

# "FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE"

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(Revelation 12:9), and those who pretend to be one thing and are something entirely different, will eventually have their abode with him. The physician who promises a man health and at the same time injects poison into his system is not any worse than preachers who tell people there is no judgment and no hell. The world abhors a hypocrite, but we note that hypocrites will people hell, not heaven.

*Others* spoken of that will people hell are: (1) The beast and false prophet (Revelation 19:20. (2) The wicked (Revelation 21:8). (3) Those who will not obey the gospel (1 Peter 4:17); 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8). (4) Those in the kingdom who offend, do iniquity (Matthew 13:41). (5) Those who do nothing (Matthew 25:28-30).

## CONCLUSION

May the warning the rich man wanted to give his five brothers be taken by us, that we come not into the place of torment! To say there will not be any eternal punishment for the wicked is to slander the God of the Bible and to impeach His divine veracity!

May the rich man's misfortune be a timely warning to us, and cause us to work for heaven!

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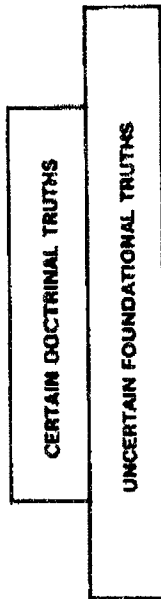
### CONCLUSION

## INTRODUCTION

The "nature of Biblical faith" is an intriguing subject. It is often approached with an incredible naivete, as though it were a simplistic doctrine. Many treat the subject as if it could be handled by a mere quoting of Hebrews 11:1. But, the question of Biblical faith is not so simple, and Hebrews 11:1 is a description of a particular type of faith, not definition! So, we must examine anew the doctrine of faith. We will find such an examination to be very enriching, ennobling, and encouraging.

Biblical faith is often used of a *subject* (an individual person), and when it is, it is used in at least seven distinct ways. The first five in the listing I will give play an indispensable role in man's salvation. *First*, the Bible speaks of faith as mere "belief" (John 12:42; Hebrews 11:6; etc.). *Second*, faith sometimes means "trust" (John 14:1; Romans 4:17-20; etc.). *Third*, it often refers primarily to "obedience" (Numbers 20:12;

built (the *fact* of the existence of God) is either problematic or non-existent. The following diagram illustrates the point just made, *viz.*, one cannot have certain doctrine based upon an uncertain foundation.



So, faith *that* is primary and foundational, whereas faith *in* is required unto the salvation of the soul. I love my wife and am committed to her. It would be absurd, however, to suppose that I should invest such a commitment to our relationship without good, solid evidence for the *fact* of her existence. The relationship is parallel to faith *in*, while the *fact* of her real existence parallels faith *that*. I am committed to the Lord. My trust in Him is based on love and submission to His will. But, it would be foolish to invest such a total commitment *in* Him without justifiable reason to believe *that* He exists at all!

## THE PROBLEM

1. *Professional Philosophy*. For many years, professional philosophers have noticed a weakness in the defense of Christianity promoted by many modern apologists. Most of the time the weakness can be directly traced to an erroneous expression of the relationship between faith and reason. George Smith focused the issue well from the viewpoint of the atheist:

The conflict between Christian theism and atheism is fundamentally a conflict between faith and reason. This in epistemological terms, is the essence of the controversy. Reason and faith are opposites, two mutually exclusive terms: there is no reconciliation or common ground.<sup>2</sup>

Smith has taken his cue from the various writings of modern "apologists" both in and out of the church. In other words, atheism—as a position seemingly making sense to modern man—receives much of its strength from an inconsistent expression of the relationship between faith and reason. The Bible contains no such conflict between faith and reason as envisioned by Smith, but it remains my task to prove that. At any rate, if my thesis can be sustained, the challenge of Smith (and others) shows itself to be impotent relative to genuine Christian theism. Nevertheless, atheists continue to press the charge. For instance, Smith stated:

The conflict between science and theology, or between philosophy and

John 3:36, ASV; Hebrews 10:23, 38; Revelation 2:10; etc.). *Fourth*, faith is often used to refer to steadfastness, loyalty, or "faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:9; Hebrews 10:23, 38; Revelation 2:10; etc.). *Fifth*, it is used objectively to refer to the content of faith, thus, it is termed "the faith" (Romans 10:9; Jude 3; Galatians 1:11, 23; etc.). *Sixth*, faith is sometimes used to speak of a strong personal conviction (Romans 14:2, 23). *Seventh*, faith is also sometimes used to refer to a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:8, 9; Matthew 17:20; 1 Corinthians 13:2; etc.).

When used of the *object* of faith (which would, of course, be either the Father or the Christ), it is used with reference to *natural* revelation (i.e., God's revelation of Himself in nature, Hebrews 11:3; Romans 1:19, 20; Psalms 19:1-6), and with reference to *supernatural* revelation (i.e., revelation of God's will through Scripture or through Jesus Christ, John 1:17, 18; 20:30, 31; Ephesians 3:3-5; Romans 16:25-27; 10:17).

