

Apologetics – Faith vs. REASON

Last week we considered ‘Faith vs. Reason’ concentrating on the place of *reason* in the Bible and in the activity of apologetics. This week we will concentrate on the place of *belief* (or faith) in the Bible and in the activity of apologetics.

1. Read through 1 Timothy (in 6 groups – 1 chapter each) noting each reference to ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ or ‘truth’ and place them in the categories listed below (from last session).¹

‘Faith’ Category	Reference from 1 Timothy
A set of propositions or accepted facts <i>‘the faith’</i> (e.g. Col 2:7; Jude 3)	1 Tim 3:9
intellectual assent or cognitive understanding <i>‘having faith that...’</i> or <i>‘believing that...’</i> (e.g. James 2:18-19)	
wholehearted commitment to ... belief in something or someone <i>‘having faith in..’</i> or <i>‘believing someone’</i> (e.g. Jn 3:16; Jn 8:45; Mt 21:32)	

➤ DEBRIEF

Belief and Rationality

2. Can belief in God measure up to some or any rule of rationality and therefore have a solid foundation?

¹ Leaders Note: See appendix

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There are two ways to consider whether belief in God is reasonable.

- We can start by *considering a theory of rationality* and see whether our belief fits into it. But the problem with this approach is:
 - a) the criteria put forward as to what is ‘rational’ is hard to determine – it differs depending on what period of history and culture you belong to and
 - b) we make the mistake of making reason autonomous (in other words ‘reason’ the governing principle).
- An alternative way forward is to *start with belief*. This would mean building a theory of Christian rationality which starts with belief and accommodates reasoning.

Understanding Belief

3. Is it possible *not* to believe anything?



- *Rene Descartes* (1596-1650) suggested that we doubt everything until it could be proved to one's own personal satisfaction. This is the *guilty-until-proved-innocent* principle of rationality – only that which can be proved by absolutely certain evidence is to be accepted.

- *Thomas Reid* (1710-1796) suggested the opposite – *innocent-until-proven-guilty* principle of rationality. In other words trust our beliefs and the intellectual or belief structure that comes from them until reason provides us with substantial grounds for questioning belief.



What both of these views presuppose is that we all have beliefs! We live in a world that other people live in, we have a mind, we can remember, we can feel, we are aware, we have a sense that some things are right and others are not. We all believe something. In the least these could be called *basic beliefs*.

Most of the *basic beliefs* that we hold also seem to be *justified beliefs* – that is, there is a rational reason for holding them (and no rational reason to deny them). They are self evident.

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4. How is it possible that we can hold to any form of *basic belief*?

We just do – in fact we could not live without holding to them!! (e.g. I am alive! I am aware! etc.)

There are more *complex beliefs*. That is, beliefs that are not self-evident but can be concluded. It is possible to come to believe something. We can call this kind of belief *inferential belief* - that is, belief produced by reasoning. For example:

1. All men are mortal
2. Socrates is a man
3. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

But, key to this form of belief is that each 'inference' can be tested. (i.e. are all men mortal?, Did Socrates exist?, Was Socrates a man? Etc.). If the answer is yes – then we have an inferred belief.

5. Harder questions

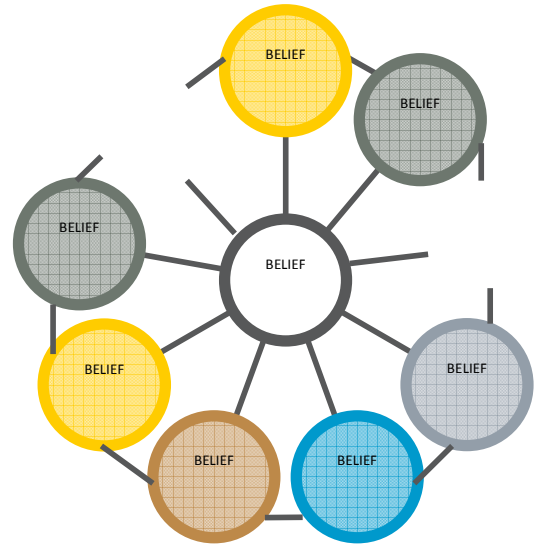
- a) How do we link those which are *basic beliefs* and those which are *inferred beliefs*?
- b) What would be necessary to put a *basic belief* under question (what could be an adequate reason to cease from believing?)

