

A Saving Faith

Among the obstacles to belief in God is the tendency of people to believe that science is incompatible with faith. People for the most part accept the conclusions of science, and faith suffers because of the bias. For example, there is the case of the human footprints that have been found in ancient rock strata dating from the Carboniferous Period, supposedly 250 million years old. Since according to evolutionary theory man cannot be older than a million years the footprints pose a problem. Adding to the difficulty is the discovery of dinosaur footprints contemporary with human footprints in Cretaceous rock in a dry river bed in Texas. Commenting on the scientific contradiction, Albert Ingalls wrote in the *Scientific American*,

“If man, or even his ape ancestor, or even that ape ancestor’s early mammalian ancestor, existed as far back as the Carboniferous Period in any shape, then the whole science of geology is so completely wrong that all the geologists will resign their jobs and take up truck driving.”¹

Is that the reaction of a scientist who follows the objective evidence? Not exactly. The simplest explanation of the evidence is that man and dinosaur were contemporaries, but adherence to the teaching of modern geology prevents acceptance of the explanation. An investment of years in a scientific profession is also a difficult thing to abandon, especially when all the geologist has to do is deny what the footprints in stone are saying. Thus “science” becomes an obstacle to belief.

The obstacles to belief are numerous. Most if not all of them fall under two headings: pride, and lust. People tend to think they know more than they really know, and to want more than they really need. We like to think that our own conclusions and judgments are better, even better than God’s.

Naaman, the captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man, and highly respected. He was also a valiant warrior. Yet Naaman was a leper. Word came to him from a little girl, a captive from the land of Israel, that a cure for him was possible from the prophet in Samaria. So Naaman went to Samaria with his chariots and his wealth and he stood before the door of the prophet Elisha. Elisha

¹ John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), p. 172,3.

didn't come out, but sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and *you will be clean.*"²

But Naaman became furious and drove away. He said,

2 Kings 5:11 "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.' 12 "Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman revealed his pride when he said, "I thought..." The cure for his disease did not meet with his preconceived notions. He compounded the mistake when he said, "... the rivers of Damascus are better than the rivers of Israel."

How many times in life has God offered someone a solution for a desperate problem only to be met by the reply, "But I thought..."

Do you want to believe in God? Then trust what He tells you. If he tells you something then don't tell Him that you can improve on his offer. You must realize that you are not greater than God.

Frequently, in the New Testament we read how the hearers of Jesus demanded proof of His claims to be the Son of God. Some who stood near His cross when He was crucified demanded that He come down from the cross so that they could, "...see and believe."³ They wanted him to prove He had divine power, but He ignored their demands. The proof they got came on the third day following.

The Apostle Thomas demanded proof. When the other Apostles told him that Jesus had risen from the dead he replied,

John 20:25 ... "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."⁴

Thomas received the proof he demanded, but he was an Apostle. People other than the Apostles will not be able to see and touch the wounded flesh of the Savior. This does not mean that God has not offered any proof of his power and divinity; He has provided an abundance of evidence. The Resurrection is foremost among the proofs. Nevertheless, Jesus said to Thomas on that day,

² *New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. 2 Ki 5:10

³ Mark 15:32.

⁴ John 20:25).

“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.”⁵

All Thomas really needed for belief was to remember what Jesus had told him and the other Apostles. He said He was going to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed and then be raised on the third day.⁶ His promise was enough. What we should remember today is what He said, and believe that He will perform what He promised.

Paul wrote about Abraham in his letter to the Romans,

Romans 4:18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.”

19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

- What God has promised He is able to perform.

Others we read about in the gospels struggled with belief. Typical among them was the father of the demoniac who said, “I do believe. Please help my unbelief.”⁷ He wanted to believe, but he needed help. This father was a lot like the congregation that had been summoned by the preacher to pray for rain. Their country had been in drought for months. When they were assembled the preacher said, “You all know why we are here. Now what I want to know is—where are your umbrellas?”

They believed, but they needed a little help with unbelief.

So how does a person get faith of the type spoken of in the Bible—the kind that saves?