Though faith is sometimes contrasted to *sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7; however, see John 20:29; 4:39-42; 6:69; etc., for exceptions), *doubt* (James 1:6; but, for exceptions, see Matthew 14:3; 21:21), and the *deeds of the law* (Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:2-5; etc.), it is never set into opposition to *knowledge* in Scripture!! Occasionally, men are said to have had a "weak" (or, "little") faith, but such was due to a lack of *trust*, and not to a deficiency in knowledge (cf. Matthew 14:24-37).<sup>1</sup>

In the remainder of this essay, I will narrow the scope of my discussion considerably so as to focus upon the nature of faith as used of the *object* of faith, *viz.*, God Himself. To restrict the discussion still further, I will attempt to discuss the relationship of faith and knowledge relative to the question of God. The reason for such constrictive guidelines is that the church is experiencing difficulties today at this particular point. That is, many are now advocating positions which compromise the gospel beyond any possible defense! Though often done with the best of motives, the devastating effects of this compromise are still real.

If I can draw a further distinction between faith *that* and faith *in*, I think that the issue will be more clearly focused in your minds. Faith *that* God exists, that the Christ is His divinely-begotten Son, that the Scriptures are His inspired, inerrant, and authoritative word, is *foundational!* I mean that, without this foundation, faith *in* (primarily a loving, trusting, submissive, commitment to God's will) is impossible! Put another way, knowledge without commitment is disbelief (see James 2:19; John 12:42); commitment without knowledge is irrationality! In point of fact, a superstructure (in this case, all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity) *cannot* be solid if the *foundation* upon which it is

theology, are offshoots of a more basic conflict, that between reason and theology. Anyone who advocates theism—the belief in the supernatural—simultaneously advocates irrationalism—the belief in the unknowable.<sup>7</sup>

Smith is perceptive enough to see that *agnosticism* is the inevitable result of any position toward God which argues, in effect, that His existence can be believed but not known! He says, by way of summarizing his claim, "it is logically impossible to reconcile reason and faith."<sup>8</sup>

Another defender of the atheistic viewpoint stated:

We are told that ultimately nothing can be proven true and that consequently we must rely on faith throughout our lives. . . .

The theist argues that we have to rely on some faith in our everyday lives and then, using this statement as a springboard, he leaps to the conclusion that faith in anything is somehow justified—fairies, leprechauns, walking on air, and God. But the fact remains that we do not have good reasons for believing any of these things. Faith or not, proof or not—we still have to decide on the basis of whether there are good reasons available for our beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another atheistic philosopher added:

Christian faith is not merely believing that there is a god. It is believing that there is a god no matter what the evidence on the question may be. "Have faith," in the Christian sense, means "make yourself believe that there is a god without regard to the evidence." Christian faith is a habit of flouting reason in forming and maintaining one's answer to the question of whether there is a god. Its essence is the determination to believe that there is a god no matter what the evidence may be.<sup>9</sup>

To be fair to philosophers, I must hasten to say that this is *not* a universally accepted position. There are many philosophers who believe that one can prove that God exists. And, I would include myself in that number. Still, this challenge is not one that can be ignored.

One may ask, though, where these people ever got the idea that Christianity was irrational in the first place. Where did such a notion originate? They got it from religious thinkers of the twentieth century, as the next two sections of my essay will demonstrate.

2. *Apologetics who are not Members of the Church.* James Dobson, popular religious writer and lecturer said:

Matters of faith can never be proved; they always have to be "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" [Heb. 11:1, KJV]. It would be impossible to make a skeptic acknowledge that God influenced the sale of my house [which he had previously discussed, D.S.J.], just as the same unbeliever would doubt my conversion experience wherein I became a Christian. . . . my interpretation of the event is based not on facts but on faith.<sup>10</sup>

Now, Dobson is not really a "Christian" in the New Testament sense of the term at all. But, more importantly for the purposes of this lecture, I would have you notice that Dobson strongly contrasts *facts* and *faith*. In fact, they are, in his view, completely opposed one to another!

Robert H. Schuller is undoubtedly one of the most well-known of the modern TV "evangelists." He addressed himself specifically to the question of God and came up with the following:

If there is a God, what in the world is He trying to do? Of course, the question must begin with an "if," for our faith is just that—faith! Faith is a commitment to an unprovable assumption. The "bottom line" of all questions is, "Is there an intelligent, intervening God?" There are three possible answers to this question. 1) There is no God. Call me an atheist. 2) I won't say; I can't be sure. Call me an agnostic. 3) There is a God. Call me a theist.

Can we be positively certain that any one of these answers is correct? The answer is No! Both the atheist and theist are making a commitment of faith. The atheist believes in nothing. The theist believes in something. But both are making a commitment to an unprovable assumption.<sup>11</sup>

On his weekly television program, Schuller was discussing this question. He said: "If proof is possible, then faith is impossible." Notice if you will that Schuller holds that "faith" is an unprovable assumption which yields no real certainty whatever. The tragic thing is that many of our apologists (i.e., those in the church of our Lord) hold precisely the same position as Robert Schuller on faith and reason!