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Try this for size (thanks to David Wolfe²) – a belief system is acceptable when the beliefs in it are:

- *Consistent* (i.e. free from contradictions with other beliefs in the network of beliefs)
- *Coherent* (i.e. internally related to other beliefs within that network of beliefs)
- *Comprehensive* (i.e. the network of beliefs has the ability to ‘gobble-up’ or include other experiences)

In this system, it is *consistency*, *coherence* and *comprehensiveness* which bridges the gap between *basic* and *inferential* beliefs.



6. How is this helpful when we consider the process of apologetics?

Each of us (Christian or Non-Christian) have a structure of belief which rests on certain basic beliefs and it is common that those beliefs are shared by all (sane) people because we are all human (e.g. gravity is a good thing!). Other beliefs are not shared (e.g. belief in God or not).

What does Christian belief have going for it? Christians can put their belief out on the table for rigorous examination confident from scripture and from our experience and from our reasoning that it will stand the test because it is *consistent* (it doesn't contradict itself), *coherent* (it is internally one connected story) and *comprehensive* (this belief accommodates and speaks too experiences in life). Given that we believe that the one God created and governs all we know there is a faith-based and reasoned explanation to hold all things together.

Are the opponents of Christianity able to stand up under the same scrutiny?

² *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1982).

Unbelief and Doubt (which are not the same thing!)

'If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties'

(*'The Advancement of Learning'* - Francis Bacon 1561-1626)

So what about doubt?

7. Should a Christian be worried about doubt?

Apologetically, 'doubt' appears to be a significant factor that prevents a person from believing. Someone may refuse to come to belief because they 'Have their doubts' or someone may struggle to live in their belief because of the unresolved doubts that plague them.

There are several reasons why we should be interested in 'doubt'. Behind our thinking, our decision-making, or our emotions, there are ever-present doubts.

- *Philosophically*, 'doubt' has epistemological implications (what we can know) because it influences the way we gain knowledge, view or consider truth, and the way we distinguish between right or wrong.
- *Psychologically*, 'doubt' can debilitate or empower.
- *Theologically*, 'doubt' is often viewed as the prelude to belief or unbelief.

I want us to consider this for a couple of reasons. First, because in apologetics you often hear someone say 'I just have my doubts'. Understanding doubt will help. Second, because you might be someone who is plagued at times with doubts – let's not deny them but address them as a very real part of how many of us operate.

What is 'doubt'?

At its most basic, Oz Guinness (one of the world's most recognised scholars on the topic of Doubt) suggests that at the heart of 'doubt' is 'two-mindedness'. It is the place somewhere between belief and unbelief - the state of mind suspended between the two so that neither defines the other but each exists together.³ This definition needs some filling out to be useful.

³ O. Guinness, *Doubt – Faith in Two Minds* (Herts: Lion Publishing, 1976), 19.

First, *'doubt' has to be linked to truth* because it is ultimately measured according to truth (or perceived truth) and so therefore we can say that doubt will be associated with matters of truth, the emotion of trust, and the notion of trustworthiness.⁴

Second, *'doubt' is not unbelief*. Doubt indicates a state of thinking where no resolution has been achieved. Unbelief is different. It operates as a state of resolution where the person has decided not to believe in something (whether they know it or not). For doubt to be doubt, and not unbelief masquerading as doubt, it must be characterized by genuine uncertainty.⁵

But, *doubt can become unbelief*. Doubt arises from our human weakness and frailty. We may have doubts concerning our faith in Christ or our confidence to fully trust God because we find it difficult to establish absolute proof.⁶ Our doubt becomes unbelief when the person gives in to an attitude of unbelief.⁷

Third, *doubt is not the opposite of faith – unbelief is*. Faith is when trust (belief) is placed in something (or someone), whereas doubt is uncertainty associated with that belief. It is possible to put faith in something even though doubt may still exist, whereas doubt would not exist unless there was something to put faith in. And so doubt is linked to faith but it is not opposite to it.⁸

8. Consider Matthew 28:17; Matthew 14:31. What kind of 'doubt'?

^{NIV} **Matthew 28:17** *When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.*

^{NIV} **Matthew 14:31** *Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him (Peter). "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" [Context – Jesus walks on water]*

The well-known illustration for faith is the person and the chair.

