

Faith and Reason

Section I

Matters that reason does not comprehend (paradox)

First of all I will consider in section one the following matters that reason does not comprehend: a) The existence of God; b) the Triune God; c) the nature of the Scriptures; d) the nature of faith; e) the two natures of Jesus -- Divine and human.

a) The Existence of God

The existence of God cannot be proven by scientific means or methods. God is a hidden God, an invisible spirit (Joh. 4:24; 2 Cor. 3:17; Is. 45:15; 1 Tim. 6:16). God said to Moses that no man has seen God and lived (Ex. 33:20). We cannot see Him with our eyes or fathom Him with our thoughts. To know, understand, and approach God is entirely a matter of faith. Whatever man knows of God he knows through God's own revelation of Himself, either through God's work of creation and providence, or through His holy Book, the Bible. Had God not revealed Himself, man would have never known Him, since God is the absolute, perfect Personality, who dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16). The Holy Scriptures are the revelation of God, His holy and unperishing word.

b) Triune God

According to the Holy Scriptures, God is one in essence, but in this one essence there are three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God the heavenly Father is the Creator. The writer to the Hebrews clearly states that by faith we understand that God created the world, the visible and invisible, with His word (Heb. 11:3; Col 1:16). In the creation story the Bible relates that when God commanded something to be created, it came to pass: "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so." Not even a believer can understand on the basis of his mind the existence of the triune God or that everything -- visible and invisible -- was created by Him. Faith is not a product of the mind, but according to the words of Paul, faith is foolishness to the mind. God's existence cannot be proven scientifically or demonstrated by the mind, but it is completely a matter of faith.

c) The Bible -- God's Revelation

Is the Bible a geology, biology or a history book? It is none of these, but rather it is a book containing God's revelation for the salvation of souls. In contrast to all other books in the world, Holy Scripture is the Word of God. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which the prophets wrote

by divine inspiration, are throughout, from beginning to end, the words of God Himself. Luther writes on this point: "You must deal with Scripture in such a way that you accept it just as if God Himself is speaking."

Holy Scripture does not merely attest to the fact that it is God's word; it also explains the peculiar manner in which God gave His word to men. It clearly teaches that the Word of God was inspired, and enlivened unto certain holy men, whom God called to be the official writers of His holy book, so that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim.3:16). Scripture emphatically declares: "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). Since the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, they wrote not their own words, but those which God Himself put into their minds. Apostle Paul writes of this to the Corinthians: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13).

The Bible, therefore, is the holy word of God, for it has originated and come from God. But on the other hand, we must say that the Bible is also a human word, for it has been transmitted to us via man. After the fall in Paradise, God proclaimed to fallen mankind salvation through faith in the seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent. This method of orally proclaiming His word was retained by God until the time when He called Israel out of Egypt and made them His chosen people. Up to this time the Scripture existed as oral traditions, only in the minds and mouths of men. At a later stage these oral narratives were written down and edited over a period of one thousand years (1500 - 400 B.C.). These narratives were written down by human hands. But in spite of the human factor, the Bible is completely the word of God, as Paul writes to Timothy: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim.3:16).

d) Nature of Faith

In one old Finnish children's religion textbook there is an example illustrating the nature of faith. A father is in a dark root cellar under the kitchen. Father tells his little son to jump into the dark hole, and he will catch him. The boy cannot see the father, but, hearing the father's voice and trusting him, jumps into his waiting hands. The writer to the Hebrews defines faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). [Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen]. Also, "But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is ..." (Heb. 11:6).

e) Two Natures of Jesus -- Divine and Human

The second article of the creed deals with matters that are completely contrary and beyond the understanding of carnal reason. Jesus was, on the one hand human, experiencing hunger, thirst, weariness, and he even cried twice. But Jesus was at the same time divine. The Nicene creed states of Jesus: ". begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father ..." Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost, not of the will of any man, and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus walked perfect footsteps, never falling into sin. He was tempted in every point like you and I, says the writer to the Hebrews, but was completely sinless. These are things the carnal mind wars against.

After Jesus was crucified and buried, he rose victorious from the grave on the third day for our redemption. This is a historical fact. Luther writes in the explanation to the 2nd article of the creed: "who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold and silver, but with His holy and precious blood, in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He has risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." Apostle Paul wrote about the resurrection to the Corinthians, who disputed it. "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching

vain, and your faith is also vain ... and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1 Cor. 15: 12,13,14,17,18).