Flannery O'Connor, a well-known Catholic author, said it simply: "Where you have absolute solutions. . . you have no need of faith. Faith is what you have in the absence of knowledge."<sup>10</sup>

But, one does not need to look at the proclamations of religious thinkers to find this view of faith. For instance, note the following from an article discussing heart surgery:

When coronary-bypass surgery was introduced in 1967, physicians immediately took it on faith that the operation would relieve angina, prevent heart attacks and prolong life. Calls for scientific studies of the operation's efficacy were rejected as unnecessary. Cardiologists and surgeons refused. . . to withhold surgery. . . because they "knew" that those patients would die without the surgery.<sup>11</sup>

Even on popular television shows, one finds the same faulty thinking about the nature of faith. For example, on "Benson" (popular prime-time sitcom), we were told that his mother bought a small piece of wood from a street vendor which he had told her was a part of the cross of Christ. Benson told her that she had been cheated. She said:

lest someone think that this is simply a problem in semantics, I hasten to point out that it is brother Lemmons' position that "impartial knowledge causes (one) to run the risk of being wrong." He is on record as saying: "At no point in history can we say we have arrived, and that the position we occupy at this point in time is infallibly right; that it has never changed, and will never change."<sup>17</sup> To say (as I do) that *some* things may be known with absolute certainty (such as, the fact that I myself exist, God exists, baptism is essential unto salvation, etc.) does not commit me to the position that *all* things may be known with absolute certainty! I have never argued that I know all things with absolute certainty. Nor do I know of anyone else who has so argued. But, brother Lemmons (apparently to show great humility) argues that *no* things may be known with absolute certainty, presumably not even the basic requirements for salvation in Christ. This is *not* a mere problem of semantics!

Don England, professor of chemistry at Harding University, has recently published a book on Christian Evidences. He stated:

The approach used in this text is presuppositional rather than dogmatic. That is, a faith of some kind is shown to be essential in every walk of life and discipline. Yet, it is shown that there is no superior alternative to Christian faith. . . . The importance of the Christian walk in faith is repeatedly emphasized over reliance on proofs, signs, or demonstrations that tend to exclude faith.<sup>18</sup>

Again he said:

I do not attempt to prove, to the exclusion of faith, that the Bible is inspired or even that God exists. . . . I . . . attempt to show that faith in God and in Biblical inspiration are reasonable and superior to any belief alternative.<sup>19</sup>

He spoke of an "aversion to proofs," indicating not only a personal hostility to such attempts, but his belief that "proof by demonstration . . . would exclude faith."<sup>20</sup> Going further, he states that each time that John uses the term knowledge that "it is knowledge dependent on faith."<sup>21</sup> One of his colleagues asserted that, "Always we must come back to the fact that faith is basic. . . . In fact, I might almost say that all of our *knowledge* is based on faith."<sup>22</sup> These brethren suggest that an attempt to "prove" the existence of God would be destructive to faith. Moreover, they hold that *all* knowledge is based upon faith, rather than the opposite.

J. D. Thomas, former chairman of the Bible department at Abilene Christian University, stated:

In all matters of religious epistemology we come to the question of distinguishing between absolutely provable knowledge and that which

All God ever asks of anyone is that they have a little faith, and, considering the reward, that's not too much to ask. Now, what do you want your old mother to believe—that this is a piece of the cross or an old hunk of saw-wood?<sup>12</sup>

Later she said: "it's my faith."<sup>13</sup> Whether it was *really* part of the cross or not made no difference at all! In the first example above, faith is set into sharp contrast to "scientific studies" and "knowledge." This is a typical modern point of view concerning faith. In the "Benson" episode, sheer irrationality is identified as faith. And, this too, has modern adherents.

3. *Apologists who are Members of the Church.* If this were only a problem among those who are not genuinely Christian, it could be solved by teaching. At the least, members of the body of Christ would not be troubled by the view. But, I am saddened to report, this problem exists within the body of Christ as well. In fact, it is one of the *most* serious problems faced by the church today!

Reuel Lemmons, well-known editor, argued:

A man cannot hold by faith a truth that he holds by reason also. When reason fails to show the way, faith does. If reason establishes the way man has no need for faith. The Holy Spirit recognized this unbridgeable gap between faith and knowledge by saying. . . "we walk by faith and not by sight."<sup>14</sup>

I wrote an article to review this position, and sent it to brother Lemmons prior to publication. He responded to me on February 9, 1983 and said, in part:

I think your review will make it perfectly plain to the readers just who it is that is so terrible and so unscriptural in his application of the scriptures on the subject you are discussing. . . .

. . . you, Brother Sztanyo, do not know everything there is to know about anything under heaven. I do not think you will say that you do. If you don't, your impartial knowledge causes you to run the risk of being wrong. If you did have perfect knowledge there would be absolutely no room for faith at all. Yours is the dangerous doctrine, not mine.<sup>15</sup>

In a letter to Ernest Underwood, he made plain his position on the relationship between faith and knowledge:

You do not have absolute knowledge about anything. If you do, why do you study? It is axiomatic that if you do have perfect knowledge you don't need faith, for faith and knowledge are not synonymous.<sup>16</sup>

This position divorces faith from knowledge, in spite of the attempts to deny the obvious. Additionally, our brother mistakes "perfect knowledge" for "knowing a thing with absolute certainty." The two statements are not synonyms. I affirm the second, but deny the first! And,

is faith-dependent to some degree or other. . . . In other words, men of strong faith "act like" they have absolute knowledge, even though in this life they can never have more than a strong faith.<sup>23</sup>

To clarify this position he argues:

