our environment (something like a resistant bacteria), only to make us more destructive, not more developed. **Suffering adversity does not help us advance or contribute to others in any positive way.**

If adversities and trials do not increase our faith, what does? The Bible's answer is clear.

Faith is increased by the Word of God

- Romans 10:17—*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17—*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*
- 1 Peter 2:2—*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*

Chapter 23

The Partner

Monday Morning

Professor Jorgensen had no classes on Monday. Nevertheless, he usually came to his campus office to grade papers, catch up on his reading, and do some computerized “paper work.” Sometimes, students would come to see him on Mondays, but only by appointment. On this particular Monday, there was a knock on his door at 9:05 A.M. The following conversation ensued.

“Come in.”

“Good morning, professor.”

“What are you doing here? I told you never to come here.”

“There’s a problem.”

“Fix it. That’s what you’re there for.”

“The girl, Virginia Miller, she refuses to pay.”

“So, drop it. She called our bluff, just let it go.”

“We can’t do that.”

“Of course, we can. She has no evidence we approached her. If she goes to the cops, I’ll pull out the letter, and we’ll flag her as a religious nut case. End of story. But she won’t, because she knows that. So just drop it and look for the next one. Do your research. Find somebody else with money.”

“I’m afraid it’s not that simple. The guys I work with are hungry for a pay off, and her new boyfriend is loaded. It’s easy pickings, and they want it now.”

“Well, they don’t get to decide that.”

“I’m afraid they do. I can’t stop it.”

“What are they going to do?”

“Kidnap the girl and demand a ransom from the boyfriend.”

“WHAT! That insane! We’re not kidnappers. You have to talk them out of it. When you came to me two years ago, we made a deal, and it certainly did not include kidnapping.”

“Don’t be so smug, professor. You were flunking me, I bribed you to pass me, and you took it.”

“And all the rest was your idea. You said you could find wealthy students doing poorly at mid-semester who needed the class to graduate. I fail them on their mid-semester exam, then your guys would approach them with the same deal I gave you. And it’s worked for two years. We all put a little extra money in our pockets, and I can easily deny anything that surfaces.”

“But this time you wanted to go after a poor girl with a rich boyfriend. I didn’t like the idea in the first place because it involved another person. I told you to leave it alone. So she called your bluff. And now you are telling me those idiots who do your muscle work want to kidnap her? That’s crazy. I’ll have no part of it.”

“You’re already a part of it because I just told you about it, and if you go to the cops, we’ll tell them about all the other pay offs. Besides, I had to tell you about it because it’s the same guys who attempted to blackmail her and failed. If they get caught, they’ll squeal like a pig, and we’ll all go down. Look at it this way, professor. They are going to demand \$100,000. That’s 25 grand apiece. Not bad for a little extra pocket money. And, as usual, you don’t have to do anything but keep your mouth shut. Come on, professor. You’re a man of faith, so where’s your faith?”

“This is not about faith, it’s about wisdom. And don’t come to my office any more.”

With that, Sally Murphy dragged a hand through her short red hair, smiled devilishly and said, “Sure thing, professor. But you will probably want to let me know where to drop off your cut.”

Chapter 24

Faith and Wisdom

We have defined faith as trusting reasonable evidence. In other words, faith is trusting reason applied to evidence. But if we are to compare it to wisdom, we need to get a precise definition of wisdom. Here are a few to consider:

- According to the “New Oxford American Dictionary,” wisdom is “the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment.”
- According to Wikipedia, “wisdom is a disposition to find the truth coupled with an optimum judgment as to right actions.”
- The Old Testament word is חָכְמָה (*chokmah* – with a silent “c”), almost always translated *wisdom*, although the word can mean *skill*.
- The New Testament word is σοφία (*sophia*), also translated *wisdom* or *skill* (in the sense of a skill for living) and is often connected to σύνεσις (*sunesis*) *understanding*, which is also translated, *knowledge*, *thinking* or *intelligence*.

So we can conclude that wisdom is a skill for understanding, which uses values, reason and knowledge of the truth, to arrive at good judgment. In short, wisdom is a skill for understanding what makes good judgments.

Wisdom is understanding sound judgment.
Faith is trusting reasonable evidence.

Another, more casual, way to put it is,

Wisdom connects the dots between factual evidence.
Faith decides that the evidence is factual.

There is a lot of overlap between good faith and good wisdom. Both are connected to evidence.

- Wisdom understands it.
- Faith trusts it.

Both use reason.

- Wisdom uses it to make a judgment.
- Faith uses it to make a decision.

But there is at least one significant difference between faith and wisdom:

Wisdom does not just know about evidence, it understands it.

Faith may trust good evidence that it does not understand.

If the doctor does laser surgery on my eye, I don't understand it. But I believe it will be successful because I trust the evidence surrounding the procedure and the reputation of the doctor. I don't understand the nature of the trinity, sovereignty and free will, the nature of light, or how speed affects time. I don't understand how waves collapse into particles, how quantum entanglement works, or how Jesus rose from the grave. But I believe all these things based on the evidence. Based on evidence, I believe my truck will get me to my office and back, but that does not mean I understand how it does that.

Wisdom understands how to make judgments, based upon biblical revelation that can be understood.

Faith trusts reasonable evidence, including biblical revelation, that cannot necessarily be understood.

I might believe in something I don't understand, but not in something without reasonable information.

Chapter 25

Big Trouble

Monday

Gin's roommate Suzy came back late Sunday night with stories about her weekend at home, including an encounter with an old boyfriend. Gin trumped that with the account of her breakup with Bobby. That led into a discussion about Joe and an even more involved interrogation by Suzy. Gin was uncomfortable exploring her feelings about Joe, mainly because it forced her to admit to herself that she did indeed have feelings for him. The good part was, it kept her mind, and the discussion, off of her problems in the religion class. They stayed up and talked until late Sunday night and continued the discussion when they got up late on Monday. In all this, Gin said nothing about the professor's threatening letter to the dean.

After her 3:00 class Monday afternoon, Gin went back to the apartment and made herself a sandwich. Suzy had a late class, so Gin decided to go back to the library to study. She wanted to text Joe, but he had already said he was busy and would see her in class on Tuesday. She was annoyed by the fact that she missed him and kept thinking about him. But once at the library, she immersed herself in her European history project and managed to lose track of time. When she finally checked her watch, it was nearly 8 P.M. She packed up and left the library, taking her normal path toward the apartment. The route took her past the busy strip-mall that had several restaurants and bars. She looked a bit longingly when she passed the Starbucks where she and Joe had talked for nearly two hours.

As the strong smell of greasy burgers and beer flowed out of a bar she was passing, she felt a sharp pain, like a bee sting. Turning, she saw the contents of a hypodermic needle being injected into her hip. As she began to lose consciousness, she felt herself being picked up and heard a male voice say, "I told her she had too many. Can you believe it, she even wanted to drive home." Then her world went black.

Gin woke up in a dark room. Her first realization was that she was shackled to a bed. She had very limited movement of either her hands or feet. Her head was on a pillow. There were no blankets on the bed, but she was fully clothed. At least she could be thankful for that. Other than feeling a bit nauseated, she seemed to be all right. There was no gag or tape on her mouth, so she surmised that she was isolated enough that calls for help would not be heard. As her eyes began to adjust, she could see she was in a dark, musty-looking room, like maybe a cellar or a basement. There were no windows in the room, but she could make out the outline of a door in front of her, past the foot of the bed. She could hear some movement beyond the door, but heard no voices or sounds of cars or anything you might hear in a public area.

She lay there for what seemed to be about an hour. Clearly, this all came about because of her comments on faith. But as she lay alone in the dark, she began to question her own faith. Not her faith in God, but her faith in her decision to take a stand in the religion class. She knew she had faith, but now she feared she was beginning to have what Jesus called *little faith*. Like Peter, when he was walking on the water next to Jesus, she was starting to sink. She was about to yell for help when the door opened. A man came into the dark room without turning on a light. He was the same size and build as the hooded man at her kitchen table. He was still wearing a ski mask, and he still had a gun. “What did you do, give up on blackmail and advance to kidnapping?” Gin asked.

“You are very perceptive.”

“Oh, come on. You think you are going to get a ransom for me? The only one I know with that kind of cash is Joe Crowley, and he barely knows me. Surely, you don’t think you can hit up Joe for forty grand to get me back.”

“No. A hundred grand.”

“What! That’s ridiculous. He’ll never pay that.”

