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Does Faith Represent Reality?
The Biblical Worldview Understanding of Faith

By Freddy Davis

Not too long ago I had a conversation with another Christian about the idea of faith. One of the things that was said to me was that we can't absolutely "know" that our beliefs are true because we can't "prove" God. It wouldn't be "faith" if we absolutely knew.

There is a certain logic in that reasoning, but it actually doesn't represent a biblical worldview. However, that conversation got me thinking about how to best express the biblical belief about faith in the face of an understanding that is more influenced by the naturalistic beliefs prevalent in modern society, than what the Bible teaches. And it reminded me of a conversation I once had on Facebook with person who was an avowed Atheist.

It is not unusual for me to get into conversations on social media regarding the topic of faith. Following is an excerpt from the conversations that I was just referring to with an Atheist named RL. To say this guy expressed a strange understanding of the meaning of faith would be an understatement. Yet his point of view is actually rather common among those who hold a naturalistic worldview. I believe that his argument is a perfect introduction to dealing with the real meaning of faith.

Freddy Davis

RL - Something is only unbelievable based on the presuppositions you begin with. You have, so far, failed to specifically state your starting point. Based on the very incomplete assertions you have made, you seem to be operating from a

naturalistic worldview perspective. Is that the case? Are you dissing my beliefs based on an assumption that the natural universe is all that exists?

In order to have a credible argument that my beliefs are false, you necessarily begin with an assumption that what you believe about the nature of reality is true. Yet you have not demonstrated that to be so.

RL

Freddy Davis - we are going in circles my brother. So here is my beginning just to give you the starting point that you ask for. The bible is a fictitious piece of literature stolen from ancient Egyptian stories, remastered and re-taught, with a European, white male dominant twist, used only to control and attempt to govern the masses... so let's go from there.

Freddy Davis

That is simply not true. Where do you get that kind of nonsense? This is not helping your credibility.

And you didn't answer my question. Do you hold naturalistic worldview beliefs?

RL

First and foremost, I don't want nor do I need credibility, that in itself would be submitting to someone's else's truth instead of my own. To answer your second question, I don't have belief. Beliefs are only necessary for those who don't know.

Freddy Davis

RL - You are not really serious, are you? Don't have any beliefs? What do you think you have been spout-

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ing? Just because you can't articulate them doesn't mean you don't have them. When you give answers like that, it does hurt your credibility. It shows you have no idea what you are talking about.

Note: As you can see, RL expressed an understanding of faith ("beliefs," in his vocabulary) that didn't even conceive that his beliefs were actually beliefs. He holds a faith point of view that he doesn't even recognize.

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To get at the topic of faith more fully, I am going to start with how Naturalists view the topic. I want to start there because the naturalistic worldview currently dominates modern society. We live in an environment where naturalistic beliefs influence the thinking even of many committed Christians. This environment frequently causes people to end up with a skewed understanding of various Christian beliefs – even the very meaning of faith itself.

Faith According to Naturalism

Naturalists begin with the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. They do not believe in God or any kind of transcendent reality. With that as a starting point, they view religious belief as simply untrue on its face because they believe that all of reality can ultimately be understood using empirical science. To them, once knowledge and technology advance far enough, everything in every part of reality can come to be known using empirical science. So since God, or diverse kinds of powers and influences that are advocated by various religions, cannot be verified by empirical science, they are deemed to not represent reality.

Thus, when Naturalists hear people use the word "faith," the only conclusion they are able to come to is

that someone is proposing an idea that is either simply presumption, or hope and desire. They consider that anything that cannot be tested by science does not have the kind of evidence necessary to consider it to be real. For them something that cannot be tested by science has no evidence to support it and is, thus, not real. So, to them, people who believe things that do not have scientific evidence to support them must believe by faith.

The problem Naturalists have, however, is that they completely misunderstand the nature of their own beliefs. Many, as with RL in the conversation above, actually do believe that their beliefs are all based on science. That is not true, of course. In fact, the very essence of their foundational beliefs are every bit as much based on religious faith as any religion they might criticize.