Scientific knowledge we know, and things seen we know, but faith is the assurance of what we accept that we do not yet know but are hoping for, and it is the conviction (confidence in the certainty of) those things we are committed to but have not yet realized by our sight or other senses.<sup>24</sup>

He attempted to separate faith from knowledge in a letter to Mac Deaver: "Absolute, final knowledge beyond which there can be no greater, would not leave room for faith. One of Webster's definitions of faith is, 'firm belief in something for which there is no proof.'<sup>25</sup> One can already imagine how this position would be applied to the question of God. But, brother Thomas does not leave us guessing as to his position. He says:

We cannot prove, or disprove, the existence of God in a scientific, absolute sense. What we CAN do is to furnish an adequate basis for faith in pointing out the necessity for God—the extremely high probability that he exists (my emphasis, D.S.).<sup>26</sup>

Finally, he denies that one can have the same kind of faith as that possessed by the apostles (which, of course, makes any talk of "restoration" pure foolishness).

The apostles KNEW of the resurrection because they had empirical evidence. . . . We today believe, or have faith, but since we did not actually see Him after the resurrection, we are limited to faith. However, when faith is strong, there is no doubting as far as commitment of life to Him is concerned. *We act as though we have as much certainty as the apostles had. This is real faith.*<sup>27</sup>

Notice that "faith" is contrasted to empirical evidence, and "knowledge" is restricted to sense experience. Apparently, to brother Thomas, only science can really give us knowledge with any degree of certainty.

A similar position is adopted by Roy F. Osborne. He stated: "Faith of any sort is based on probability. . . . In a world of fallible beings, imperfect senses, and partial experience, absolute certainty is only a theoretical concept."<sup>28</sup> He then says: "As a friend of mine says, 'We behave "as if" we knew.' We can never be absolutely certain, but we behave as if we were."<sup>29</sup> Consistent with these assumptions, brother Osborne concluded that "Matters of faith are matters of opinion." In an article devoted to an exposition of this thesis, he said: "In reality the only things we can call facts with any degree of certainty are things we can experience with the five senses. All other things are subject to

interpretation and are therefore subject to error."<sup>30</sup> Again, the assumption is that "matters of faith" are known to a much lesser degree than "matters of sense experience." In fact, brother Osborne affirms the incredible position that "matters of faith are matters of opinion."

Numerous other examples could be cited, but these are sufficient to make the point. Generally, the error lies in either (1) confusing the relationship between faith and knowledge in Scripture, (2) assuming that knowledge is restricted to sensory perception, (3) thinking that one cannot have absolute certainty in any sense whatever, (4) accepting a notion of faith as "strong personal conviction" without real "certainty," or (5) thinking that "knowledge" is based on "faith" rather than the opposite! At any rate, these confusions produce devastating results when presented to students in the name of truth. For instance, consider the following from one of our Christian college newspapers:

Those of us who venture to stake our lives on a belief in a personal God do only by trust. Nothing, not even science, can remove all our doubt regarding the existence of God. Therefore such a belief involves risk. . . . Certainly, his challenge (i.e., the challenge of Christ, D.S.) is not a blind bet. There are too many things, especially his life, which give credence to his claims. It stands to reason, based on the odds, that one would want to bet on him. It's still a gamble, but I've placed my bet. Now it's your turn.<sup>31</sup>

## VARIOUS FALSE THEORIES OF FAITH

1. *Faith is prior to knowledge, and all knowledge is based on faith.* This position is becoming a more and more seriously held view of modern religionists.<sup>32</sup> That this position is false, however, is easily demonstrated, for no one can believe anything unless the belief has some content! In brief, one must know (or, *understand*) **WHAT** to believe before the belief is possible at all. This is true of even the most rudimentary beliefs men may hold. Thus, knowledge is *always* prior to belief. One will not invest a commitment to a thing or in a person unless he first understands *something* relative to the kind of commitment required! Augustine, a fourth-century philosopher-theologian, may have said it best, when he stated:

For who cannot see that thinking [NOTE: the word translated "thinking," etc. throughout this paragraph is the Latin term for *reason*, D. S.] is prior to believing? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed. . . . It is . . . necessary that everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded; although even belief is nothing else than to think [i.e., *reason*, D. S.] with assent. . . . everybody who believes, thinks—both thinks in believing, and believes in thinking.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of the fact that he held that reason *perfects* faith, he still recognized the fact that it is absolutely impossible for faith to exist in the absence of *understanding*.

2. *Faith and knowledge are not only distinct, but separate.* Those holding this position suggest that faith and knowledge are completely divorced one from the other. Generally, they will say that if one has knowledge, then there is no room left for faith. There are several things wrong with this view. *First*, it is fundamental that we learn to distinguish without separation! The fact that terms are distinct, or that various things must be understood differently, does not imply that these terms or things are *separated* in reality. For instance, the soul and body must be distinguished, but not separated. The body has size, volume, shape, color, mass, appendages, etc., whereas the soul has none of these qualities. Do we argue, since this is so, that the body and soul must be completely separated one from the other? In a similar way, "faith" and "knowledge" differ in certain respects from one another, but it does not follow that they are to be separated.

*Second*, there are numerous passages which inseparably join both faith and knowledge (John 4:42; 6:69; 17:8; 1 Timothy 4:3; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 John 4:6, 16; 5:13). Indeed, our Lord used the terms synonymously in John 17:21, 23:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (emphasis mine, D. S.).