“Oh, I think he will, but I don’t think he’ll be very happy about it. He’s only known you, what, a week? And now you’re going to cost him a hundred grand. I’d say he’ll conclude you are a pretty expensive girlfriend, one he will want to dump as

soon as possible. You should have taken our first offer. That would have been easy. Now it's a bigger deal, and so is the pay off." At that, Gin became quiet. This guy was crazy enough to try it. And he was probably right. Joe would come up with the money, and then he'd hate her and want nothing to do with her. "My friends are out making contact with your soon-to-be-ex-boyfriend as we speak."

"How long do you plan to keep me tied up here?"

"As long as it takes."

"I have to use the restroom."

"Wet the bed."

"No, come on, really, I'm not kidding." But he only walked out and closed the door.

After another 15 minutes of pain, and loud pleadings, she had no choice but to wet the bed. Then she relaxed and fell asleep for a while. She didn't know how long she slept. She was awakened by the sound of a door closing. Now it seemed completely quiet outside her room. It seemed like her guard had left. Then suddenly she heard the outer door open again. Then the door to her room opened. In the dim light, she could only recognize that this was not the same man she had seen before. This one was tall and thin, with big shoulders. She figured he had come to torture her in some way. He quickly approached the bed and turned on a flashlight. "Gin, are you all right?"

"Joe? Joe! Joe?"

Chapter 26

Good Faith and Bad Faith

We know it's bad to place faith in a bad object. It's bad to follow a cult leader, to skate on thin ice, or plan to get rich from the lottery. Cult leaders, thin ice, and lottery tickets are poor objects for faith. What makes them bad is the faith in them is not close to the evidence. Evidence tells us that cult leaders, thin ice, and lottery tickets are not reliable.

But it is not bad to trust leaders, ice, and tickets. Suppose there is objective verifiable evidence that a certain leader, some call a cultist, **is** actually a teacher of truth (like the Apostle Paul)? What if there is reasonable evidence that the ice **is** thick enough for skating? What if there is reasonable evidence that this **is** the winning ticket? The chances of having good faith goes up and down with the evidence. The greater the evidence (reason applied to reality), the better (more reliable) the faith. The more disconnected it is from the evidence, the worse (more dangerous) the faith.

Which of these would you consider to be good faith and bad faith?

- I believe in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
- I believe God told me to witness to you.
- I believe God told me to marry you.
- I believe God will make me wealthy if I buy this business.
- I believe in Santa Claus.
- I believe I am going to heaven.
- I believe God will give me a parking place.
- I believe Allah revealed the Koran to Mohammed.
- I believe all believers in all religions go to heaven.
- I believe in my lucky shirt.
- I believe God speaks to me through my circumstances.
- I believe God wants all Christians to be rich and healthy.

- I believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God.
- I believe I don't have to go for cancer treatments because God will heal me.

Some of these you would say are good to believe and some not. But in all cases, **the ones you consider to be bad faith should be those for which there is not sufficient reasonable evidence.** For example, there is reasonable evidence for the infallibility of the Bible, but not for believers of all religions going to heaven. There is reasonable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, but not that God will make me wealthy.

Chapter 27

Surprised

Monday Night

Gin was totally confused. She wondered if she was still sleeping. “Joe, is that really you?”

“Yes, Cotton, it’s me.”

“How did you know I was here? We need to get out of here. They’re coming back. They kidnapped me. They plan to...”

“I know they did, honey. Just calm down a second. I need to tell you something.”

“But right now we need to... You knew they did? You knew I was kidnapped?”

“Yes.”

“But—how?”

Joe reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a wallet, opened it up, and held it in front of Gin. She stared in disbelief. There on the left was an identification card with Joe’s picture on it. And on the right was a state police badge with the word “Detective” written across the bottom.

“You’re a cop?”

“I’m a detective, working undercover.”

“You lied to me?”

“No, I didn’t. I just didn’t tell you everything.”

“Yeah, well, that’s a pretty big omission. You deceived me, you...”

“Gin, listen to me. We have been onto these guys for months. They pick out students with lots of money from Professor Jorgensen’s class, then Jorgensen would give them a failing grade on some exams. Next, his thugs would approach the student and tell him or her that Jorgensen would flunk them unless they paid the thugs some money. The students they target need the class to graduate, so they pay. Once they pay, they can be accused of bribery, so they don’t say anything.”

“You were in the class as a spy? Was I just part of the investigation?”

“My captain asked me to take the class to see if I could catch them at it. So, yes, I was there as a spy. But you were a total surprise—someone they could go after for religious intolerance and terrorist tactics. They love targeting outspoken Christians because the administration will believe almost anything said against them. So when they came after you, we followed you. We have been following you twenty-four hours a day since Friday.”

“You were following me?”

“Yes, that’s why I couldn’t study with you or call you the last few days. Now listen, Cotton. If you want out, I’ll take you out right now. But we caught a break, and I’d like to use it. Use you. The guy who was guarding you left to get something from a Quick Mart on the corner. My partner is watching him. This gave me a chance to come in. I can get you out, but I’d really like your help. I want to put a bug on you. Your role is simply to stay here and get him to say as much as you can about the operation. We want him to hang himself and the professor, on tape.”

Just then Joe’s phone buzzed. It was a text, “BAD GUY COMING BACK. GET OUT NOW.”

“Leave or stay, Gin. You have to decide now. It’s one of your faith decisions, are you going to have faith in me or not.”

“I want to, but you lied to me.”

“No, I didn’t. Everything I told you was true, and so is everything I’m telling you now.”

“Okay, I’ll stay. But you are close by, right?”

“Just across the street, we’ll be listening. If anything sounds dangerous, or we lose contact, I’ll be back here in seconds.” He fastened a tiny microphone under the collar of her blouse. As Joe left, he turned back, and said, “By the way, I only dated Sally because she’s a suspect.”

Chapter 28

The Faith of Gideon

The time of the judges was a period when Israel went through cycles of disobedience, bondage, restoration, and back into disobedience again. During one of those low ebbs in the cycle, Israel was possessed by the Midianites, who allied themselves with the Amalekites to devastate the land. *So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD* (Judges 6:6).

After sending a prophet, God sent His angel (probably a pre-incarnate theophany of Jesus Christ, since He is called *The Lord*) to Gideon. The angel told him he would deliver Israel, *So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me* (verse 17). After Gideon prepared a sacrifice, we read,

Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face" (Judges 6:21-22).

So Gideon asked for a sign and was given rational evidence from *the angel of the LORD*, who imposed a real supernatural act upon the natural world. Notice that God did not expect Gideon to make a blind leap of faith without evidence. Then Gideon tore down the village Baal and Asherah idols and assembled an army. But before the battle, we read this account:

Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken."

And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground." God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground (Judges 6:36).

Gideon was not asking for direction from God. He was not attempting to seek God's will. God had already made His will clear, and He had already done a miracle to prove it. Gideon had already assembled an army because of his faith based in that miracle. But now, as he faced the battle, Gideon wanted more evidence.

I would expect God to tell him He'd already given him evidence and to believe that and get on with it. But He didn't. Instead, God gave Gideon more irrefutable evidence, twice. Gideon did not have a problem making a commitment (the vertical element of our Faith Graph). He had prepared a sacrifice, torn down the village Baal and Asherah idols, and gathered an army. Gideon's problem was not about commitment; his problem was that he did not focus on the evidence he had been given. Gideon wanted more evidence. Like Thomas in John 20, and Peter in Matthew 14, when he began to sink, he took his eyes off the evidence he had already been given. But when Gideon (and the Apostle Thomas) asked for more evidence, God gave it to him.

Chapter 29

Catching Bad Guys

Monday Night

After Joe left, Gin was alone for several minutes. But now she didn't feel lonely. The microphone under her collar put her in direct contact with Joe and his partner, somewhere across the street. When she heard the outer door again, Gin decided it was time to get involved.

"Hey, you out there. I want to talk."

The door opened, and the hooded guy came in, still wearing the ski mask. "What do you want?"

"I want to make a deal."

"You are not in any position to make a deal."

"Oh, I think I am. You kidnapped me. That's big time, meaning, you will go to prison for a long time. Kidnapping is impossible to hide. And if you plan to kill me to keep me quiet, that's murder-one, life in prison or death by lethal injection. Not good. It's a big fantasy thinking you'll get a \$100,000 for me, but that's all it is, a fantasy."

"We believe it will work. You're the faith girl. We believe it will work more than you believe it won't. Sure, we're stepping out on a limb, but that's what makes life exciting."

"Stepping out on a limb only makes sense if you are stepping in the same direction as the limb. This time the limb points in a different direction than you are stepping."

"How do you know?"

