

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

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[This article combines several related blog posts by Dr. Henebury.¹]

It appears to me that one of the first things a faithful theologian needs to do is to straighten out the confusion brought about by the world's separation of faith and reason. This relationship is so vital to a biblically fastened worldview that to neglect it will involve the believer in a host of conflicting beliefs and practices. For it is just here that the negligent Christian theologian will be attacked.² To the average man in the street, "faith" is that "I really hope so" attitude that many people employ when their circumstances get tough. It is that blind trust that things will turn out all right in the end. Faith thus defined is the opposite of reason. "Reason" deals with the cold hard facts, so it goes, and is what we have to use in the "real world" – in business, in science, in education.

One Christian writer has put the matter in the form of a question: "Is it rational for us to believe in God? Is it rational for us to place our confidence in Him and his revelation to man? Can a person believe in God without performing a sacrifice of his intellect?"³

According to many people, faith and reason are polar opposites. Faith deals with hopes and aspirations and dreams and 'religious stuff', while reason concerns itself with the facts of day to day experience, the world in which we live and do science learn about what is and what is not so. As the late Harvard paleontologist, Stephen Jay Gould stated it, in what has become a mantra among secular scientists, "religion tells us how to go to heaven; science tells us how the heavens go." To put it in less deceptive terms, "religion deals with gods and heaven and pixies and UFOs; while science (which knows these things are non-existent) concerns itself with what is so." Gould even thought up a nice anagram for his concept: NOMA, or "non overlapping magisteriums".⁴ Secular science gets all the facts; faith gets all the pink elephants. Or as one astute critic observed,

The power to define "factual reality" is the power to govern the mind, and thus to confine "religion" within a naturalistic box. For example, a supposed command of God can hardly provide a basis for morality unless God really exists. The commands of an imaginary deity are merely human commands dressed up as divine law...[N]aturalistic metaphysics relegates both morality and God to the realm outside of scientific knowledge, where only subjective belief is to be found.⁵

It is because of misconceptions such as these that the matter deserves more attention than it gets. We must begin by defining our terms. Gould and his followers are so impressed by their

1 [Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective](#) (parts 1, 2 and 3).

2 To give one example, this sharp dichotomy is a main plank in the atheistic arguments of George H. Smith's, *Atheism: The Case Against God*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1989). Just read any atheist and you will discover the same approach. Many unbelievers think that the dichotomy between faith and reason is basic to why they can remain in their unbelief. Given the standard dichotomy I think they are correct.

3 John P. Newport, *Life's Ultimate Questions*, (Fort Worth, Scripta Publishing Co, 1994), 415.

4 We shall not tarry at this point to discuss the relationship of Theology to Science. That will be gone into later. There it will be shown that outside of a Christian-theistic description of the world science would be impossible.

5 Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin On Trial*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 161-162.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

formulation of the issue because they have defined *faith* away while reconstituting *reason* so that it mirrors their own opinion of themselves and what they think they are doing. The first thing that any person should do, therefore, is to know what he means when employing specific terminology.

I will define *reason* along with theologian-philosopher John Frame as, “the human ability or capacity for forming judgments and inferences.”⁶ This is employing the word in a descriptive sense. Frame goes on to narrow the definition down to a normative sense “to denote correct judgments and inferences.”⁷ The important thing to notice about Frame’s definition is that it houses no built-in biases against supernaturalism. While being itself a perfectly good description it does not contain anything in it with which the secularist can control the debate.

Faith, meanwhile, may be accurately defined as “persuasion of the divine truth,” upon which we rightly presume when we renounce all self-dependence, and upon which all our hope is based.”⁸ Carl Henry provides a perceptive yet succinct definition when he calls faith the “knowledge based on and issuing from revelation.”⁹ Within this definition it is important to realize that such faith is impossible without the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we are not concerned with a general religious belief, but in a living faith which has “its object, basis, and origin” in a relationship “between a human being and God.”¹⁰ This faith is *dependent on revelation* and can come to certainty through a Divine in-working by means of the Word of God.