And, Isaiah used the terms synonymously with reference to God Himself in Isaiah 43:10, 11:

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me: I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour (emphasis mine, D. S.).

*Third*, in John's gospel, *pisteuo* with the dative is frequently used (John 2:22; 5:46; 8:31-47). With reference to the nature, mission, and role of Jesus, John utilizes *pisteuo* with a *hoti* clause, as in John 8:24 ("be convinced that I am"), John 20:31 ("be convinced that Jesus is the Christ"), as well as several other passages (see John 13:19; 14:11; 17:8). *Pistis* ("belief") is here close to *gnosis* ("knowledge"), as in John 6:69: "we have believed (and continue to believe) and have known (and continue to know) that you are the holy one of God." Both faith and knowledge are concerned with the fact that the Father has sent Jesus

(faith—John 11:42; 17:8, 21; knowledge—John 17:3). Both faith (John 16:27-30) and knowledge (John 7:17) realize that He or His teaching are from the Father. If knowledge relates to the truth (John 8:32), faith relates no less to Him who is the truth (John 14:1, 6). The fact that He is the Christ is an object of faith (John 11:27; 20:31), but it is also an object of both faith and knowledge together (John 6:69). Scripture refers to itself as having been written to produce both faith (John 20:30, 31) and knowledge (1 John 5:13). In spite of the fact that his own position is radically different, Rudolph Bultmann was forced by the evidence to conclude:

John cannot set *pisteuein* in antithesis to *ginoskein*. . . . In respect of their objects, there is no difference between *pisteuein* and *ginoskein*. . . . *pisteuein* and *ginoskein* are not simply to be differentiated as initial and final stages, and it certainly rules out any distinction into two kinds of Christians, the *pisticks* and the *gnostics*, as in Christian Gnosticism. In antithesis to Gnosticism it is apparent that knowledge can never take us beyond faith or leave faith behind. As all knowledge begins with faith, so it abides in faith. Similarly, all faith is to become knowledge. If all knowledge can only be a knowledge of faith, faith comes to itself in knowledge. *Knowledge is thus a constitutive element in genuine faith* (emphasis mine, D. S.).<sup>34</sup>

Conversely, all faith begins in knowledge (or, understanding). There is such an interconnection between the two, that separation is not possible!

3. *Knowledge is restricted to sense perception; faith is based upon testimony.*

This position, quite common among us, seems to have originated with Alexander Campbell, who was profoundly influenced by John Locke, an empiricist. Campbell said, for instance:

*No testimony, no faith:* for faith is only the belief of testimony, or confidence in testimony as true. To believe without testimony is just as impossible as to see without light. The measure, quality, and power of faith are always found in the testimony believed.<sup>35</sup>

Again, Campbell said: "It is *known* when we have witnessed it ourselves, and it is *believed* when reported to us by credible persons who have witnessed it. This is the chief difference between faith and knowledge."<sup>36</sup> One writer recently expounded upon this very theme as follows:

To speak philosophically, I believe what is testified, I know what I have observed or experienced, and I am of opinion in all things speculative. . . . A person's faith is always bounded by testimony; his knowledge by observation and experience, and opinions commence where both these terminate, and may be boundless as God's creation or as human invention.<sup>37</sup>

are known with absolute certainty which are not subject to empirical investigation at all. Such propositions as the following are known with absolute certainty and yet, are not even subject to sensory perception! "Justice cannot be attributed to impersonal beings." "Moral virtue presupposes freedom." "Every judgment (statement or proposition) makes a claim to be either true or false." "Responsibility presupposes freedom." "Every change presupposes a sufficient cause." "Every value demands an adequate response on the part of the person to whom it is revealed." "Love implies interest in the happiness of the beloved." These, and many others I could mention, are truths which can be known with absolute certainty, and all of them have some bearing upon the Christian faith. Still further,

there is a strict impossibility that any perception is grasped with a greater degree of certainty than the one who is the subject of such a perception. Since perception is an act of a conscious subject distinct from other acts of a conscious subject (such as willing, feeling, thinking, remembering, etc.), it shares the same basic characteristics of all such conscious activity. "I" am the one who *thinks*, who *wills*, who *feels* emotionally, who *remembers*, and who *perceives!* In spite of the fact that each perception is totally new even with reference to the same object of perception at different times, it is still one and the self-same "I" who perceives. I am always immediately aware of my own existence (and its unity) as well as my own conscious activity. The acts of consciousness which I, as a conscious subject *perform*, literally *cannot* be known with greater certainty than my own self-awareness. Such is patently absurd. Any act of consciousness presupposes a conscious subject who performs such an act.<sup>43</sup>

Other reflections could be inserted at this point, but these are sufficient to show that, among other things, Campbell got sidetracked at the starting point. Agreeing with John Locke, Campbell maintained that all human knowledge must originate in sense experience. But, this initial assumption was erroneous. Therefore, it needs to be corrected!

### THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL FAITH

Given the restrictions enunciated earlier in this essay, and the preliminary responses made to various false notions of faith, I should like to briefly address myself to some of the principles of Biblical faith. I hope that it will quickly become apparent that, though skeptics can find many defenders of the irrationalism they attack, Biblical faith is not irrational. So, the defender of New Testament Christianity is not open to the attacks of the atheists at the point of faith and reason. As a matter of fact, I agree with the method employed in the following statement from a rather prominent theistic philosopher:

According to this position, one should never be able to find *faith* where one finds "observation" but not "testimony." And, one should not be able to find *knowledge* in the presence of "testimony" but not "observation." Additionally, knowledge should never be found going beyond observation, be found as a condition for observation to occur at all, or be more certain than what is perceived.

It seems, however, that for our modern scribe, there is yet another motive for the article mentioned. He stated:

When one is convinced that every conclusion he draws is absolute truth, and that faith is the knowledge of that truth (truth is, in this concept, a proposition proven by a logical process), then it obviously follows that anyone who does not accept that conclusion has rejected truth. . . and no truth rejector can be recognized or fellowshiped.<sup>38</sup>

It is evident that our editor meant to devalue logic and the reality of absolute truth in at least *some* things. Of course, I agree with him that some have perhaps carried this too far. But, his complaint is not just about the extremists. In the January issue of the same journal, Franklin Camp wrote:

Your editorial on Faith, Knowledge, and Opinion was excellent. . . My conclusion should always be subject to further study. The Bible provides its own credibility which gives me assurance but this does not mean that my understanding is infallible. Some have carried absolute truth to the extreme as though absolute truth and man's assurance are the same. I do not question my faith but I am always subject to questions about it and realize that I can be wrong.<sup>39</sup>

Our editor replied favorably, saying: "Wise words from a wise man."<sup>40</sup> Obviously both men believe that our conclusions should always be considered as potentially wrong! Though I agree that one should hold some conclusions tentatively, it does not follow that all conclusions should be so treated. I do not intend to adopt an agnostic position regarding the existence of God, the Deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the oneness of the Lord's church, baptism as essential unto salvation, etc.

But, how does one respond to this false position? *First*, there are numbers of passages which have faith existing in the presence of *observation* (cf. John 20:29; 4:39-42). *Second*, there are also passages in which knowledge is found based upon credible testimony (cf. 1 John 5:13; Luke 1:1-3, where the "credible witness" did not even personally observe the data about which he wrote). *Third*, there are the numerous passages already cited, which connect faith and knowledge together, thus showing that the distinction forced upon these terms by these brethren, is untenable. *Fourth*, there is clear evidence that some things

that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt: and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

Rahab's knowledge could not possibly have been based upon observation, since none of the events to which reference was made, were events which they had personally observed! Nevertheless, based upon the evidence, she knew of the *fact of God* and of the *strength of God's children*. And, if James is to be believed at all, this *foundation of knowledge* was essential unto her justification (see James 2:24-26). In other words, faith in God would not have been possible at all apart from faith *that*. It is nothing short of incredible that our modern apologists have missed this connection!

In the following list, each of the propositions is *both faith and fact*. The kind of evidence undergirding each proposition is different, but this does not mean that the proposition is either doubtful or untrue. In fact, each proposition is true, and that is what I mean by *factual*! That is, what the proposition claims actually corresponds to reality and is, therefore, true.

#### FAITH OR FACT?

Baptism is essential unto salvation. Faith or Fact?

The Church was established on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of the Christ. Faith or Fact?

Jesus the Christ was bodily resurrected from the grave. Faith or Fact?

Adultery is wrong. Faith or Fact?

God exists. Faith or Fact?

Some of these propositions depend primarily on historical evidence (whether from the Bible alone, or also from secular sources). Some depend upon Biblical evidence alone. Some require a study of both natural and supernatural revelation (e.g., the Deity of Christ). And, some require a study primarily of natural revelation (e.g., God exists). But, in spite of the fact that the test for truth differs, I insist that each of the propositions stated is *factual*. Would *any* faithful gospel preacher dare to deny this?

*Second*, the Bible nowhere opposes faith to knowledge. Since I have already discussed this point earlier in this essay (see under "Various false theories of faith," section 3), I will not elaborate here.

*Third*, the Bible nowhere teaches that knowledge is restricted to sense experience. Neither does Scripture teach that knowledge derived from

Many people today assume that faith (or a religious attitude) is compatible with the absence of knowledge (and its accompanying certainty). "I do not know," they say when asked whether God exists, "but I think it very probable" or "I believe because the belief helps to make life more meaningful to me" or "I believe on authority." Sometimes such people acquiesce in a non-cognitive form of faith because they know no other, but sometimes they do so because they take it for granted that claims to religious knowledge (and so to certainty) have been invalidated by philosophers (or, perhaps scientists). Sometimes, too, they may feel that although a knowledge of God is possible it is reserved for a few spiritual specialists—a handful of saints and mystics.