"Because the odds of you getting caught are near 100%. Listen to my deal. Suppose we back up a step. You let me walk, and I'll ask Joe for \$40,000 to delete the letter, just like you asked. That way there is no kidnapping and no way to prove wrongdoing on your part. Look at it as applying sufficient pressure on me to do it your way. If I went to the cops, you could send the letter and my career goal of public school teaching would be over. So obviously, I'm not going to do that. Everybody would believe you because the media can't wait to find

a Christian terrorist. I couldn't talk, without destroying my own future. That way you'd only get 40 grand, but it's safe money."

"It's too late for that now."

"No, it isn't. Check with the professor. Jorgensen has got to be stressing out over a kidnapping. A simple payoff is deniable. He pockets the cash and goes on as usual. But a kidnapping gets attention."

"Jorgensen's got nothing to do with this."

"But he did write the blackmail letter, right? And he does get a cut, right?"

"All he does is write a stupid letter and pocket the cash. He ain't got the balls for this."

"So, who does?"

"What do you care, and why all the questions all of a sudden?"

Gin understood that the hooded man was clearly not the leader of this little pack, and he was not all that confident, or intelligent. So she added, "I just want you to call whoever makes the decisions, so you can release me, and I can go get you your forty grand."

The hooded man looked at her a few minutes, then made a phone call. After a few seconds, he said, "It's me," followed by a jumbled description of Gin's proposal. Then he said, "Yeah... Yeah... Really?" Then he stared at Gin with a terrified look, as if she was the one with the gun. Then he continued, "But how?... Okay, I'll check."

He put the phone down on the only table in the room, walked back over to Gin, and began putting his hands on her blouse and in her hair. "What the heck are you doing! Get your hands off of me." Then his fingers slipped under her collar and pulled out the listening bug. He stared at it as if it were a nuclear bomb.

After a few seconds, he pointed his gun at her and silently mouthed, "*Don't say a word or you're dead.*" Then he picked up the phone and said, "Yeah, you were right... Now? But what about the money... Okay, okay." The hooded man stuffed the phone in his pocket, and turned to leave. But before he

reached the door, it opened and Joe put the nose of his .45 directly on the hooded man's forehead.

“Drop the gun, pal, or I'll save the state the cost of a trial.”

Chapter 30

Going Out On A Limb

Do We Have Rational Evidence for All Biblical Events?

Biblical faith is always trust. It is stepping out on a limb, but always in the direction of the limb. It's driving down a country road at night when you can't see beyond your headlights. But it's driving in the direction of the road, not making some strange turn to the right or left when the road is straight. Biblical faith extends beyond the evidence but in the direction of the evidence. It makes reasonable deductions based on the evidence. Then those deductions allow us to make decisions to believe that which is a reasonable extension of the evidence.

Those who argue for a non-evidential faith point out that we cannot get evidence for everything in the Bible. I cannot witness Moses parting the Red Sea, or the resurrection of Jesus, so how can I believe those things based upon reasonable evidence? The answer is, those things are recorded in a reliable Bible, and they are recorded in such a way that we can conclude the authors are recording actual historical events.

The Queen of Sheba believed in the magnificence of Solomon's kingdom when she saw the evidence with her own eyes. Her belief was not because she saw every last piece of wealth Solomon owned. But because of what she did see, she could step out on a limb and say that what she saw caused her to believe the reports she had been given (2 Chronicles 9:5-6).

Belief often comes in packages (like the Bible) of what Augustine called "Authority" established by reasonable evidence. I believe my computer will work. That means I believe its hard drive will function correctly, it will help me get on the Internet, send emails, and allow me to use various programs. I can't personally witness the work of my computer's harddrive or what it

does to get the Internet or run my programs. Nor would I understand it if I could. But I have reasonable evidence that it is a good computer. I cannot prove anything in it is unreliable. Everything I can investigate about it is reliable. Therefore, I have reasonable evidence that it will be able to do those things I need it to do, even though I don't have reasonable evidence for everything it does.

I can also run tests on the Bible to conclude that it is reliable, based on reasonable evidence. I can't prove anything in it is unreliable. Everything I can check out proves to be reliable. Therefore, I can trust that the details, which I cannot check with reasonable evidence, are also reliable.

So I trust my car to get me home, and my computer to run my programs, based on the exact same kind of faith I place in the Bible. The only difference is what I trust my car and computer to do. If I place faith in my car or my computer to give me peace, security, meet my needs, and get me to heaven, that's foolish because it's not what they claim to do. The object of my faith changes, depending on what I believe in, but it does not change the nature of the belief itself.

Of course, faith in God is unique! But that's because God is unique, not because the definition of faith changes when it comes to God. My faith in everyone I know is unique, but that's because of who each of them are, not because the definition of faith changes for each one of them.

Chapter 31

The Quarrel

Monday Night

While Joe's partner wrestled the, now handcuffed, hooded man into his unmarked police car, Joe released Gin. They all rode to the police station together. Once there, Gin had to wait for the police to process the hooded man. She first called Suzy. After she explained what happened, Suzy insisted on coming down to the police station. Gin responded with, "Oh, you don't need to do..." but then interrupted herself with, "yaknowhat—if you could get here, like, soon, I could really use a change of clothes, including clean underwear. I...um...sort of...peed my pants."

While waiting for Suzy to arrive with the clothes, Gin called her parents and told them the whole story, repeatedly assuring them she was all right. Then she called her grandfather with the same assurances. They agreed to talk more about it tomorrow.

Shortly after that, Suzy arrived, and Gin was able to change clothes. They talked briefly, but Gin convinced Suzy not to wait for her, since she did not know how long she would be there, and Joe could bring her home.

Sergeant Gunther was unhappy about the fact that she did not report her first two encounters with the blackmailers. But after about a half hour of questions, she was released. The sergeant expressed both gratefulness for her cooperation and disappointment about her previous silence.

Joe took her home. Neither said a word. When they got to her apartment building, Joe got out, opened her door, and walked with her to the outer door of the apartment building. It was almost 2:00 in the morning. They stood for a minute, each looking at the ground. Joe was the first to speak.

"What's the problem, Cotton?"

"It's been quite a night."

“Yeah—but that’s not why you hit your mute button. Why the silent treatment?”

“You lied to me.”

“No, I told you. Everything I said was true. I’m a grad student in chemistry. I’m planning to be a chemical engineer for my father’s oil company. You met my family. They are all exactly as I said they were. Between undergrad and grad school, I went to the police academy and became a detective for a couple of years. Then I quit and went back to school. Two weeks ago, my former captain called me in and asked me to do the undercover work, just for this one job.”

“Is that what I was, work, a job?”

“Cotton, you know better than that.”

“I thought you would have trusted me enough to tell me.”

“Secrecy is part of the job when working undercover.”

“You should have told me.”

“Well, you should have told me about being blackmailed.”

“Well, maybe I would have, if you had told me you were a cop.”

“I couldn’t do that. It’s part of the job.”

“And that’s what I was, too, wasn’t I? Part of the job. I thought the way you looked at me, there was...something more. But it...I...was just part of the job.”

“No, that was real. And, yes, you became part of the operation, but that’s not why I was interested. That’s not why I asked you out for a coffee. I didn’t know you would be their next target. But when you were, we had to make you part of the investigation.”

“I thought I became someone you could trust.”

Joe’s frustration turned to anger before he said, “You know what? I...whatever.” Then he turned, walked back down the sidewalk, and got in his Jag. The tires squealed on the pavement as he sped away.

After Suzy talked to Gin on the phone from the police station, she felt relieved. She stayed up a while, but somewhere around midnight, she fell asleep on the couch. When Gin opened the door, Suzy woke up. Still in a bit of a daze, she wrapped her arms around Gin, and they hugged a while. Then

Suzy made her go through the whole thing again. They made some coffee and talked for nearly an hour. Suzy concluded with, “Your belief in God got you through it. You acted consistent with your faith.”

“Everybody acts consistent with their faith, Suzy. That’s why I trusted God, but it’s also why I didn’t call Joe.”

“So, what about Joe? How has this affected you and Joe?”

Gin stared at her coffee cup for a minute, then she burst into tears.

Chapter 32

Faith and Works

We have all heard things like:

- “He’s a believer, but his life doesn’t show it.”
- “She claims to believe in Jesus, but don’t tell her anything you don’t want everybody to know.”
- “He calls himself a Christian, but if I were you, I wouldn’t get into any business deals with him.”

Christ and the apostles taught an important principle about a person’s faith and his or her lifestyle.