Modern, secular education is designed to counteract any tendency to belief in God, and many of the other public institutions are biased in the same direction. Since a majority of our citizenry has passed through the public schools it is no surprise that adults have fallen into a pattern of thought that doubts the existence

⁵ John 20:29).

⁶ Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33.

⁷ Mark 9:24.

of God, or that allows them to believe they cannot place any confidence in God. This mode of thinking has to be abandoned.

The Apostle Paul told the Romans what it takes to get a biblical faith. He wrote,

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

It is as simple as that. Faith, therefore, is not a miracle somehow wrought in the human heart. Faith comes from hearing the gospel of Christ. Also, the Apostle did not make a distinction between an inward and an outward call. God has placed the power to create faith into the gospel itself.

Paul also said in the same letter,

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- “It” – The gospel of Christ is the power of God for salvation.

Therefore, it is necessary for every person who would be a believer in Christ to hear the evidence for and become convinced of the suffering, the death and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—because that is the gospel.⁸ This “good news” about the Savior is designed in such a way that it is able to penetrate the human heart, and to convince the unbeliever, so that whereas before they despaired in unbelief, now they can exult in faith. Therefore, read the testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and have faith. Study the letters of Paul, Peter, John and the other New Testament writers to gain understanding and reinforce your faith.

Anyone can do this.⁹

This is why the Apostles and early evangelists of the First Century placed such emphasis upon the testimony concerning the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The testimony of those witnesses and historical proofs to which they refer are essential to faith.

Luke wrote,

Luke 1:1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.¹⁰

⁸ I Corinthians 15:1-8.

⁹ Ephesians 3:4.

¹⁰ Throughout this document the emphasis by underlining or highlighting is mine, author.

Luke followed the pattern of the other writers of the gospels in that he investigated everything carefully and wrote down the events in such a way that people who read his work could know the exact truth, and knowing, could place confidence in the gospel message that the evangelists were preaching.

Furthermore, these Apostles were competent witnesses of where Jesus went, of what He said and what He did.

J. W. McGarvey wrote that, “Competency is determined by considering the **opportunities** of the witness **to obtain knowledge** of that to which he testifies, and his **mental capacity to observe** and remember the facts.”¹¹ Note that the Apostles had companied with Jesus from the time that Jesus received the baptism of John the Baptist, and they understood that their office was that of witnesses.¹² The Apostles were mentally and physically competent. Physical competency required mainly good eyes, and good ears. As has been said,

Good eyes and ears were better qualifications for the original Apostles than all the learning of the Archbishop of York, or of the potentialities of a Rhodes Scholar. Their most important role was to identify the person of Jesus, whenever and wherever they saw him. Jesus expected them to tell what he did, to repeat what he said, and to proclaim the facts without comment.

Peter understood this. He wrote,

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

The Apostle Paul was not a witness in the same sense as the original twelve, but he clearly knew the value of the testimony. When Paul stood trial before King Agrippa and the Roman Festus he told them,

Acts 26:26 “...the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

Truly, the matters concerning the trial and crucifixion of Christ had not been done in a corner. More importantly, His resurrection was a public event that occurred in the city where he was surrounded by his avowed enemies. Many witnesses confirmed His appearances following His resurrection. The proofs

¹¹ J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, Part III, p. 117,18.

¹² Acts 1:21,22.

were so convincing that many even of his former enemies—including those from among the Jewish priests—were converted and became His followers.¹³

Paul was well aware of these facts, and so was Agrippa. Today we have the written testimony of those early witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. This testimony is comprised of the gospels, the Acts and the letters of the Apostles to the churches.

Paul wrote to the church of the Ephesians,

Eph. 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, **when you read** you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ...

- People understand what Paul wrote by reading his letters.
- The same is true of the gospels.

To the church at Corinth Paul wrote,

1 Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased **through** the foolishness of **the message preached** to **save those who believe**. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

What we have learned from Paul is that hearing the gospel testimony leads to faith,¹⁴ Further, that people are saved by the message. How so? By believing the testimony.

Since faith depends upon eyewitness testimony, and your reading and hearing the evidence, it is imperative that you examine what has been said by the Apostles and writers of the New Testament.