We may add one more definition to those given above, this time from the Scots worthy, Hugh Binning: “Faith is the soul’s testimony to God’s truth; the word [i.e. the Bible] is God’s testimony.”¹¹ To hearken back to a previous set of posts, the Divine *Logos* who created and structured the world and created us to interpret the world through Him via the Scriptures, has given faith as the *mechanism* by which the two are brought together.¹² Thus, faith is not opposed to reason; but in fact it is served by reason. We see this taught in Hebrews 11:3, “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word (*rhema*) of God, so that the things which are seen were not made by things which are visible.” As the “we” in the verse refers to saints, the understanding is available only on the basis of faith

6 John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1987), 329.

7 Ibid, 330.

8 Edward A. Dowey, Jr, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Third edition, 1994), 154. The initial definition is from Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. 2:14.

9 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 2.57.

10 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1.568.

11 Hugh Binning, *Works*, (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, [1858] 1992), 32.

12 Cf. Bavinck, 1.231.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

(cf. vv. 1 and 6). Since the verse refers either to the created spheres, or, most probably, in view of the historical references in the chapter, to the program of history itself, and it takes the prerequisite of faith to comprehend, then, patently, a Christian view of knowledge places faith before reason. Or as the Puritan commentator William Gouge put it, "Faith is in the understanding."¹³ Therefore, the teachings of the Bible should act as the "control beliefs"¹⁴ of the one who has come under the sway of the Bible.

Revelation and Reason

Having brought into the discussion the necessity of Divine revelation as the presupposition of faith, we are faced with the question of how reason relates to this revelation. My answer to this question will have to be provisional for now. I hope to post separately on this subject in the future.

If faith truly appropriates the truth about God then it is clear that it can have no proper function apart from Divine revelation. As "faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), it responds to matters above the reach of the inductive sciences (1 Cor. 2:10 etc). Hence, from a Christian point of view, it is essential for man to have proper faith if he is to know his creational environment fully.

Naturally, this is not the position of the unregenerate, nor, if what we have said above is true, can it ever be. This is for the simple reason that, according to Van Til, "Their epistemology is informed by their ethical hostility to God."¹⁵ A century ago Herman Bavinck, following the work of C. P. Tiele, noted that every religion claimed as part of its identity, a form of revelation.¹⁶ He noted that each religion, if it were to sustain itself, needed some source of explanation (of immaterial reality) beyond human reason.¹⁷ But once English Empiricism had gained prestige, "reason gradually gained for itself the power to pronounce on the content of revelation as well."¹⁸

The lesson is easy enough to discern. Though the Enlightenment project housed various theories and explanations of knowledge, the central pillar of all Enlightenment epistemology was the persuasion that the parameters of knowledge about reality were circumscribed by the rationality and intelligence of man. Bavinck remarked that, "Materially the gospel could not be anything other than the truth of reason."¹⁹ There was no place left for faith. This is the "dead-

¹³ William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980 reprint), 762.

¹⁴ The term "control beliefs" is borrowed from Nicholas Wolterstorff's important little book, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 70.

¹⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1955), 190.

¹⁶ Bavinck, 284-285.

¹⁷ Ibid, 286

¹⁸ Ibid, 288

¹⁹ Ibid.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

end” down which most secular thought has come.

Even though both Rationalism and Empiricism as philosophical movements have been held up to withering scrutiny, they still enjoy a healthy adherence, particularly the latter, with its support of “the scientific method.” As for Kant’s attempt at fusing these two schools of thought together in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, we should remind ourselves that he only “saved science” from the potential ravages of Hume’s skepticism by subjectivizing it, while at the same time “saving” religion and ethics by making them impenetrable to pure reason. But as the historian Will Durant asked,

What had the [Critique] really done? It had destroyed the naïve world of science, and limited it, if not in degree, certainly in scope, – and to a world confessedly of mere surface and appearance, beyond which it could issue only in farcical ‘antinomies’; so science was ‘saved’! The most eloquent and incisive portions of the book had argued that the objects of faith – a free and immortal soul, a benevolent creator – could never be proved by reason; so religion was ‘saved’! No wonder the priests of Germany protested madly against this salvation, and revenged themselves by calling their dogs Immanuel Kant.²⁰

Today non-Christian thought, though it more and more disavows the bombastic over-confidence of the Enlightenment, is just as aimlessly lost without a center as it has always been. Futility is the inevitable outcome of all non-revelational, or, better, anti-revelational thought (Rom. 1:21-22).