There is no inconsistency between our faith and our works

Faith is a decision, based on our desire to trust reasonable evidence. But how do we know if someone else has faith? And how do we know if our own faith is genuine? Since we can’t see it, hear it, touch it, taste it, or smell it, what’s the test that determines if we have real faith?

I have often said that the evidence of salvation in people I have seen come to Christ is

- #1 A conviction of their sin, and
- #2 A hunger for the Word of God

Both Christ and the apostles gave us a clear answer to the question about the evidence of faith. Jesus said there is no such thing as a good person who does bad works and a bad person who does good works. The tree and the fruit are consistent.

You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit (Matthew 7:16-18).

For example, consider the question, “Is an atheist, who is also a philanthropist, a good person?” Not according to Jesus. An atheist believes in people, but not in God. So his works, his charitable gifts to people-related projects and organizations, accurately reflect his faith.

James also said there is no inconsistency between our works and our faith.

But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” (James 2:18-21).

Jesus and James are telling us that our works are always consistent with our faith. There is no such thing as a person who believes one thing and then acts contrary to his faith. For example, every sin we commit is a hole, or warp, in our faith. We sin because we believe we can get away with it. We believe in a holy, righteous God who judges sin. But we don’t believe that about the specific sin we are committing.

The Apostle John said,

The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (1 John 2:4-6).

Chapter 33

Tension

Tuesday Morning

Among a flood of tears, and statements like “I was awful,” and “I ran him off,” and “I lost him,” Gin told Suzy about her feelings for Joe and how badly the night had ended. After hugs and attempted statements of comfort from Suzy, Gin was able to get a few hours of sleep. When she woke up, she showered, curled her hair, and headed off to the comparative religions class. She kept checking her texts and her voice mail, but there was nothing from Joe. She stared at her phone several times, trying to muster up the courage to call him, or maybe text him. But each time her courage failed her.

She hoped to see him in class. But he wasn't there. Neither were Sally or the professor. A graduate assistant named Mr. Cooper taught the class with an explanation that Professor Jorgensen had been suspended, pending an investigation. Gin said nothing and heard nothing that was said in class. But during the hour, she came to the decision that she had to talk to Joe. No matter how mad he was at her, she would ask him to talk and hope he would be willing to see her.

Walking out of class, she tapped her finger on Joe's name in her “Favorites” list. As she walked down the hall, his line began to ring. She opened the outer door as he picked up.

“This is Joe.”

“Hi.”

“Hi.”

“I, um, would like to, I was wondering if we could, I really want, I need to talk to you.”

“That should be easy.”

“It should? Okay, well, can we...?”

“Cotton, you're looking at the ground. Look up.”

Gin looked up to see Joe holding his phone and leaning on his Jaguar, which was parked about 10 yards right in front of her, next to the sidewalk she was standing on. As she cautious-

ly approached, he put his phone in his pocket, and pushed himself away from the car. Then he extended his arms toward her. She dropped everything, including her computer bag, and ran to him. As she wrapped her arms around his neck, she said, “Joe, I’m so sorry, I know you were just doing your job, and that’s the way your job is, and you couldn’t say anything, and I was being a jerk, and I don’t want you to be mad at, and...”

“No, Cotton, you were right.” He interrupted her in a near whisper, since only her hair separated his mouth from her ear. “I should have trusted you. I should have believed in you. Even without any of that evidence you talked about, when we first talked, I believed you were the most honest, truthful, trustworthy person I have ever known. And I want to trust you, about everything.”

They held each other in silence for a few minutes. They were oblivious to the world, except Gin later recalled some guy walking by suggesting they should “Get a room.” Finally, Joe said, “I hope you didn’t break your computer. It is in that bag you dropped, isn’t it?”

Gin just nodded. After a few more minutes of silent hugging, she looked at his Jaguar, which was on the street behind him and in front of her, “Aren’t you in a no-parking zone?”

“Yeah, I had to make sure I didn’t miss you when you came out of class. I probably should move it before I get a ticket. I was wondering if you would mind going with me to a coffee shop. I know a Starbucks just off campus. I took a real pretty girl there once.”

At that Gin released him and stepped back, “Really!?!?”

“Yup. The prettiest girl I’ve ever seen. We talked about faith.”

Chapter 34

Aren't Many People Saved Without Reasonable Evidence?

What about the people who have been saved over the centuries simply by hearing the Gospel and choosing to place their faith in Christ? Didn't they become believers without trusting reasonable evidence?

First of all, notice that wasn't true of those who heard the Gospel from the apostles. They proclaimed the Gospel in the context of the evidence they had witnessed. Those who received Christ trusted the reasonable evidence the apostles gave them. The apostles opposed belief in clever tales and mystical stories (1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Peter 1:16-18).

Consider Romans 10. Paul began with this statement about the Jews:

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge (Romans 10:1-2).

A zeal for God is trusting God without trusting reasonable evidence (lots of vertical but no horizontal on our faith graph). Faith that is *not in accordance with knowledge* is not something taught by the apostles.

Later in the same chapter, Paul described salvation with this:

...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

Salvation includes confession because our works, including our words, declare our faith. There is no inconsistency between our words and our faith. But notice that Paul did not promote a blind leap into faith in Jesus. Paul said, *you will be saved by*

Jesus Christ, when you trust the reasonable evidence *that God raised Him from the dead.*

Still later in Romans 10, Paul asked and answered the question: *How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ* (Romans 10:14-17).

Faith, according to Paul, does not come by a blind leap. It comes by *hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

But let's suppose there are people who became believers and received Christ out of a blind leap of faith, with no reasonable evidence at all.

It is certainly possible to put bad faith in a good object and "luck out," because the object is good anyway. I can have a leap-type of faith in a lottery ticket with no reasonable evidence at all for my leap of faith and end up winning the lottery. After all, somebody will win the lottery that way. At the same time, thousands of other people put the same faith in their lottery tickets to no avail. Blind faith in my ticket, which happened to win, does not make my definition of faith good. If I used that same definition on everything else, I would majorly mess up my life, as people who win the lottery usually do, because that's how they defined faith when they bought the lottery ticket.

In most religions, you are simply born into your faith. No decision, no conversion, no reasoning is necessary. But you cannot be born into faith in Christ that way. In order to become a believer in Christ, you must be *born again* (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:3, 23). Every believer in Christ must make a decision (John 1:12). And decisions must be based on something.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

Chapter 35

A Decisive Issue

Tuesday

Unlike the last time they were in Joe's Jag, this ride was full of conversation. Joe's right hand found Gin's left hand, and their fingers got tangled together. Then he began to talk about the case. Although Gin asked a few questions, Joe did most of the talking. He told her where he and his partner, a detective named George Faraday, situated themselves, so as to always know where Gin was, without being spotted by either her or her blackmailers. He told her that they were as surprised as she was by the kidnapping. He explained how they followed her to the place where she was being held. They watched two of the hooded people leave. Then, when the third one went to the corner Quick Mart, George followed him and Joe came in to make sure she was all right and ask her to get a confession.

He went on to tell her about the aftermath of her release. The recording she made through the mic under her collar was able to nail the professor. Of course, he lost his job. But his lawyer bargained for his being paroled with a year of community service in exchange for the names of the others involved. Since he was not part of the kidnapping, the DA took the deal. Joe told her that the others, even Sally (or especially Sally), would do some serious prison time.

Gin and Joe managed to park, go into the Starbucks, order coffees, find a table, and sit down, all while still holding hands. Then Joe focused on her again. But it was not so much romantic as it was a look of concern.

"What?"

"Cotton, you need to know I'm not just looking for a fling with a pretty girl. Even though I've only known you for a week, I'm serious about you."

She could feel her heart begin to pound. Suddenly, she experienced both the greatest pleasure and the greatest fear she

had ever known. But all she could manage to say was, “Me, too.”

“Then we have a big problem, don’t we?”

“Yes, I guess we do.”

“You are a Christian, and I’m an agnostic.”

After a period of silent nodding, she managed to say, “Right.” And then, as if she just realized what he said, she added, “But how did you know that’s a problem? I mean, most people today would not think spiritual or religious differences matter.”

“You live by the Bible. That wasn’t hard to figure out. Well, I’ve never read the Bible. Oh, I’ve read parts of it from time-to-time. I did grow up as a Catholic, after all. I remember it being read in church, as the priest would quote it off-and-on in his homilies. But the last three days, I had a lot of time to fill. As I said, we followed you 24 hours a day for the last three days. Most of that was sitting in a car, a van, or a room, watching your apartment or the library.