A person could have *faith* in a chair - that it will hold one's weight when seated. What is most important about faith is the object of faith – for this person, the chair. Without something to put faith in, faith is nothing. Because a person has faith in a chair they can act and sit on it. If they had no faith in the chair, then they would not sit and so their unbelief in the chair would be exposed.

⁴ O. Guinness, 10.

⁵ G. Drew, 'Turning doubt around', *Stimulus* 3/4 (Nov 1995): 6.

⁶ A. McGrath, *Doubt & Assurance* (ed. R.C. Spoul; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ O. Guinness, 22.

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Let's use that illustration to think about doubt.

Doubt works differently but it is related. It is the *uncertainty associated with faith* because it is the point of indecision that may either prevent a person believing or prevent a person unbelieving (for want of another term). It is the person's two mindedness about whether they should sit on the chair or not. For this reason doubt should be considered as positive as well as negative, but always subservient to faith.

Finally, *the seriousness of doubt is dependent on the object calling for the person's faith*. If the object of faith is significant to the person, such as the reliability of a bridge a mile over a crocodile infested river, then the person's dilemma of doubt will be more serious than for something of smaller significance, such as a bridge over a puddle one foot below! The significance of doubt is in what a person doubts rather than in how they doubt.⁹

It is at this point where we see the importance of understanding how doubt operates in relation to faith in Jesus. As belief in Christ has eternal importance, then doubt should be considered with utmost respect.

- 9. Consider John 20:24-29 first in the NIV (and focus on verse 27). What kind of doubt? Then read the same verse in ESV. (c.f. also 1 Tim 1:13 – 'I acted ignorantly and unbelief')**

➤ QUESTION/ANSWERS

- 10. How has this session helped you think and do your apologetics?**

⁹ Ibid., 22.

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Exercise:

In Groups (by question), look at your 'issue', consider the voice of the objector, then discuss what you could say from the Bible which may address the issue.

Group 1: Why doesn't God get rid of suffering?

The voice of the objector:

Heaps of people think this, why can't Christians see it? If God created this world and cares so much about it, why is there so much damn suffering in it? If God gives freedom to people to choose what they do and they choose to harm innocent people then God is obviously not that 'loving'. It seems that God values the freedom of those who harm others more than he values the freedom of those who are harmed. And now that you have got me started, what about the kind of suffering which is not caused by evil people but by God himself – like tsunamis' and earthquakes and volcanos. If God is in control of nature surely a 'loving and protecting' God would protect innocent people! The reason is that there is no God.

Group 2: How can a 'Christian' be holy and sinful at the same time?

The voice of the objector:

I don't know how you can say that I can be totally 'holy' before God when everyone else who knows me knows that I am not! Is God blind or something? To be charitable I might be able to see how God forgives my past sins because of Jesus, but I don't see how that can change anything about my present state or the sins that I commit in the future.

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Leaders Appendix – 1 Timothy 1-6

ESV 1 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, 2 To Timothy, my true child in **the faith**: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by **faith**. 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere **faith**. 6 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. 8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, 11 in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. 12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me **faithful**, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in **unbelief**, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the **faith** and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to **believe** in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. 18 This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding **faith** and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the **truth**. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the **truth**, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles **in faith** and **truth**. 8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; 9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness- with good works. 11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing- if they continue in **faith** and love and holiness, with self-control.

3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all

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dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the **faith** with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, **faithful** in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the **faith** that is in Christ Jesus. 14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of **truth**. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the **faith** by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, 3 who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who **believe** and know the **truth**. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. 6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the **faith** and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 10 For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who **believe**. 11 Command and teach these things. 12 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the **believers** an example in speech, in conduct, in love, **in faith**, in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, 2 older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. 3 Honour widows who are truly widows. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. 5 She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, 6 but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. 7 Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the **faith** and is worse than an **unbeliever**. 9 Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife¹⁰ of one husband, 10 and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. 11

¹⁰ Have a look at how the NIV translates this verse!

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But refuse to enrol younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry 12 and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former **faith**. 13 Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. 14 So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. 15 For some have already strayed after Satan. 16 If any **believing** woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are really widows. 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages." 19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. 23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) 24 The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. 25 So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

6:1 Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 2 Those who have **believing** masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are **believers** and beloved. Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the **truth**, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 6 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, **faith**, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the **faith**. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, 14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will display at the proper time- he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen. 17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. 20 O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," 21 for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.