The Myth of Epistemological Neutrality

What I have said above shows that there is no place of neutrality, no universal ‘buffer-zone’ where all people, no matter their control beliefs, can come together to assess the facts without bias. This is emphatically the case between the Christian believer and the unbeliever in Christianity, whatever else he may believe.²¹

This is not to say for a second that there is nothing the believer and the unbeliever have in common. What we are saying is that when a Bible-believer and, say, a Muslim, or an atheist look at a fact, they may well agree on what the fact is (e.g. the midday sun), but they will not agree on the meaning of the fact. The Muslim will believe that the sun is there because Allah, his wholly transcendent and ineffable god, has determined it to be there. The atheist believes that the sun is there due to a series of momentous blind chain reactions

²⁰ Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, (New York: Pocket Library, 1954), 275.

²¹ Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 225f.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

dating back to a singularity some 15 billion years ago. The Christian-theist, on the other hand, sees as part of the creation and ongoing immanent providence of the transcendent²² Triune God of the Bible, the redeeming God of grace.

One need only give a little thought to the issue of neutrality if he is a Christian. For *as a Christian* he sees the world. He is certainly not neutral. He is for Christ and the Bible (Matt. 12:30)! As Jochen Douma accurately puts it, "Choosing the LORD always means making a choice that excludes every other possibility."²³ And what is true of the Christian holds true for the non-Christian, for the Bible declares that he is far from being neutral either (Eph. 2:1-3). "Theologically, the point can be expressed this way: when people forsake the true God, they come under bondage to idols. When they reject the true standard, they adopt a false one."²⁴ This, at least, ought to be understood, but here is where the howls of protest are heard – howls emanating from conservative Christian scholarship no less.

A Case Study: Harold Netland and the Demand for Neutrality

As we further consider whether reason should be categorized separately to faith as properly functioning independent of it, I cite the example of an article by Harold Netland entitled, "Apologetics, Worldviews, and the Problem of Neutral Criteria."²⁵ In Netland's 1991 article we see an able but, I believe, misguided critique of presuppositionalist John M. Frame's epistemology as set forth in his book *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. The overall burden of Netland's complaint is clear, there must be some mutually shared neutral criteria that all people, whether Theist, Atheist, Hindu, Buddhist, Humanist, or whatever, can use to judge each other's positions.²⁶ It is the possibility of this neutral ground that Frame, in common with other biblical presuppositionalists (including the present writer) denies.

The first stratagem of Netland is to label Frame's position "theological fideism,"

22 Notice that I have deliberately linked the immanence of God with His transcendent nature. This is done in contrast to the "transcendence" of Allah, which as formulated, makes that god utterly incomprehensible, and so vulnerable to the skeptic's charge of being unknowable. A totally incomprehensible deity is one we cannot speak about. If we cannot say anything about him we may as well not think about him at all! A correct doctrine of God's transcendence will include His immanence, and thus God's incomprehensibility is not total. For more on this subject see John M. Frame's essay, "God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence," in John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word*, (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1974).

23 Jochen Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 18.

24 Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 126.

25 Harold A. Netland, "Apologetics, Worldview, and the Problem of Neutral Criteria," – *Trinity Journal*, 12:1 (Spring 1991), 39-58.

26 Netland, 52 and 54.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

which quickly becomes “fideism” as the article proceeds.²⁷ Having done this he presents his position as the one that will use reason instead of eschewing it.²⁸ The main question he wants answered is this: “Given our religiously pluralistic world an obvious question arises... ‘Why should one accept the Christian presupposition instead of the Hindu or Buddhist presuppositions?’”²⁹ Behind this question is his assumption that Frame is claiming that, “ultimate presuppositions (commitments)... can be accepted or rejected at will.”³⁰