“My partner thinks I’ve gone off the deep end, but I decided to do some Bible reading. I even read some of it to him. I took on the New Testament. I read John’s gospel, then Acts, Romans and the letters to the Corinthians. That’s as far as I got, but somewhere in Corinthians, it says a believer cannot be unequally yoked to an unbeliever, and a single person can marry, but only in the Lord. If I understand that right, it keeps us apart.”

“Joe, I can go out with you, I can date you, and um, well, I just can’t ...like...um... marry you.”

“Cotton, you are not hearing me. I’m not looking for someone to date. I’ve had it with dating. I’m not interested in a short-term shallow relationship, or even a long-term shallow relationship. I’m seriously crazy about you.”

Her mixed feeling of fear and pleasure came back, even stronger than before, but once again all she could manage was, “Me, too.”

“Well, then, we’ve really got a problem.”

Gin looked at him and nodded. Then she said, “I’m sorry, Joe. I should have talked to you about this. It’s just that I was so afraid of losing you. I didn’t realize I was such a coward. I

guess I was just hoping that we could start dating and somewhere along the way you'd become a believer.”

“Cotton, I'm too old for that. Dating is a game I don't want to play anymore. I want to figure this out right now. I've never felt this way about anyone, but if we started dating, sooner or later we would hit this wall. Well, I'm fast-forwarding us up to the wall right now. If we can't resolve this, we can't move on.”

Now Gin felt nothing but fear. She realized that the only man she had ever loved could walk away from this table at Starbucks, and she might never see him again. But she also realized that her love and her fear of God trumped everything. She looked down again, at her now-cold coffee, and prayed for strength. She realized that only the Holy Spirit could convict him. Only God could bring Joe to saving faith. But maybe God would use her. She was ready to go to war—for Joe, for his faith, for his eternal life, and for their future together. She looked up at him and said, “You want to fight?”

Surprised, he released her hand, sat back, and folded his arm across his chest. “Sure. What about?”

“Your stupid belief in agnosticism, for one.”

He chuckled a bit before he said, “Okay.”

“It's absurd. Agnosticism says truth cannot be known. If that's true, then the idea that ‘Truth cannot be known’ cannot be known. Therefore, some truth must be knowable. So agnosticism is stupid.”

“But ...”

“Of course, **some** things cannot be known. Nobody thinks we can know everything. But agnosticism says nothing can be known. Nobody knows everything, but everybody knows something.”

“But ...”

“Besides, you don't live that way. You function all day as if some truth can be known. You act as if you know your food won't poison you, that there will be enough air to breathe, and water to drink.”

“But ...”

“You think you know that your car will start when you turn the key, or I guess you push a button or talk to the darn thing or

whatever. And since it will pass up anything but a gas station, you have to know there will be one not too far up the road to fill it up. Not only is your agnosticism stupid, it's hypocritical."

"Do I get to say something now?"

"No! Okay, what?"

"All religions believe in the supernatural, right?"

"Pretty much. Atheism and Deism are two worldviews that don't. Atheism believes in nature and Deism believes in an uninvolved God. There are a few atheistic churches and the Unitarians are deists. But most all religions believe in the supernatural. Why?"

"We are asked to choose between religions, and almost all of them believe in supernatural events that cannot be observed in our world. We can't know anything for certain, so it seems to me agnosticism is our only real option."

"Certainty? Life is not about certainty. Faith involves future projections based on reasonable evidence that results in trusting whatever makes the most sense. It's about making a decision, it's not about certainty. The problem with agnosticism is that you never decide to believe anything. It's like driving a car that's heading for a cliff, and you just keep on heading for the cliff, because you can't be 'certain' whether you should turn to the right or the left. So, instead of making a reasonable decision about what is most likely the best way to turn, you think it's smarter to just drive off the darn cliff."

"But if I keep my options open, I can look down many roads at the same time."

"And you can't drive down any of them. You're stuck at the intersection."

"Let's just say I go along with the idea that it's often wise to make a decision without certainty, based on the preponderance of the evidence or what is beyond reasonable doubt or something. There is still the question of deciding to believe the Bible."

"It's the same thing."

"No, it isn't."

"Yes, it is. If you believe Genghis Kahn invaded Russia and George Washington crossed the Delaware, then by the

same beyond-reasonable-doubt evidence you can believe in the historical events of the Bible.”

“But Cotton, honey, listen to me. It’s different. There are no supernatural events in this world. I don’t have to believe in the supernatural to understand that Washington crossed the Delaware. The Bible has lots of miracles. I know, there all kinds of religious people who claim miracles today, but no real scientist or historian does. The Bible authors, I think there were something like 40 of them, all claim to be writing about the real world, but I can’t go out and observe supernatural things in the real world. I guess I am a doubting Thomas. His faith was based on the certainty of seeing and touching the wounds of Jesus. I need to see the evidence of the supernatural myself.”

“The Bible doesn’t claim that everybody will see miracles. The Bible is a library of 66 books that record God’s supernatural intervention in, what is otherwise, natural history. History is the record of natural events, penetrated by a few miracles, which accompanied God’s special revelation to His patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. Thomas was one of those apostles. The Bible does not say miracles occur anywhere else. For example, while Jesus was doing miracles in Galilee, there were no miracles going on in Rome or Egypt or Babylon. Just because Jesus calmed the wind on the Sea of Galilee doesn’t mean God was calming tornadoes in Kansas or typhoons in the Philippines.”

“Yeah, but the problem is bigger than that, Cotton. I can understand that miracles are rare and only witnessed by a few prophets who received God’s revelation, and therefore I shouldn’t expect to see them myself. If faith means trusting reasonable evidence, and I conclude that the Bible is true beyond reasonable doubt, then so are its miracles. I get that. But how is it they are possible at all? It’s the possibility of the supernatural that I need reasonable evidence for, and, like doubting Thomas, I need it from the real world, not from somebody’s stories.”

Gin suddenly felt defeated. She could tell him about archeological evidence, about the history of Josephus that records the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. She could tell him about the empty tomb that has no explanation, or the changed

lives of the apostles. But that was not Joe's question. He needed to prove that supernatural events were possible in the natural world. And she could not demonstrate that. She was afraid she was about to cry. She had lost. She felt like her prayers had not been answered. She knew God had a perfect plan. She knew all things worked together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. But apparently, that purpose did not include Joe. With tears forming in her eyes, she looked at him and said, "So are you going to leave...me?"

"No, Cotton, we're going to talk more. I'm going to take you home now. And I'm going to think about all of this. But I promise I will not leave it like this. I will get back with you. We'll talk tomorrow, okay?"

She only nodded.

Chapter 36

The Belief of "Doubting Thomas"

Let's look at the special example of the Apostle Thomas. In John 20, Jesus appeared to the disciples, but Thomas wasn't there. The disciples then told Thomas that Jesus had risen from the dead, and Thomas said, "*unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.*" A week later, Jesus appeared to them again, this time, it included Thomas. Jesus said to him, "*reach here with your finger and see My hands and reach here your hand and put it into my side; and do not be unbelieving but believing.*"

Thomas had the right idea about faith. It was to be based in evidence. It is true that he should have believed it from Jesus' own predictions about His resurrection and the evidence He gave through His miracles. But it is also true that Thomas did not have the additional evidence the others had, because he wasn't there when Jesus appeared. When He said, *do not be unbelieving but believing*, Jesus connected believing to evidence. In John 10, Jesus told the Jews who were about to stone Him,

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father (John 10:37-38).

The Bible is full of examples, similar to that of Thomas, which connect a person's faith to evidence. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the judges, the prophets, and the apostles all received evidence. Some were surprised by it, like Moses, Samuel, and Elijah. Others asked for it, like Job, Gideon, David, and Thomas. Even if we conclude that the request of Thomas was inappropriate, our conclusion must include the fact that he was unbelieving because he did not trust the evidence he had before Jesus ap-

peared to him, and he believed when he trusted the evidence of the resurrected Christ. So once again, consistently **the Bible defines belief as trusting reasonable evidence.**

But before we leave the Thomas incident, notice that he believed based upon the same evidence that the others already had. Were the other apostles wrong to get that evidence? If they didn't need it, if they were supposed to believe without evidence, then why did Jesus give it to them? Why were there any resurrection appearances at all? Why did Jesus *provide many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days* (Acts 1:3)? In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul lists five of the 11 recorded appearances as part of the Gospel.