To illustrate this point, they cannot empirically verify any of the foundational beliefs of their naturalistic presuppositions. They cannot demonstrate using empirical science their beliefs about: 1) the origin of natural reality, 2) the origin of life, 3) the source of the variety of life forms that exist on earth, or 4) the origin of consciousness. What they believe about all of these things is based purely on faith that their naturalistic beliefs are true – that the natural universe operating by natural laws is all that exists.

Naturalists like to fancy that their beliefs are not based on faith, and demand that religious people prove their beliefs using naturalistic proofs. But they cannot even live up to their own standards. They will accuse Christians of believing in God based on blind faith, which is not true, yet they themselves believe their naturalistic beliefs by blind faith.

Faith According to Christianity

At this point, we sometimes bump up against a little problem. Even many Christians, when they think of faith, think of it in naturalistic terms – that faith re-

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lates to things we believe without any evidence. After all, if we have evidence we are not living based on faith, right?

Well, that is NOT a biblical understanding of faith. To get at an actual understanding of faith based on a biblical worldview perspective, we have to set aside this idea that faith is mere hope or desire, and grasp what the Bible actually teaches about the topic.

A biblical understanding of faith is expressed in the Greek by the word *pistis*. It implies complete trust, confidence, a firm persuasion, or a conviction. And rather than seeing it as belief without evidence, the Bible teaches that it is belief WITH evidence – it is just not the kind of evidence that Naturalists would accept.

So to get at this biblical understanding, we need to look in the Bible to see what it says about the meaning of faith. And, in fact, there is an actual definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 – interestingly, it is the only actual definition of faith that is found in the Bible. There we read:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. NASB

In this definition, the word translated "assurance" means "that which becomes a foundation for another thing to stand on." It represents what is real as opposed to what is imaginary or deceptive – something we are able to have full confidence in. It particularly relates to matters that help people recognize the objective reality of things that cannot be seen visibly, and that help us distinguish them from those things that are not real. So, when it comes to the things related to eternity – God, heaven, and other elements of transcendent reality – we can't see them with our physical eyes, but we do believe that they actually exist, and we live and act as if that were true.

The things "hoped for," in this verse, are the things we believe because we have faith that it is true. Hope, in this case, is not a mere desire for something to be true, it is an actual *expectation* based on knowledge, even though that knowledge can't be verified empirically. We know it is true, but we can't show it to be true using science. That said, there is actual proof, but it is found in other places.

The word "conviction" translates a word that means "a result that is produced in the mind by a proof that leaves no doubt whatsoever." Thus, in this passage, we are told that faith produces a result that we can be absolutely certain of in spite of the fact that we cannot see it with our eyes.

So, to put all of that together: *Faith is a personal manifestation of actual evidence regarding objectively real things that cannot be seen with the eyes, but is so conclusive that it simply cannot be doubted.*

Comparison of Naturalist and Biblical Views of Faith

So, what is that evidence that can't be doubted? Let's explore this a little more deeply.

In order to concretely grasp the differences between Naturalism and Christianity as it relates to faith, it might be helpful to put the differences side by side for comparison. We will deal specifically here with some of the issues that Naturalists most strongly criticize regarding Christian beliefs. These are the things they imagine when they criticize us for living by faith.

The Truth of the Bible

Naturalism - There is no empirical proof that God even exists. As such, there is no objective evidence that the Bible is anything more than one religious book among many. Faith that it is something more is nothing more than blind faith or wishful thinking.

Christianity - God has revealed Himself and His ways in the Bible. People who know God in a personal relationship have this revelation *objectively* confirmed in their own spirit by God Himself. Faith in this truth is based on an objectively real personal relationship with God.

Existence of the God of the Bible

Naturalism - There is no empirical proof that God even exists, so faith in Him is nothing more than blind faith or wishful thinking.

Christianity - We don't just know *about* God, we know Him personally because humans are spiritual persons who have a capability of personally interacting with Him, and He has specifically revealed Himself to us. Thus, faith is based on an *objectively real* spiritual capacity.

