

A Reasonable Faith

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Is the Christian Faith Rational?

Few people reject the Gospel because they *know* the Gospel. Most reject it because they *think* they know it. Many accusations leveled at the Christian faith are based on misconceptions of the Gospel. Here are just a few:

- It is exclusive (yes, it is)
- It is irrational (no, it is not)
- It is absolute (yes, it is)
- It is close-minded (no, it is not)

A common misconception of the Gospel is that to be a Christian you need “blind faith.” But becoming a Christian does not require you to commit “intellectual suicide.” Far from valuing a “blind faith,” the Bible encourages us to exercise an “intelligent faith.” Rather than a mindless leap in the dark, the believer takes a deliberate and rational step into the light. As the *New Commentary on the Whole Bible* explains:

“Our faith is not a leap in the dark; it is belief in response to evidence. It involves the mind as well as the will and emotions.”¹

A Rational You

God created you as a rational being. In fact, you have been described as “a rational, self-conscious, self-determining creature, intended by [your] Creator for fellowship with Himself.”²

Becoming a Christian does not mean denying what God has made you to be. In fact, when asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus replied in [Matthew 22:37](#):

Is the Christian Faith Rational?

Does God Exist?

Is the Bible God’s Word?

Do Science and Scripture Agree?

Why is There Evil in the World?

Do Miracles Really Happen?

What Should We Think of Jesus?

Did Jesus Die and Rise Again?

Is There a Heaven and Hell?

Is There No Other Way of Salvation?

Can We Really Know the Truth?

How Do I Share My Faith?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind.*’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Jesus underlined the need for you to love God “with all your mind.” The Greek word that Jesus uses for “mind” actually means “intellect” or “reasoning capability.” As *Strong’s Greek Dictionary* explains, the word means “*deep thought... imagination, mind, understanding.*”³

Peter uses this same Greek word for “mind” when he writes in **2 Peter 3:1**:

“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome *thinking.*”

The Gospel is about training the mind toward wholesome thinking – a thinking that is centered on Jesus Christ and that is aligned with God’s Word. We cannot understand the work of God in our lives until we understand how the Spirit of God impacts our thinking.

In **1 John 5:20**, John writes:

“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us *understanding*, so that we may know him who is true.”

John again uses the same Greek word for “mind” (here translated “understanding”) that Jesus used when he said, “Love the Lord your God...with all your *mind*...”

Your mind is a central pivot point for your experience in Christ. This is why Paul writes in **Romans 12:2**:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed *by the renewing of your mind.*”

How are you transformed? By the renewing of your mind! Let’s see what some other translations have to say about this transformation process:

New Century Version: “...be changed within by a new way of thinking.”

Good News Bible: “...let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind.”

New Living Translation: “...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”

New Testament in Modern English: “...let God re-mould your minds from within...”

Amplified Bible: “...But be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind – by its new ideals and its new attitude.”

This renewal of the mind plays a crucial role in your growth into the likeness of Christ. Just take a look at the emphasis that the New Testament places upon the mind:

- **Philippians 1:9** – “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more *in knowledge and depth of insight*.”
- **Colossians 1:9** – “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God *to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding*.”
- **Colossians 1:10** – “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, *growing in the knowledge of God*.”
- **Colossians 3:10** – “...and have put on the new self, which is *being renewed in knowledge* in the image of its Creator.”

God’s plan is not to repress your mind but to harness it. Through the “washing of the water of the word” (**Ephesians 5:26**), God intends to bring your mind – your reasoning capacity – into line with his view of things.

God has created you as a rational being. For this reason, the Christian faith also has a rational quality. As Paul Little explains:

“Faith in Christianity is based on evidence. It is *reasonable* faith. Faith in the Christian sense goes beyond reason but not against it.”⁴

In **1 Peter 3:15**, Peter tells his readers:

“...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...”

Peter expects the believer to be prepared to answer* anyone who asks for “the reason for the hope that you have.” Peter is encouraging the first century believers to *understand* the faith they have in Christ so that they can *articulate* that faith to unbelievers. As the *New Commentary on the Whole Bible* explains:

“This does not mean that every Christian must be a learned scholar and apologist for the Christian faith. But each Christian is called to understand and be able to clearly explain his own reasons for being a Christian and his own grasp of the faith.”