In John 20:29, Jesus said, "*Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they **who did not see, and yet believed.***" Does that mean people are more blessed if they believe without evidence? Quite the opposite! The Apostle John tells us that he wrote the things he wrote to give evidence for the rest of us to believe. The next two verses state:

*Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but **these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.***

Chapter 37

The Discovery

Wednesday

The old roller coaster metaphor could never be used more appropriately than to describe Gin's emotions on Tuesday. She started low, climbed to a height she had never imagined, then sunk to a depth she had never known. Bobby was even, predictable, steady, like a highway in Kansas. Joe was more like a treacherous road through the mountains of western Colorado, narrow and full of curves, where one could be euphoric about the beauty, or fall off the edge. Gin ended the day feeling she had two wheels already over the edge.

She did not hear from Joe the rest of the day, but she was comforted by a text message from him at 10:09 P.M., even though it just said, GOOD NIGHT COTTON THINKING ABOUT YOU.

She texted back, ME 2.

Wednesday morning was quiet. Gin had breakfast with Suzy, called her parents, went to two classes and checked her phone—a lot. Nothing from Joe. Then at 3:12 in the afternoon, her phone played a marimba sound and displayed Joe's picture.

"Hi, Joe."

"I rediscovered something amazing. I mean, I already knew it, but I didn't realize how important it was."

"What is it?"

"I want you to see it for yourself. I want to ask you out on a date."

"I thought you didn't like dates."

"I want you to go with me to a lecture on quantum physics."

"How romantic."

"We can hold hands."

"Oh, well, allrightythen."

"Do you know anything about quantum physics?"

"Not much. It's about subatomic particles, like atoms and electrons and stuff, right?"

“Right. Have you ever heard of the ‘Double Slit Experiment’?”

“No.”

“Cotton, you have to hear this. Professor Donaldson is giving a lecture on it tonight at 8:00 in the Student Union.”

“If you say so. Mind telling me why?”

“Because it’s supernatural nature. It’s about things that happen that can’t happen.”

Gin didn’t know whether to be pleased or skeptical. So she decided to try a little of each. “Really? How is that possible?”

“It isn’t. That’s the point. The double slit experiment proves things that can’t possible be true.”

“So let me see if I have this straight. We are going to hear a lecture that makes sense of things that don’t make sense, about stuff that happens although it can’t happen, which describes true things that cannot possibly be true. And hold hands.”

“Right.”

Chapter 38

Quantum Physics

The Double Slit Experiment

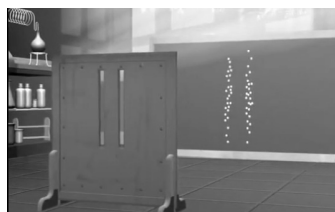
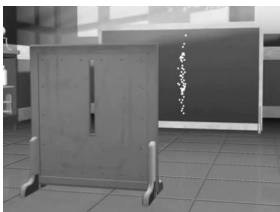


Quantum physics exists because of the double-slit experiment. English scientist Thomas Young (1773–1829), speaking on November 24, 1803, to the Royal Society of London, revealed his conclusions about the wave theory of light, based on his now earthshaking double-slit experiment. Over the last 200+ years, many scientists have repeated this and similar experiments with increasing sophistication, yielding the same results. Actually, anyone can do it. The Internet will provide you with all the information you need so that, if you like, you can perform the experiment yourself at home.

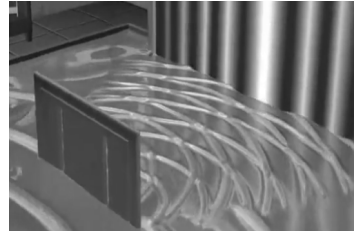
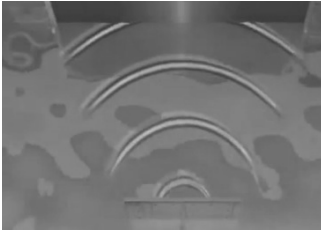
First, let's talk in terms of the macro physics (or classical physics) world, the one we all observe every day. It's often called Newtonian physics. English physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), making observations about particles of matter, concluded that light was a particle. Here's why.



If you set up a board with a slit in it in front of a wall and shoot balls at it, say, paint balls, you would get an image on the wall the shape of the slit. If you put two slits in the board you would get the image of two slits on the wall. And so on.

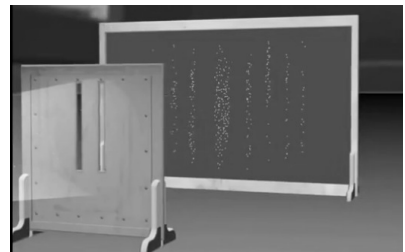
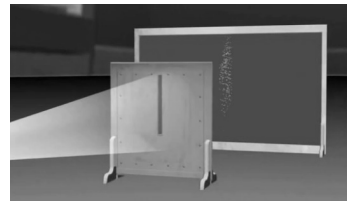


If you put the board in water and started a wave moving, when the wave hit the slit and radiated out, it would hit the back wall with the greatest intensity directly in line with the slit, similar to the line the paint balls make. But if you added a second slit, the waves would interfere with each other, so the points of greatest intensity would form an interference pattern of multiple lines on the back wall. So far, so good, right?



But now let's go quantum, and look at the world of subatomic particles.

An electron (or in the case of light, a photon) is a tiny piece of matter, like a tiny paint ball. If we fire a stream of them at a board with a slit in it, we get the same pattern on the back wall as with the paint balls. When Newton did this with light, he observed the particle-like display on the wall and concluded light was a particle. But Thomas Young added a second slit in the board and shined a light through it. He expected to get an image of two slits on the back wall. He was shocked to see that, instead, he got an interference pattern, like a wave. So he concluded that light was a wave.



But how can a particle form an interference pattern like a wave? A particle cannot be a wave and a wave cannot be a particle. Waves and particles are two entirely different forms of

reality. Yet the light that passed through the slits seemed to be both. When we shoot electrons or photons through one slit, we get a particle pattern, and when we shoot them through two slits, we get a wave-like interference pattern. But electrons are particles, tiny pieces of matter. So how can an electron cause a pattern like a wave? There is no error in the experiment. It has been repeated all over the world for over 200 years with the same result. And it doesn't make sense.

But physicists are clever. They thought, maybe the electrons were somehow bouncing off each other and creating the interference pattern when they had to go through two slits. So they shot them through the two slits very slowly, one at a time. There is no way they could interfere with each other. But after an hour of this, the electrons fired at the two slits, one at a time, produced the same wave-like interference pattern on the screen. Physicists were completely baffled by this. Apparently, the problem only intensified when they applied mathematics to it. They claim that, mathematically, it can be demonstrated that the particle can go through one slit or the other slit or neither or both and make a particle pattern or a wave pattern on the screen. There is no way these particles can produce both a particle pattern and a wave pattern on the screen, yet they do.

Understand that this is an information problem, not a logic problem. Logic says a thing and its opposite cannot both be true ($A \neq \neg A$). Newton logically proved that light acts like a particle, and Young logically proved light also acts like a wave. There is no experiment that demonstrates that light is not a particle, or that light is not a wave. Both can even be proven mathematically. The problem is, logic gives us no way to understand **how** both can be true. The problem is one of insufficient information, not logic.

The Double Slit Experiment Gets Really Weird

Let's return to our experiment.

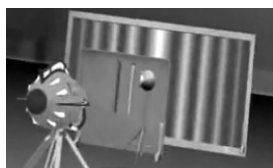
When electrons pass through one slit, they form a particle pattern. When they pass through two slits, they form a wave pattern. Particles are never waves, and waves are never particles. They are different forms of reality. So what exactly happens when the electron passes through two slits? How do they become something that produces an interference pattern, like a wave? As time went on, physicists were more capable of observation than they were in the early 1800s. By the early 1900s, physicists were able to put a small measuring device (something like a tiny camera) by the two slits to see what those electrons actually did when they passed through the slits.



As they turned on the camera, they observed something that has rocked the world of physics from that day forward. When they began to record what happened, they got two slits on the screen. The electrons, which were acting like

waves, began to act like particles.

When they turned the camera off, the electrons went back to an interference (wave) pattern. The electrons acted differently with the camera on, as if they were aware they were being watched. But that's impossible. How can an electron know anything, let alone that it's being watched?



Then one day, whether purposefully or inadvertently no one really knows for sure, someone turned on the camera but not the recorder. So the camera was working, but the information was not being recorded. With this, the electrons went back to producing a wave-like interference pattern. So the camera was

not the issue. Nothing changed when the camera was on. But as soon as the physicists looked at the data (plugged in the device that recorded the information from the camera), the electrons displayed a particle pattern. This observation changed the world of physics forever. How could watching the electrons, instead of just watching the screen, change the outcome of the experiment?