In contrast with all these tendencies I shall contend that religion, at any rate in its Christian form, must include a claim to knowledge; that the claim can be substantiated according to objective principles of reason; and that the knowledge is obtainable through the exercise of the mind's normal powers. The last point is especially important. Religious knowledge, even when it is a response to supernatural revelation, is a wholly *natural* activity of the human mind; for the latter exists only by being a created reflection of its divine Archetype.<sup>2</sup>

With these preliminaries out of the way, let me now advance several Biblical principles with reference to the faith-reason issue. *First*, the Bible is *nowhere* opposed to "proofs" as is the case with some of our contemporary apologists. In fact, proving one's case is a *matter of obligation* to the child of God. Paul said, "Prove all things (literally, "put all things to the test"); hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21; cf. Philippians 1:7, 17; 1 Peter 3:15, etc.). In Isaiah 41:21, there is a clear challenge from Jehovah Himself to those who would argue against His existence: "Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob." Whether God exists and what God is like are questions to be settled on the basis of adequate evidence (in this context, the evidence is predictive prophecy, which is clear proof of an omniscient Being). The very thing the false gods of the pagans could not do (see Isaiah 41:22-24), the God of Israel could do (see Isaiah 42:8, 9).

In Joshua 2:8-13, the record indicates that Rahab's belief and commitment were based upon knowledge, and that her knowledge was based upon events which occurred *before* the children of Israel even crossed the Jordan river. In fact, some of the events may well have occurred before Rahab was born, since they were at least 38 years past. In the portion of the text reproduced below, the word for "know" is *episteimai* (in the LXX) which is the strongest word for knowledge in the Greek language. Our English word "epistemology" (the theory and study of knowledge) comes from this word!

And she (Rahab, D. S.) said unto the men, I know (my emphasis, D. S.)

direct observation is inherently superior to other types of evidence. I shall give several examples of this truth.

In Matthew 16:1-4, the record states:

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, when it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.

Here, Jesus explains that they had evidence enough to establish a correct conclusion regarding His true identity. *They wanted an empirical sign!* Some may think that a greater certainty would have been the result had He given them such a sign, but there is no indication at all that such would have been the case. And, remember, no one could possibly give an empirical sign of a non-empirical Being (God), except by way of furnishing evidence so that a correct inference could be drawn concerning the identity of the non-empirical Being. If one modifies the original claim (i.e., observation yields the highest degree of certainty—call that *knowledge*; other forms of evidence yield high probability at best—call that *faith*) to maintain that he infers the truth of the proposition (i.e., Jesus is the Anointed One of God—the God-man) from things perceived or that he infers them from inviolable principles, then I inform him that such is precisely the move made in defense of Christianity, and that such is the kind of evidence upon which faith is built. But, the inference made is (so long as the argument is valid and the premise true) *known with as great a certainty as the premises which are used for evidence!*

In John 4:39, 41, 42, we have another interesting example of the faith-reason relationship:

And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman, who testified. He told me all things that ever I did. . . . And many more believed because of his word, and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard (akeikoman) for ourselves, and know (oidamen) that this is indeed the Saviour of the world (emphasis mine, D. S.).

There are two groups here under consideration. In both cases, there is a claim ("Jesus is the Savior of the world"), evidence to show that the claim is true, and belief in the Christ based upon a knowledge of the truth of the claim (see also John 8:32). The woman and the second group of Samaritans came to a knowledge of the truth of the claim

(which was the basis for their belief), upon the conjoining of testimony plus sight. The first group believed on the strength of the testimony of the woman *without* visual evidence. In both cases, the evidence was sufficient to show that the claim made was true. And, in both cases, they *knew* that it was true (cf. John 2:21, 22, for a similar example). There is no indication anywhere that the degree of certainty is different for these people, in spite of the fact that the evidence was given to them in different ways.

Again, in Luke 16:19-31, we have another example of the same relationship. This, of course, is the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus, and you will recall that the rich man desired to have Lazarus return from the dead to warn his brothers of the terrible fate awaiting them if they did not mend their ways. The text records the conversation in verses 29-31:

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Abraham insists that they could have the benefit of empirical evidence (a man whom they knew to be dead, but who communicated directly to them about their spiritual condition), but that this evidence would be no more convincing or compelling than Moses and the prophets (and, this is clearly a form of "non-empirical" evidence, since the things stated in "Moses and the prophets" would have been withdrawn from their own sense perception). In short, they would *not* be more greatly persuaded by the visual evidence than by the Scriptural evidence. I argue that the supposed "greater degree of certainty" of empirical evidence is refuted by this one passage alone!

Another thrilling example of my position is found in Luke 1:1-4, which reads as follows:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed (emphasis mine, D. S.).

From this text it is evident that Theophilus is a lover of God (the literal meaning of his name would be, "friend of God"), and that he *had been instructed* in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity (the term

"instructed" translates *katecheo*, which means detailed and rigorous instruction, and from which our English word "catechism" derives). Furthermore, it seems clear that neither Theophilus nor Luke were eyewitnesses of those things about which Theophilus had been instructed. Moreover, the evidence which he received from Luke was in the form of *written testimony from a credible source!* That this evidence was sufficient for Theophilus to "know the certainty" of those things (which had to include the fact of God's existence, since everything else believed depends upon that foundational truth) is the plain and forthright declaration of Scripture. One cannot maintain a contrary position without adopting an unscriptural view!

*Fourth*, I have elsewhere argued that "faith is the volitional commitment of an informed intellect." This simply means that faith is a willing commitment to a known truth! Put still another way, faith is an act of the will which is based upon knowledge. Unless one knows *that* he is to believe in the first place and *what* he is to believe, "faith" is impossible! How can one have faith *in* someone or something unless he knows what he is to believe? So, it is strictly impossible to "have faith in God" unless one *knows* something about God prior to the commitment. It follows, therefore, that those who deny that God can be known to exist, actually adopt a position which renders faith impotent!