Man as a Spiritual Person

Naturalism - There is no empirical proof that man is anything more than a natural animal. Any belief to the contrary is blind faith.

Christianity - Human beings were created by God as spiritual persons who have the capacity to perceive and interact with Him – who is also a spiritual person. Thus, faith is based on an *objectively real* spiritual capacity.

Man as Fallen

Naturalism - There is no empirical proof that man is anything other than a natural animal, so the very idea of fallenness has no basis in reality. Belief in that religious tenet can only be based on blind faith.

Christianity - The Bible teaches that people who have never engaged God by entering into a personal relationship with Him by placing their faith in Jesus Christ, remain separated from Him. Faith regarding this truth is based on God's affirmation of it to us through *an actual, objective personal relationship we have with Him*.

Afterlife

Naturalism - There is no empirical proof that there is anything beyond this life, or that human beings are anything more than natural animals. When this life is over, it is over. There is nothing else. Any belief in an afterlife is nothing more than blind faith or wishful thinking.

Christianity - Human beings are spiritual person's who are created at conception and are eternal from that point. During this life, people choose either to enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ or remain separated from Him. That decision determines a person's eternal destiny. Those who choose Christ will spend eternity in heaven with God, and those who reject Him will spend eternity in hell separated from God. Faith in this truth is based on God's revelation, and is affirmed to us in the Bible and in our spirit through the *objective personal relationship we have with Him*.

Salvation in Jesus Christ

Naturalism - There is no empirical proof that God even exists, or that Jesus Christ was anything more than a mere human being. Christians' belief that Jesus somehow spiritually saves individuals is nothing more than blind faith or wishful thinking.

Christianity - When a person invites Christ into their life, God forgives their sin, spiritually transforms them into new spiritual creatures, and adopts them into his spiritual family. Faith in this truth is based on the person's *objectively real experience of meeting God personally*.

Why the Biblical Understanding of Faith Is True

Since the very idea of faith relates to things that cannot be understood based on empirical science, how is it possible to have the kind of certainty that the biblical definition of faith proposes? That, I think, is the real question that people want answered.

First, though, let's acknowledge that there is evidence for the truth of the Christian faith that falls into the category of being empirical. These things are not "proof" as such, but are very strong evidence that can be pointed to that support the truth of the Christian faith – things such as historical documents and archaeological findings. That said, the ultimate proof of the reality of God and of the Christian faith is personal, though not subjective. It is affirmed in our spirit as we personally experience an objectively real encounter and interaction with God.

Before making our conclusion, however, let's review one point that was made before. There is no such thing as a point of view that does not depend on faith as its starting point. We saw that even Naturalism, with its demand that everything in reality be subject to empirical inquiry, is actually a faith system. There are simply things that cannot be known based on an empirical methodology.

So how are we, then, able to deal with this at all? We are able to deal with it because there actually is an objectively real transcendent reality, and God has put into the human person a means for interacting in that arena. Human beings are not exclusively natural animals. We live in an animal body, but our essential self is spirit and is capable of interacting in the realm of the spirit. As such, the proof that faith is built upon is personal and experiential, not material. As Christians, we know it is real because we are able to interact with God based on an objectively real personal relationship we have with Him.

If God really does exist, then believing in Him is a perfectly reasonable belief. It begins with actual personal interaction with a God who objectively exists, and who communicates to us personally from the spiritual place in which He exists. We know it is true because we know Him. Our "faith" is not blind faith. We are able to have absolute certainty that God exists because there actually does exist a part of reality that can be known based on factors that go beyond physical proofs. Naturalists don't believe it because they are unwilling to explore that element of reality, but their unwillingness to acknowledge it does not mean it does not exist. It only means that they are unwilling to explore it.

The biblical understanding of faith is true because it reflects actual reality. God really does exist and He has revealed Himself to humanity – not just as an abstract idea, but as an actual person we can know. We are able to respond to that revelation and enter into an objectively real personal relationship with Him. When we do, we are able to see Him with the eyes of faith – not faith that is wishful thinking, but that which allows us to engage reality as it actually exists.

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