[By the way, in 2002, physicists set up this experiment, but they inserted a measuring device they called an interferometer. The device demonstrated that in order for the electron to be aware of the interferometer (to “know” it was being watched), that information would have to travel four times the speed of light, and that’s impossible, since the speed of light is the speed limit of the universe.]

It seemed like either we must think of each electron as a wave that hits both slits, or we have to think of the electron as splitting and going through each slit separately. But then, how does the electron know a pair of slits is coming so it can split and go through both? And how can an electron split? Even if that were possible, it cannot be a wave and a particle at the same time, yet it is. And why are the results different simply because of the way they are observed?

Chapter 39

A Decision

Wednesday Evening

When the lecture at the Student Union was over, people got up to leave the auditorium. Most just filed out. Some stood and talked in the aisles and some in the foyer. But Gin, while still seated, turned toward Joe, and with both her hands grabbed the lapels of the leather vest he was wearing. “That’s it. That’s what you were looking for. That’s why you took me here, isn’t it? Quantum physics has discovered real supernatural events in the natural world. Light can’t be both a wave and a particle, yet it is. A wave can’t collapse into a particle, yet it does. These are observations from the natural world that can legitimately be called supernatural.”

Still being held by the lapels, Joe added, “Cotton, you need to understand how strange this is. It’s like tracking someone in the snow by recognizing the continuation of a certain boot print, say, one with lines in it. Then all of a sudden the boot print changes to a different one, say, with knobs instead of lines. Then you take a picture of the one with lines and look at the one that had knobs, and it now has lines, exactly like the one you took a picture of.”

“So,” Gin summarized, “supernatural miracles could be from another dimension. Heaven could be as real as earth. To see it, we would just have to be able to look at reality differently.”

“This observation is about subatomic particles, and everything is made up of these things. So everything we see could be real, only because we see it a certain way. If we saw it a different way, or as the quantum physicists would say ‘if we measured it a different way,’ then it could actually be different. When we observe it, one universe changes, or they would say ‘collapses’ into another one.”

“Like God’s predestination collapses into our free will when we look at free will instead of sovereignty.”

“Or,” Joe continued, “like the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain that I read about in the Gospel of Matthew, where He appeared with Moses and Elijah. That could just be the apostles seeing it one way and then being allowed to see it another way.”

“But Joe,” Gin spoke, with her nose inches from his, all the time hanging on the lapels of Joe’s vest, “then that would also be true for believing the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Even if it’s not the same thing, it’s faith in something that has reasonable evidence, which is supernatural in the sense that it can’t happen in the natural world, yet it did.”

“I know.”

“You know?”

“I know.”

“But then there should be nothing keeping you from receiving Christ.”

“I know.”

“You know?”

“Is there an echo in here?”

“Joe, then why don’t you receive Christ?”

“Because I already did.”

“What! When?”

“This afternoon, just before I called you. I actually prayed and asked God for some evidence of the supernatural in the natural world. Then I saw the ad for this lecture and I remembered the course I had in quantum physics. I went back and read through some of my old notes. I figured I asked God for evidence and He came through, so I had no choice. I’m not going to fink out on a deal with God. So I told God I realized I was a sinner and Jesus paid for my sin on the cross, and I wanted to receive Him as my God and Savior. So I guess I’m a Christian. Whatdoyouthink?”

Gin wanted to kiss him, but instead she pulled his head down until his forehead touched hers. Then she said, “So why didn’t you tell me? If you received Christ this afternoon, why did we have to come here to this lecture?”

“So **you** could learn something about **faith**.”

Chapter 40

Quantum Physics and the Bible

Biblical Parallels

Let's look at some parallels between the double-slit experiment and biblical theology. Consider the biblical idea of predestination and free will. The Bible clearly teaches that God predestines the salvation of those who will be saved (Romans 8–9; Ephesians 1). The Bible also teaches that those who are saved make a real, free will, choice to believe in Christ (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Romans 10:10). We also learn that God predestines the events of history (Isaiah 37:26; 48:3), and we are told things happen by chance (Ecclesiastes 9:11; Luke 10:31). But how can that be? There is no way the same event can be both predestined and a free will choice (or chance) event. The same would hold true for the doctrines of the unity and Trinity of God, the 100% humanity and 100% Deity of Christ, the historical account of biblical miracles, and the impossibility of them occurring in the natural world. These are not logical contradictions, but they are incompatible conclusions.

Understand, there are no logical problems in the Bible. Logic says a thing and its opposite cannot both be true. $A \neq \neg A$. The Bible says God predestines salvation, it never says God does not predestine salvation. The Bible says we have free will to choose salvation, it never says we do not have free will to choose salvation. The Bible says God is one, and the Bible describes three persons of the godhead, who are called God. The Bible never says God is not one, or that the Son and the Spirit are less than God. We cannot understand **how** both things can be true, yet they are, logically.

"Faith" According to Quantum Physics and "Faith" According to the Bible

Notice that quantum physicists and the authors of the Bible have the same definition of faith—to trust verifiable evidence

(although the physicists would probably not call it faith). Quantum physicists believe (trust the evidence) that subatomic structures like photons and electrons can both be measured in particles and waves, even though there is no way to know how that is possible. The authors of the Bible believe that salvation comes about both by predestination and free will choice, even though there is no way to know how that is possible.

Let's take another example. The same faith (trusting the evidence) physicists have in the results of the double-slit experiment is the same kind of faith (trusting the evidence) required to believe in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Resurrection cannot happen in the physical (three-dimensional) world, but the only reasonable way to evaluate the historical evidence is to say that it did. There are no contradictions here. There is no experimental evidence that says people rise from the dead in the physical world, and there is no historical evidence that says Jesus didn't. The faith that Jesus rose from the dead is exactly the same (by way of definition) as the faith that electrons make both particle and wave patterns on a screen.

Quantum physics believes in logically determined evidence, even when it seemingly contradicts, as does the Bible. The only difference is, quantum physics uses scientific experiments, and the Bible uses historical data. As scientists go about doing experiments, there are no unexplained events until they come to something like quantum physics. In the same way, historians go about making observations, and there are no unexplainable events until they come to the Bible. Unlike religious superstition, the Bible is a book of historical events in the real world, documented in real time.

The Bible gives to history what quantum physics gives to science

It gives observations that must be superimposed upon seemingly contradictory, but equally verifiable, observations of the regular events in our three-dimensional world.

Two Fundamental Conclusions

But some things seem clear. Quantum physics tells us that the subatomic particles that make up our world are collapsed, or disentangled, from waves simply by the act of observation. But that means the observer is part of the observation. And that's even more troubling. It means reality changes for the observer with the way it is observed. There are two inevitable conclusions that quantum physics is forced to make:

- 1) Reality is a product of consciousness.**
- 2) Real mass particles exist in a certain form, only when the measurement is made.**

These conclusions were made back in the early 1900s, and they have not changed in a hundred years. Quantum physics has hit a wall that does not make sense. So it can only accept them as true.

Here are two relevant statements from our leading physicists:

“It will remain remarkable, in whatever way our future concepts may develop, that the very study of the external world led to the scientific conclusion that the content of the consciousness is the ultimate universal reality” (Nobel Prize winner Eugene P. Wigner).

“Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are a part of the mystery that we are trying to solve” (Nobel Prize winner Max Planck).

The two-slit experiment, for the first time in physics, indicates that there is a relationship between the observer and the observation, at least at the subatomic level. But since everything is made up of these subatomic particles, the reality of everything we know might just depend on the way we observe it. This is an extreme break from the idea of a constant reality, or one where the laws of macro (Newtonian) physics define all the answers.

The Biblical Significance of the Observation/Observer Connection

We shall return to quantum physics in a bit, but first I'd like to ask the question, "Do these quantum physics experiments coincide with biblical teaching?" It seems that they do.

There is a sense in which Bible believers could say to quantum physicists, "What's the big deal, we've always known that."

One parallel is in the area of transformational miracles (miracles where the observations in the three-dimensional-world changed when the observer was allowed to see it in a different way). The Bible has several examples. One is when the king of Aram was trying to kidnap Elisha because Elisha warned the king of Israel about the Aramean attacks. We read,

*And it was told him [the king of Aram], saying, "Behold, he [Elisha] is in Dothan." He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, **open his eyes that he may see.**" And the LORD **opened the servant's eyes and he saw**; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:13-17).*

So, where were all those *chariots of fire* a few minutes before Elisha's servant saw them? The answer is, they were already there, in the same place as they were after Elisha's servant saw them. What changed was simply that Elisha's servant was allowed to see them. Or we might say that he was allowed to ob-

serve the same thing a different way. *The LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw.* The observer was part of the observation. When he was able to look at it in a different way, he saw something different (and apparently, contradictory) to what was observable before. The wave (the enemy chariots) became ("collapsed into") particles (the *chariots of fire*) when observed differently. This was not a private subjective experience. The observation of Elisha's servant did not create the chariots of fire. It was an objective reality, which Elisha could already see. But the observation changed when there was a change in the way the observer was able to see (measure) the reality.