We have not been called to present the Gospel as a “just believe” proposition. Like the Christians of the first century, we are able to appeal to a faith that is “true and reasonable” (**Acts 26:25**). And we too must be ready to explain the basis for our hope in Christ.[†]

Is It Wrong to Ask Why?

We should never fear the scrutiny of those who sincerely question. Jesus never rebuked the seeker who questioned him. But before we are ready to answer to

* The Greek word that Peter uses for “answer” is *apologia*, which literally means “a defense.” It is from this Greek word that we get the academic term “apologetics” – which means “an organized and reasoned defense of the Christian faith.”

† This hope is described elsewhere as “the hope of eternal life” (**Titus 1:2; 3:7**) and “the hope of glory” (**Colossians 1:27; Romans 5:2**). See also **Ephesians 1:18** and **Colossians 1:23**.

the questions of those who are *outside* the faith, we must be ready to answer the questions of those who are *inside* the faith.

Many Christians view any questioning by a young Christian as being a lack of faith. But is this a correct stance? Is it wrong for a Christian to ask, “Why?”

Paul Little, in his book *Know Why You Believe*, makes this observation:

“When young people begin to question and appear to have doubts, they should be welcomed into a climate where they are free to ‘unload’ and *express* their doubts. Many such young people have been driven underground and lost to the cause of Christ because the adults with whom they first talked had a high shock index. They implied that a good Christian would never doubt and that the questioner’s spiritual life must be slipping because he was thinking. Young people aren’t stupid. When they meet this response they quickly shift gears and mouth the party line, even though it doesn’t come from the heart. They quietly wait until they are out from under the pressure to conform, and then they shed a faith that had never become their very own.”⁶

We need to lower our “shock index,” as Paul Little describes it. We need to cultivate an environment where genuine questions can be asked. For if questions can’t be answered within the Church, how can they be answered on the street?

Faith and Reason

Read Titus 1:1-2

Paul describes two things that go hand in hand:

- Faith in God
- Knowledge of the truth

You cannot experience the Christian life that God has intended for you without these two things operating together. As John Stott explained it: “Faith and thought belong together, and believing is impossible without thinking.”⁷ He goes on to say:

“Faith and sight are set in opposition to each other in Scripture, but not faith and reason...True faith is essentially reasonable because it trusts in the character and the promises of God. A believing Christian is one whose mind reflects and rests on these certitudes.”⁸

It has been said that “[t]he heart cannot delight in what the mind rejects.”⁹ Faith and reason must cooperate for there to be a genuine understanding of the Gospel.

Limitations to Reason

Having established the importance of the mind – the fact that both faith and reason play a vital role – we’re now going to look at the *limitations* of reason. As important as it may be, reason has some inherent limits. There are some things that the human mind simply cannot grasp.

Take for example a person who has been blind from birth. The concept of color is impossible to describe, because it is beyond that person's experience. There is nothing equivalent that can be used to compare it with. It is not just *difficult* to explain. It is *impossible* to explain.

In the same way, there are certain things beyond the capability of human reasoning to understand. The limitations of reason starts to hit home when we try to apply our minds to what are called "ultimate" questions – questions about the origin of the universe and the origin of God. Here are just a few examples:

- How can God have no beginning?
- What was God doing before he created the universe?
- If God is timeless, how can he have chosen one particular point in eternity to create the universe? (And if "time" was created together with the universe, what does "one particular point in eternity" even mean?)
- If God was content to exist for an eternity without creating the universe, what made him decide to create the universe when he did?

These are what are called "mind-benders." We can try to imagine what it was like before the universe was created, but because this is totally beyond our experience, reason fails us.

But guess what! This is exactly where faith comes into play! In **Hebrews 11:1**, we discover:

"...faith is being...certain of *what we do not see*."

The following verses tell us how faith applies to the ultimate questions of God's existence and the origin of the universe.

- **Verse 3** – "*By faith* we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."
- **Verse 6** – "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him *must believe that he exists* and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

As the fourth century Augustine of Hippo wrote:

"God does not expect us to submit our faith to him without reason, but the very limits of reason make faith a necessity."¹⁰

Reason is vital, but it cannot stand alone. In fact, Paul speaks of two specific things that surpass our reasoning capability:

- **The love of Christ** – "...and to know this love *that surpasses knowledge*..." (**Ephesians 3:19**).
- **The peace of God** – "And the peace of God, *which transcends all understanding*, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 4:7**).