It should not take a hard-core Van Tilian to point out that this is exactly the opposite of what theologians like Frame are saying. For example, Van Til himself stated, “We cannot choose epistemologies as we choose hats.”³¹ Netland makes a further mistake by equating Frame’s version of a “presupposition” with a properly basic belief.³² He objects that, “Epistemically basic beliefs cannot be presuppositions for they are (logically) necessary for there to be any presuppositions in the first place!”³³ Unfortunately, Netland has not understood what Frame means by a “presupposition,” which Frame defines as ones “ultimate commitment.”³⁴ Netland interprets “ultimate” to mean “prior,” as if it were the very first condition of mans thinking. But this is not Frame’s contention at all. To quote a very plain statement from another of Frame’s works: “Nor should we emphasize the *pre-* in *presupposition* to suggest that a presupposition must be held at some point in time prior to all our other knowledge. The *pre-* in *presupposition* refers to the “pre-eminence” of the presupposition with respect to our other beliefs.”³⁵

This makes Netland think that in Frame’s analysis of epistemology, “Fundamental epistemological problems are reinterpreted and dismissed as being largely spiritual in nature.”³⁶ He identifies three fields; logic, semantics, and hermeneutics, and asks whether these must be assumed before we even read the Bible – the great ultimate commitment of the presuppositionalist.³⁷ It is clear

27 Ibid, 44.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid, 47

30 Ibid, 50

31 Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), xiv.

32 A belief is “properly basic” when it needs no supporting or affirming argument on its behalf.

33 Netland, 51, emphasis added. As an example of what he means he says, “one cannot presuppose anything – whether it be God or some other object of ultimate commitment – without appealing to (among other things) the principle of non-contradiction,” – Ibid.

34 It should be noted that at crucial points in his argument Netland fails to give any citations from Frame’s book, preferring, as it appears, to give his own interpretation of what Frame *must* mean.

35 John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1995), 137-138.

36 Netland, 53.

37 Ibid, 54

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

to Netland that, for example, the law of non-contradiction needs to be appealed to “as a neutral criterion” in order to start the Christian ball rolling.³⁸ Faith enters too early in to Presuppositional epistemology he thinks.

On this level playing field both believer and non-believer can employ the law of contradiction neutrally as they read the Bible, or each other, or when they argue with each other. We feel like inquiring whether Netland has read Romans 8 recently, for there Paul divides mankind into “spiritually minded” and “carnally minded.” If “the carnal mind is enmity toward God” (Rom.8:7), it would seem to us that to follow it, and to allow it to operate uninterruptedly without calling attention to its *misuse*, would be a failure to obey Romans 12:2 and thus would be to sin (Rom. 14:23). When Christ saved us He gave us new eyes. Now we acknowledge that the laws of thought and grammar come from God and they must be used as God would have us use them. This is what the unbeliever will not do. In fact, he will use these laws to construct arguments against God! He will use them to convince himself that his false picture of the world is in fact true, and that the Christian picture is a forgery. What the unbeliever needs is faith to reason as he ought to reason. Faith directs reason as it needs to be directed – in dependence upon the Creator of mans mind. Reason isn’t neutral. It was never intended to be.

In the biblical worldview epistemological problems are largely spiritual and ethical in nature: if we were not spiritually separated from the mind and life of God we would automatically think all of our thoughts in reference to the One who gives them meaning. Netland, and those Christians who follow him, fails to see that the laws of logic and grammar, etc.,³⁹ which he wishes to use “neutrally” when speaking to an unbeliever, are reflections of the mind of the Creator and so are themselves revelatory. In order for Netland to employ these laws neutrally he will first have to disengage them from their Source.⁴⁰ He writes, for example,

If indeed there are no neutral principles or criteria for assessment⁴¹, and if all criteria are internal to a given worldview...the argument appeals to factors, principles, or criteria which...cannot be used legitimately to make judgments about competing worldviews. Epistemologically it makes no difference whether

38 “Can we not appeal to the principle of non-contradiction, for example, as at least one neutral criterion?” – 54.

39 Ibid.

40 This would be like a person removing the hands from his wristwatch and then expecting them to tell him the time. One can not justify the laws of thought, nor their use, if they are disconnected from the God who put them within us in the first place. Outside of our being created in God’s image (which at least includes the gift of reason) there is no adequate explanation of why man reasons and how he can comprehend the world about him. In a sense this is philosophically equivalent to Michael Behe’s “specified complexity” wherein certain phenomena in molecular biology attain meaning and purpose only when they are viewed as components of integrated systems.