Here's another example:

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone (Matthew 17:1-8).

During their trip north to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took three of His disciples up to a *high mountain*, and something happened that was not an observation anyone would make in our macro-physical, three-dimensional-world. *Jesus was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.* One minute the three disci-

ples saw Jesus in the macro physical three-dimensional world, the next minute they saw Him in a different world. There was a connection between the observation and the observers. What they saw (like particles instead of waves) changed because their observation was allowed to change. But this was no private subjective experience. The observers did not create the reality. It was a real observation that all three disciples made objectively. Peter later wrote about it, telling us it was real, objective, and that it came from *heaven*.

*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales [faith without evidence] when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses [faith in the evidence] of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" — **and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven** when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18).*

It sounds very much like Peter is discussing *heaven* as if it were another dimension (or another universe) that existed at the same time, in the same place. But outside this transfiguration observation (recorded in Matthew 17 and 2 Peter 1), *heaven* could not be observed. This forces the question, "Could it be that when we die, we simply have a change in the way we observe reality, so that we are observing that which is not necessarily somewhere far off, but in another dimension (or universe, or realm) which we cannot now observe?"

The Bible also tells us about things like the conjuring up of Samuel from the dead, Baalam's donkey and the angel, God's revelations to Moses, Elijah's chariot of fire, Ezekiel's wheels, Isaiah's temple, Jesus' baptism, Paul's conversion, and John's revelation on the island of Patmos. Experiences like these seem to be a change in observation based upon a change in the perspective of the observer. The reality did not change. What was

actually observed was a part of reality (a different dimension or a different universe or realm) that was unobservable before.

Of course, we don't know if the biblical transformation miracles are the same as the quantum physics observations. But they **illustrate** the same thing.

We do not know if this is that, but this is **like** that.

And quantum physics includes (without knowing it or admitting it) a biblical view of faith, trusting verifiable observations, even when the observation can change with the location of the observer. The difference is not in the experimental results but in the theories about those results. Reality does not change, truth does not change, but what is actually observed changes to something not possible in the physical three-dimensional universe, when the observer is able to make a different observation.

Conclusion

The faith called for in the Bible is a decision to trust reasonable evidence. No other religion offers that definition of faith. All other religions define faith as trust in things contrary to evidence. But the biblical concept of faith is the same as that used by the scientific method. Science asks us to believe in the laws of gravity, thermodynamics, motion, friction, speed, etc. The Bible asks us to trust the evidence for creation, a global flood, the formation of the Hebrew people, the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, and the development of the church through the apostles. Just as macro (Newtonian) physics establishes truth about our natural world, so the Bible establishes truth about the history of our world. And both do it by asking us to place faith in reasonable evidence. Scientific evidence can be confirmed in the laboratory. Historical biblical evidence can be confirmed by anyone willing to visit the tells in Israel.

But the Bible also tells us that God interrupted the natural course of events with revelation in the form of supernatural events. Supernatural events cannot happen in the natural world, yet they did. The Bible is not a book of religious fairy tales. It's a historical record of what God did throughout history, including the penetration of nature with the supernatural. The Bible provided evidence all along the way. Today, we can study that evidence to see if it is reasonable. We can also see that reason applied to studies, like textual analysis, archeology, history, astronomy, geology, and biology all confirm the truth of the Bible.

So the natural and supernatural history recorded in the Bible is confirmed logically, rationally, with reason applied to real evidence. But that's a paradox in the natural world, since nature, by definition, cannot be supernatural. The Bible also asks us to believe in paradoxical conclusions, like the sovereignty of God and the free will of man, the unity and trinity of God, the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ, and prophetic predictions of future events, which govern our present and past actions.

So can faith in things, that seem to contradict one another, fit the definition of "trusting reasonable evidence"?

Science, through most of history, would say, "No. All logical conclusions must make sense with all other logical conclusions." Then came Quantum Physics. With the double-slit experiment and all that followed, on to today's sophisticated atomic experiments with lasers, physicists have been forced to define faith like the Bible does—trusting reasonable evidence, even when that evidence seems to contradict other reasonable evidence. Things that can't logically be true are real (waves can't be particles and particles can't be waves—yet, they are). Physical reality changes, depending on how we look at it. (Waves can't change to particles just because we look at them, but they do.) Future events predict past events. (Observation of the present form of an atom or electron can't change what it was in the past, yet it does.) So now scientific faith has to

change, to be the same as biblical faith—trusting reasonable evidence, even when that evidence seems to contradict what we know about the macro-physical, natural world.

We might even call it “Faith in the supernatural.”

Appendix

Various Questions and Answers

Question: Don't evangelists, like Billy Graham, lead many people to Christ without evidence?

Answer: Absolutely not. A legitimate evangelist presents evidence. I've heard Billy Graham speak many times, and he always presents evidence in a rational way. Christianity is the only religion propagated that way. Most religions are spread either by military conquest, immigration, or just by building temples and having people come for a religious experience. Christianity, however, is spread by a message that delivers information. If it doesn't, it isn't the Gospel of the apostles.

Question: Don't many sincere believers just believe without evidence? Aren't there people who are saved by hearing the gospel message apart from any evidence whatsoever?

Answer: I doubt that. You mean, somebody told somebody, "Just believe in Jesus because I said so" and gave no information or reasons or basis for the belief? The Gospel, unlike other religious presentations, must be explained. The Gospel is, by definition, a message of something that happened. That cannot be presented without evidence. One does not simply pray to the name "Jesus" with no evidence as to who He was and what He did. In fact, just using the name *Jesus* usually denotes a historical person. It's not like saying names like "Krishna," "Baal," or "Ra," which do not relate faith to a real, historical person. Saying the name *Jesus* does.

Question: Don't we have examples of people who have blindly received Christ and then go on to live a life of sincere faith?

Answer: Even if that is true, it is also true of the religions of many Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. Experience is not a valid test for truth. To blindly live by what we believe does not establish our belief to be valid. Also, to blindly accept something that just happens to be true does not create a sound

definition of faith. Blindly buying the right lottery ticket does not create a good basis for making decisions.

Question: Doesn't requiring evidence to believe put the Holy Spirit in a box?

Answer: This is the Christian mystical answer to everything. It's the mysticism of the Roman Catholic, charismatic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox churches. True, the Holy Spirit can do anything He wants. But is there **any** scriptural evidence that the Holy Spirit presented faith as something to be defined as a blind leap? The examples we have in the New Testament of the work of the Holy Spirit are all about convicting people with reasonable evidence. The Spirit drew missionaries to people and those missionaries presented reasonable evidence for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (Romans 10:14-15). Using evidence is not boxing in the Spirit, it's following the example of what the Spirit did in the New Testament (Acts 4:16).

Question: Can't the Holy Spirit convict people with just the simple word of the Gospel?

Answer: The Holy Spirit might give more or less faith to each one of us (Roman 12:3 & 6). But the question is not what has the Spirit given, but what should I do with what I have been given by the Spirit. Does the biblical evidence suggest that the Holy Spirit wants me to go about blindly leaping, or trusting reasonable evidence? Paul said the Jews *have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge* (Romans 10:2).

Question: Who gets to determine what amount of evidence is enough to be classified as good faith, since the Bible does not give any ground rules as to how much evidence leads to good faith?

Answer: I never suggested that somebody gets to determine amounts of evidence or that such a determination was possible or necessary. The amount of evidence one gets is up to God. How we respond to it is up to us. It is our responsibility to be a good steward of the evidence God supplies. But remember, I

never said evidence determines faith. The Pharisees had evidence without faith. Faith also requires a commitment decision to trust the evidence.

Question: Isn't it good for people to believe in things that aren't true if it develops their imagination? For example, a kid who imagines he is an airplane pilot may be one some day because of his imagination, or when people invent things, they usually imagine something that does not exist in order to invent it.

Answer: Imagination is the basis of creativity, and it is good when it allows us to see how we want things to be, and work toward that end. But it's not good when an irrational creative idea is believed to be true. It's valuable to imagine that a person can fly, and then think of ways to allow him to do that. But if someone imagines they can fly and then goes and jumps off a 20-story building, that's like religious faith, trust without reason. Imagination is good unless we believe it's actually true without reasonable evidence.