There are some things that the spirit can grasp but the mind cannot. Spirit and mind are both required for there to be a genuine understanding of God. It is for this reason that the Bible regards unspiritual reasoning as crippled reasoning.

Crippled Reasoning

Read Ephesians 4:18

In this verse, Paul targets the problem of crippled reasoning, which he says stems from two root problems:

- A darkening of understanding because of a separation from the life of God.
- An ignorance due to the hardening of the heart.

In **Colossians 1:21**, Paul writes of those outside of Christ as being “enemies in [their] minds” and in **Colossians 2:18** he speaks of an “unspiritual mind [that] puffs...up with idle notions.” In **Romans 8:7**, he writes that “the sinful mind is hostile to God.” Again, in **1 Timothy 6:5**, he describes the “constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth,” and in **1 Timothy 6:20** he warns of “the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.”

We need to understand that human reasoning has been tainted by sin, hence the need for a “renewing of the mind.” Like a crippled body, it is still usable. It walks, but not very well.

This is why human reasoning must have another dimension added before a person can grasp the things of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16

In **verse 9**, Paul explains that “no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” This describes the limitations of the human mind to comprehend the purposes of God. But then, in **verse 10**, Paul adds something:

“...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”

What the human mind cannot comprehend is revealed by the Spirit of God! In fact, we have received “the Spirit who is from God, *that we may understand what God has freely given us.*”

Paul describes this enhancement to human reason in **verses 13-14**:

“This is what we speak, *not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit*, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, *because they are spiritually discerned.*”

This is the added dimension, without which human reasoning is crippled. Only when God brings a revelation of truth into the heart does the mind begin to grasp the nature of God and his solution for life.

A Reasonable Faith

The purpose of **Module 108** is to establish a clear understanding of the rational elements of the Gospel, so that these can be persuasively communicated to an unbeliever. While it needs to be remembered that human reasoning is crippled by spiritual blindness, we can cooperate with the Spirit of God by removing the principal obstacles that would hinder a person from expressing faith in God. A clear presentation of the Gospel removes the excuses a person may have for *not* believing.

Josh McDowell, in his book *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, makes this comment:

“Any Christian who shares with others his faith in Christ soon learns that certain questions about Christianity surface over and over again. With a little basic preparation you can answer 90 percent of these questions.”¹¹

Although the occasional “red herring” question may be thrown out, most genuine questions fall under one of ten basic types. These ten basic questions are:

- Does God really exist?
- Is the Bible really God’s Word?
- Do science and scripture agree?
- Why is there evil and suffering in the world?
- Do miracles really happen?
- Who really is Jesus?
- Did Jesus really die and rise again?
- Is there a heaven and hell (and what are the entry requirements)?
- Is there no other way of salvation?
- Can we really know the truth for certain?

In the next ten lessons, we will be looking at each of these questions in turn. This is a valuable exercise for two reasons:

To strengthen your own faith

It is not uncommon for a Christian to hit what is sometimes called “a crisis of faith.” Crises of faith happen when circumstances don’t appear to match the biblical worldview. We may believe, for example, that God heals, yet go through a period of sickness, with our faith seemingly unanswered. For a time, however fleeting, we may question our core beliefs. Although often distressing, these times can ultimately prove to be a positive experience, reinforcing the bedrock of our understanding of God. To a greater degree than before, we know not just *what* we believe but also *why* we believe.

To equip you to share your faith with others

There is nothing more convincing to an unbeliever than seeing a person who carries a deep, life-affecting conviction and who knows *why* they carry that conviction.

tion. As Paul Little expressed it:

“If we are unable to give reasons for our faith, and if we allow the same questions to defeat us in conversation time after time, we are being disobedient. By our own ignorance, we are confirming unbelievers in their unbelief.”¹²

Regardless of whether you consider yourself intellectual or not, the next ten lessons can be an exciting time of discovery, rediscovery and reinforcement for you. As we enter into the meat of this module, remember to engage the two essential elements of the revelation process:

- **Your mind** – be ready to think through the issues and ask yourself questions.
- **Your spirit** – be open to receive revelation from the Lord.

¹ *New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

² Johannes I. Marais, quoted by the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

³ *Strong's Greek Dictionary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁴ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1987), p.30.

⁵ *New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁶ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1987), p.19.

⁷ John Stott, quoted in *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁸ John Stott, quoted in *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁹ Clark Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1967), p.3.

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, quoted in *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

¹¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p.xviii.

¹² Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1987), p.16.

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