41 Notice how Netland equates the two.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

the worldview in question is Christian theism or Advanta Vedanta Hinduism.⁴²

His claim is that absence of neutral criteria makes it impossible to make universal truth-statements.⁴³ But if he claims that he has not only denied the Word of the God he is trying to prove, he has given up any justification for using these laws in the first place.

Naturally, the old objection about circularity comes to the fore. But again Netland fails to notice that there is an inevitable circularity involved in all ultimate commitments, since without such assertions one could hardly count them as ultimate. It has been pointed out before that a rationalist, for example, will not argue for his epistemology by calling attention to empirical data. Likewise, no evolutionary naturalist is ever going to argue from or to a supernaturalist standpoint. To do so would be to destroy ones own opinions with a self-contradiction. Frame has stated that circularity must be an integral part of a self-contained evaluative system.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he is joined in this assertion by those who one would never associate with presuppositionalism,⁴⁵ and by Carl Henry, who declares, "Consciously or unconsciously, belief systems rest on fundamental assumptions which decisively and comprehensively interpret all reality and life."⁴⁶ And Van Til adds that it is improper to define such reasoning as circular when one considers the fact that God is on an altogether higher level of reality (though He is also immanent) as Lord of what He has made. Thus, Van Til explains, "We are presupposing *God*, not merely another fact of the universe. If God is to come into contact with us it is natural that the initiative must be with him. And this will also apply to the very question about the relation of God to us."⁴⁷

What we have tried to bring out in this article is that the Christian *must* place faith before reason if reason is to operate correctly. Faith is necessary if we are to please God (Heb. 11:6). If we are neglecting revelation at any point, we are, at least in principle, saying that it is okay for the believer to operate independently of God in the world. That is tantamount to refusing to engage "the mind of Christ" which has been made available to us through the Author of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:16; cf. 3:23).

Autonomy: Our Default Position in the Use of Reason

Although we do not have a protracted narrative of all that went on between the

⁴² Netland, 52.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Frame, 255.

⁴⁵ See, for example, D. Elton Trueblood's remarks on necessary circularity in his *Philosophy of Religion*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), 53.

⁴⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1.180.

⁴⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1970), 201.

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

serpent and Eve, we do have everything necessary for us to learn what God wants us to learn. The culmination of the devil's temptation of the woman was in the words, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:5). Of course this was a lie. No one could know good and evil like God without being God. But the promise of "being like God" was what did it.

Ironically enough, Eve and her husband were already like God. They had been created in the image and likeness of God. Also, they were with God. The Lord fellowshiped with them in the Garden, and it is certain that these regular interactions would have expanded both the knowledge and the image of God in our first parents. What Adam and Eve most needed was not to be "like God" in the way Satan promised, but rather they needed to be *with* God. As it happened their disobedience left them less like God and deprived them of His close fellowship.

But what led up to it? We can begin to see the answer if we compare the two descriptions of the trees in Eden in chapter 2 and chapter 3. In chapter 2:9 we get an appraisal of the trees, via Moses, from God's point of view:

And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Notice the twin description of the trees of the garden as being (1) "pleasant to the sight", and (2) "good for food".

Now take a look at the woman's appraisal of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3:6:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

I have again underlined the pertinent parts of the verse for comparison. Notice how Eve's independent analysis of the tree agreed with the Lord's appraisal in 2:9. After listening to the serpent Eve in effect stood back and sized up the tree, and she concurred with God that the tree was (1) "pleasant to the sight", and (2) "good for food", but she reasoned independently from God that the tree was (3) "desirable to make one wise."

The main point here is that there was a movement from dependence on God's Word and authority to independent evaluation, and hence reasoning. In the autonomy of her reasoning about the tree Eve put reason before revelation. It

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

didn't matter that she agreed with God (at least some of the time). What really mattered was that she arrived at her conclusions apart from Divine prescription.

Since the Fall we have functioned from a default position of independence from God and His Word. False religions sprang from false notions of God. From false notions of God come equally false notions about ourselves and our world. Hence, the triad God, Man and the World is crucial to a correct Christian Worldview. Get any one of these wrong and the other two will be affected. Even in militant atheism the triad remains; only now "God" is substituted for "no God".