## CONCLUSION

Agnosticism is one of the most crucial problems facing the church of our Lord today. For, if agnosticism is not checked, not only is evangelism a moot point, but the entire system of Christianity is itself compromised! If the agnosticism represented by those reviewed in this essay were true (which it is not), then no one could really *know* a single truth of the Christian faith, since all doctrinal truth depends upon prior knowledge of the *fact* of God's existence. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine a more important issue than that discussed in this treatise. For, once the umbilical cord of knowledge has been cut, Christianity is left floundering in the lifeless sea of uncertainty!

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>One could hardly argue that Peter was ignorant of the divine power of the Christ. He saw Jesus walking on the water and, when the whole affair was completed, the apostles *worshipped* Him. Then, they confessed Him as the Son of God (see Matthew 14:33). Peter's problem, therefore, was a lack of trust!
- <sup>2</sup>George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God*, The Skeptic's Bookshelf (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1979), p. 5.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 89.

- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101.
- <sup>5</sup>B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981), pp. 95, 96.
- <sup>6</sup>Richard Robinson, "Religion and Reason," in *Critiques of God*, ed. Peter Angeles (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1976), p. 121.
- <sup>7</sup>James Dobson, *Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1980), pp. 126, 127.
- <sup>8</sup>Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), p. 133.
- <sup>9</sup>Robert H. Schuller, "The Hour of Power," February 5, 1984.
- <sup>10</sup>Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (Farrar, Stauss, and Giroux, 1979), p. 477.
- <sup>11</sup>Thomas A. Preston, "Coronary-Bypass Surgery: Remedy or Racket?" *The Reader's Digest* (April 1985): 128.
- <sup>12</sup>This aired on "Benson," October 19, 1983.
- <sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup>Reuel Lemmons, "Galileo Won't Sleep," *Firm Foundation* 99:46 (November 16, 1982): 2.
- <sup>15</sup>Personal letter from Reuel Lemmons, February 9, 1983.
- <sup>16</sup>Letter to Ernest Underwood.
- <sup>17</sup>Reuel Lemmons, "Grassroots Restoration," *Firm Foundation* (January 11, 1972): 2.
- <sup>18</sup>Don England, *A Scientist Examines Faith and Evidence* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1983), p. 13.
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.
- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>22</sup>Jack Wood Sears, "How the Worlds were Framed," in *Studies in Hebrews*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1983), p. 406.
- <sup>23</sup>J. D. Thomas, *Heaven's Window* (Abletne, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1974), p. 131.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137.
- <sup>25</sup>J. D. Thomas, letter to Mac Deaver, September 27, 1982.
- <sup>26</sup>J. D. Thomas, "Is There a God? (1)" *Firm Foundation* 99:38 (September 21, 1982): 7.
- <sup>27</sup>Thomas, letter to Mac Deaver.
- <sup>28</sup>Roy F. Osborne, *Great Preachers of Today—Sermons of Roy F. Osborne* (Abletne, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1968), p. 132.
- <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup>Cited in the *Richardson East Messenger*, June 29, 1980.
- <sup>31</sup>Dale Robinson, "Christ Offers the Best Odds in Life," *Optimist*, October 3, 1980.
- <sup>32</sup>Sears, "How the Worlds were Framed," p. 406; England, *A Scientist Examines*, p. 22.
- <sup>33</sup>Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, p. 5.
- <sup>34</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI, pp. 226, 227.
- <sup>35</sup>Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, reprint ed. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1980), p. 92.
- <sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.
- <sup>37</sup>Howard Winters, "Faith, Knowledge and Opinion," *Carolina Christian* (November 1984): 3.

# THE "NEW ANTI-ISM" CHARGES

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## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

1. The devil has many devices (2 Corinthians 2:11; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 Corinthians 10:12).
2. Definitions of anti-ism and liberalism.
3. Opposition of faithful brethren to both anti-ism and liberalism.
4. Accusations of the advocates of "a new liberalism."

### I. THE CHARGES OF THE "NEW LIBERALS"

1. Compromise with the Christian Church.
2. Perverted translations.
3. Marriage, divorce and remarriage.
4. The "junior church," divided assembly concept.

### II. THE SOURCES OF THE CHARGES

1. Unprovable assertions (1 Thessalonians).
2. Lectureships, articles, pulpits, et. al.

### III. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CHARGES

1. Many are in great earnestness regarding this matter.
2. Some will go to great lengths to make the "neo-anti-ism" label stick to faithful brethren.

### IV. METHODS OF DEALING WITH THE "NEW ANTI-ISM" CHARGES

1. Preach the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:15; Jude 3).
2. Appeal for brethren to practice the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12).
3. Show that truth is being advocated.
4. Show the self-condemnation of the "neo-liberalism" position.

## INTRODUCTION

Peter warns, "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Howard Winters, "Letters to the Editor," *Carolina Christian* (January 1985): 18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Dick Sziany, "The Nature of Biblical Faith," in *Studies in Hebrews*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1983), pp. 475, 476.

<sup>7</sup>H. P. Owen, *The Christian Knowledge of God* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), preface.