Do not look for a sign; do not look for human wisdom to be saved; hear the gospel of Christ.

Acquiring faith is not complicated in concept. The real hurdle is in overcoming the inward resistance to belief and that is because no amount of evidence can convince someone who does not want to believe. Consider the Lord's parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus where after his death the Rich Man pleads with Abraham. He said,

Luke 16: 27 ... I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they

¹³ Acts 6:7. See also John 12:42, "...many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him..." These rulers knew the truth but had not the courage to act on it.

¹⁴ Romans 10:17.

also come to this place of torment.’ 29 “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 “But he said, ‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

“Moses and the Prophets” is a term that refers to the books of the Old Testament. The writings of Moses comprise the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are the books the Jewish people call the Torah. The Prophets refers to the rest of the books of the Old Testament. The Rich Man was Jewish and was accountable to the Law of Moses; i.e., the Torah.¹⁵

Notice here the importance of a Biblical worldview. The Old Testament portion of the Bible is the collection of books to which Abraham referred when he indicated what they should hear. Today we have Moses and the Prophets, together with Jesus and the Apostles. This total revelation from God is enough to cause belief.

Notice also that the brothers had to be willing to listen. For someone who is willing to believe there is evidence. John wrote in his gospel that Jesus said,

John 7:17 “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.

The New Testament says God has “furnished proof.”

Acts 17:29 “Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”¹⁶

God has offered substantial reasons why man should believe. Faith must rest upon those reasons, and when it does man comes to know the present reality of God and His promises.

Among the obstacles a person has to overcome is the notion that faith is mere feeling, or that a saving faith is a personal choice made without regard for

¹⁵ Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1996). *A general introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded.) (80). Chicago: Moody Press. ‘Other than the word *Scriptures*, the most common designation of the Old Testament is “the Law and the Prophets.”’

¹⁶ Emphasis mine, author.

the truth, or that faith is a “leap” one must take against all evidence to the contrary. None of these describes a biblical faith.

The New Testament says that faith is assurance and conviction.¹⁷ It is a firm trust in God. Also the writer of Hebrews says about the people in his examples that their faith motivated them to action. For example,

“By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice...” (Heb. 11:4)

“By faith Noah... prepared an ark...” (Heb. 11:7)

“By faith Abraham... obeyed by going out...” (Heb. 11:8)

Their faith motivated them.

The theological dictionary says of the words defining faith in the Hebrew letter,

Faith does not do the convincing, but God, for the whole point in Hebrews is that faith stands on the revelation, word, and promise of God.¹⁸

The Christian’s faith is intimately involved with historical facts. The Apostle Paul, in his defense before Agrippa and Festus, argued that the facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ were well known to King Agrippa, and so he spoke to Agrippa with confidence because he knew that none of the facts concerning the Christ were “... done in a corner.”¹⁹ The resurrection of Christ from the dead happened in full view of the world, and was verified for all time by competent witnesses. Luke wrote that,

Acts 26:28 Agrippa *replied* to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.” 29 And Paul *said*, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

Irwin Linton wrote, “Even as the Bible has no rival in being the only book containing supernaturally given and fulfilled prophecy, so the Christian religion is the only religion based upon and inseparably connected with historical facts—facts of such nature that if established, so also is established the religion based upon them.”²⁰

These facts are well established.

Paul wrote that faith comes from the word of the Gospel, and salvation accompanies belief in the resurrection.

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:1.

¹⁸ Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in One Volume, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1985. “**conviction**” – (ἐλεγχος); [F. BÜSCHEL, II, 473-76].

¹⁹ Acts 26:22-26.

²⁰ Linton, I. H., *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, p. 36.

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

To believe that God raised Jesus from the dead you must examine the facts, and it is the gospels that contain the factual testimony. God has furnished those facts as evidence of what He accomplished in Jesus when He raised Him from the dead. Therefore, to have a biblical faith you must examine the biblical testimony and become convinced of the truth of that testimony. For that reason we say,

Faith is not something you have in spite of the facts; faith is something you have because of the facts.

Peter wrote in his first letter,

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Therefore, hear what Jesus, the Apostles and the other writers of the New Testament said—and be a believer.