Within biblical Christianity this default of human independence shows itself in our reasonings about the interpretation of texts, particularly those texts which might make us feel uncomfortable about any number of subjects. Among these subjects I might mention the age of the earth, evolution, the global flood, the covenants made with Israel, the beginning of the Church, the headship of the husband, women in the ministry, Christian counseling, and a whole lot more. It is not that everyone who uses the Bible to guide their reason will automatically come out at the same place. There are variables in things like competence and experience which may effect interpretation. But placing faith before reason will tend to hold off interrogative approaches to the text like, "Are you saying that....?" or "But what about....?" etc.

The great Methodist Bible commentator Adam Clarke (d. 1832) wrote:

"Prayer is the language of dependence; he who prays not is endeavoring to live independently of God; this was the first curse, and continues to be the great curse of mankind."

Christians are not immune from thinking independently of God. We do it when we think we can circumvent clear passages which we would rather say something other than what they say.

Jesus on Faith and Reason

We can see this in two episodes in the life of our Lord.

In the first, Jesus warns the disciples to "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6).

The narrative then says the disciples "reasoned among themselves, saying, 'It is because we have taken no bread.'"

This brought forth a rebuke from Jesus:

"O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves....do you not understand...How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? – but to beware of the leaven of the

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matt. 16:8-11).

Then the narrative tells us that "they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

clearly the reasoning of the disciples was faulty and brought forth a righteously indignant response from Jesus. They were reasoning this way because faith was not guiding their reason. Notice that Jesus does not explain His meaning to them in verse 11, but simply repeats the warning of verse 6. That was because there was sufficient information in what He said to them for them to gain the right understanding - *provided they let faith guide their reason!*

The other example is in Mark's Gospel. In Mark 4:35-41 we have the record of Jesus' stilling of the wind and the sea. It starts out with Jesus' statement of intent:

Let us cross over to the other side.

As the story moves forward these men, some of whom were seasoned sailors, began to panic and fear for their lives because of the squall which was pitching their boat up and down and throwing water in on the sides. In their fretting they petulantly rose the Lord with the words, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Then what do we read? The Lord rebuked the wind and the waves, and then He rebuked the disciples.

Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?

You see, faith would have prevented them from reasoning to the conclusion that they were on the verge of capsizing. While the noisy and raucous storm had their attention they couldn't employ faith to guide their thinking. But Jesus was in the boat! Jesus had said they were going to the other side. It wasn't for them to reappraise His words because they could not see how they could be true given the present circumstances.

The same lesson can be gathered from Peter's turn on the water in Matthew 14:22-33. A very telling one is found at the close of John's Gospel where Jesus replies to Peter's question about John,

If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." (Jn. 21:22).

But look what happens next. Reason is taking the helm and they begin thinking independently:

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1

Then this saying [which is completely misinterpreted] went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but... (Jn. 21:23).

And, of course, the words of Jesus are repeated exactly as He spoke them in verse 21. What is the lesson? Surely it is take heed of what God says and let faith guide the way you reason about it. (This is what the [‘Rules of Affinity’](#) seek to help us do). The more divergence there is from what God actually says, the more opportunity there is for us to reason independently in our attempts to understand. And in such circumstances we are always at more risk of missing what God is saying.

A Shining Example of Right Reasoning

There are many examples of men and women of God who get it right because they believe in order to understand. In Hebrews 11:17-19 Abraham provides perhaps the greatest example of faith going before reason in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac because that is what God told him to do. He did not reason like this:

“Oh, well, since Isaac is the promised one who I’ve waited so long for, God wouldn’t really want me to kill him. after all, God isn’t like those pagan deities which demand such sacrifices! Obviously this is meant as an allegory or a type or something like that...”

I might have reasoned that way under the circumstances, but Abraham’s faith controlled his reason. and so Abraham,

conclud[ed] that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead...”
(Heb. 11:19a).

He could not have come to that conclusion if his faith had not assured him that the only way out of the apparent contradiction was that God would just *have* to raise Isaac up again!

Faith connects us with our Creator and Father. It makes us dependent on Him and that pleases Him. Since we are urged to “bring every thought into captivity to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5), employing “the mind of Christ”(1 Cor. 2:16), we are to renounce autonomy, and struggle in faith to cleave to God. as Solomon put it,

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Prov. 3:5-6).

Faith and Reason in Christian Perspective - Part 1



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