

## Faith: Believing the Truth Substantiated by Evidence

by Jeff Miller, Ph.D.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to participate in the Apologetics Press Scientists Seminar in Jacksonville, AL with three other scientists (Drs. Branyon May, Mike Houts, and Joe Deweese) and a Hebrew scholar (Dr. Justin Rogers). During the seminar, we had a live Q&A period where all of the speakers lined up on the stage to field questions from the audience. Several atheists from the local university were present, many of whom stayed after the sessions to ask questions.



During the Q&A period, one of the atheists asked a question that I have often received when discussing science with naturalists: “How can faith (belief without evidence) be used to arrive at truth?” These atheists had been told by other theists that belief in God is not about evidence. It is a blind trust, regardless of the evidence—“fideism.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “fideism” as “reliance on **faith rather than reason** in pursuit of religious **truth**.”<sup>1</sup> By faith, they mean a “firm belief in something for which there is no proof.”<sup>2</sup> To many in Christendom, biblical faith is such an idea.

Imagine an empty container representing the truth on a subject. A person “pours” evidence into the container, trying to fill it to the brim and arrive at the complete truth on a matter. When it comes to religious faith, however, according to many in Christendom, the container **cannot be completely filled**. The space that is left at the top of the container, between the evidence and the brim, must be filled in with blind “faith.” So, according to them, belief in God, for instance, rests ultimately, not on the evidence, but irrational faith.

In truth, the Bible does not so define faith. The Greek word for faith used in the New Testament (*pistis*) is not a mystical word only applicable when discussing religious faith. It is the Grecian word equivalent to the English words “belief” or “trust.”<sup>3</sup> When we “believe,” “trust,” or “have faith in” someone, that faith is based on evidence. If a parent, for example, has proven himself to be trustworthy, we believe him. If we do not know a person and have no evidence to substantiate his integrity, to believe in him would be a blind (evidence-less) faith, which would be irrational and unwise. Scripture incessantly makes the point that we should come to a knowledge of the truth **based on the evidence** that has been provided to us. According to Romans 1:20, so much evidence has been provided to come to the truth of God, that not to come to the right conclusion is “without excuse.” We can **know** the truth—merely accept it “on faith”—and it will set us free (John 8:32). We should test or “prove all things” before believing them, only holding to that which is good or right (1 Thessalonians 5:21). As did the “fair-minded” Bereans of Acts 17, God wants us to search for evidence that substantiates a claim before blindly believing it (verse 11). Since many false teachers are in the world, He tells us to “not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” before believing them (1 John 4:1). Unlike blind faith (i.e., fideism)—which pits itself against reason<sup>4</sup>—Paul believed in establishing truth using reason (Acts 26:25). In fact, Jesus told His audience to **not believe Him** if He did not substantiate His claims with evidence (John 10:37).

The blind “faith” idea is unbiblical. The biblical portrait of faith would be more like evidence being “poured” into our truth container. The “evidence” rises to the top of the container and begins pouring over the top. Where “faith” comes in is when we look at the truth, verified by evidence, and **choose** whether or not to believe it. Most do not and will not (Matthew 7:13-14). It is their own choice, but it is not because God has not provided enough evidence to come to the truth. Rather, they have rejected the evidence which is readily available, due to their own personal motives.

As is always the case when I receive the question that the young men asked at the seminar, they are shocked when I respond that I do not agree that faith is “belief without evidence”—that our faith is in fact demanded by the evidence. On this occasion the atheists were shocked five times over, since all of the speakers on the panel nodded in agreement with those words.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Fideism” (2015), *Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fideism>, emp. added.

<sup>2</sup> "Faith" (2017), *Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>.

<sup>3</sup> William Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (1979), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), second edition revised, pp. 662-664.

<sup>4</sup> "Fideism."



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