Section II

1. Battle of Faith and Reason.

In Christianity we have learned that faith is not a matter of the mind or of reason. The mind of man brings about many difficult situations for us in our daily lives. Where is reason especially manifest? How many of us have ever been in a situation where we have asked some of the basic questions of our faith? Can it be so that only we will be saved? Is there truly a God? The mind may rebel against God's procreation in marriage. Is it reasonable to accept all the children into our family that God gives, even though we are tired, our hands full tending to the other children, and the world seems to be over populated anyway? Does it make sense to deny ourselves the sometimes seemingly innocent worldly pleasures? Students may encounter conflicting theories of creation in school. The philosophical ideas and meditations of this time put their stamp on today's life. Many new religions have spread into our country. Christian faith is the only faith that believes in salvation of souls without the aid of the mind. New phenomena are the New Age Movement and Satanic worship. The first mentioned is a confusing mix of Christian faith and satanism. The muslim faith is also rapidly spreading throughout our country.

These reasonings of the mind can be associated with the question that the serpent asked of the first human pair in paradise: "Did God truly say so?" God has revealed His will to us through His word, which word doesn't always agree with our own desires and thoughts. When we experience an inner conflict, we say that our mind is warring against faith. There are many doctrinal questions that are closely related to this topic: the miracles of the Bible, the doctrine of Jesus, that he is both God and man, and the doctrine of sin, which are often difficult to understand. When Jesus for the first time revealed the events he was to soon encounter in Jerusalem, Peter took Him aside to warn and rebuke him. Jesus reprimanded Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). We encounter situations in our everyday life where faith and reason battle against each other. Social drinking at business functions, tax evasion or other deceptions. The importance of watching is to be emphasized in the life of a believer.

Did the former saints battle with their reason around the same or similar doubts? The people of Israel complained about the senselessness of the wilderness journey during those forty years. Although life in Egypt was difficult, the basics of life were nevertheless provided for. During the wilderness journey the human side overcame them many times, for the goal of the journey was lost and carnal thoughts caused the people to rise up against Moses and Aaron. The reason for the inner conflict was because the thought-world, which is based upon what we see with our eyes or hear with our ears, is different from what God reveals in His word. A graphic

example can be seen in the life of Abraham. Surely Abraham experienced an inner battle as he went to sacrifice Isaac. I'm sure Noah's feelings weren't very pleasant as he built the ark on dry land and listened to the unbelievers laugh at and ridicule him.

2. Why one cannot believe and understand with the mind?

As a result of the fall in Paradise, man became completely corrupt -- from the crown of his head to the heel of the foot, says the prophet (Is. 1:6). The mind or reason of man was also darkened.

After the fall man did not lose his rational ability to understand, regulate, and to some degree shape the world. God did not remove the rule of reason. Fallen man, however, misuses reason and its accomplishments. He is so cognizant of his reason and of the great things that it can do that he forgets God who has given him all the gifts he possesses. Man takes pride in his own achievements, saying, "This I have made," instead of humbly and thankfully confessing, "This I have received." ... Reason was not destroyed by the fall but it was made to serve the sinful ego and self-glorification of fallen man.

Reason of fallen man is "fleshly." It is blind to sin and unable to see God, his true nature and state. Luther writes: "... in divine things, that is, in those which pertain to God ... as to be acceptable to Him and obtain salvation for us, our nature is so stark- and stone-blind, so utterly blind, as to be unable to recognize these matters at all."

In the area of man's relationship to God, reason has received some knowledge, known as general revelation. Luther always emphasized that human reason possesses the natural law. No proclamation of God's will or of the law given to Moses would mean anything to men if the law were not written in their hearts (Rom. 1).

Although man's reason or natural intellect still has a dim spark of knowledge that there is a God, as well as of the teaching of the law (Rom. 1:19-21, 28,32), nevertheless, it is so ignorant, blind, and perverse that when even the most gifted and most educated people on earth read or hear the gospel of the Son of God and the promise of eternal salvation, they cannot by their own powers perceive this, comprehend or understand it, or believe and accept it as the truth. On the contrary, the more zealously and diligently they want to comprehend spiritual things with their reason, the less they understand or believe, and until the Holy Ghost enlightens and teaches them they consider it all mere foolishness and fables. As St. Paul says in I Cor. 2:14. "But the natural man receiveth not (does not perceive) the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

3. Reason is a gift of creation

Are the children of God simple, because the mind cannot comprehend faith? They are not more simple than others. Believers have received the gift of faith, which cannot be acquired by the mind after Adam and Eve fell into sin. The mind is often the ally of the enemy of souls. God, the creator of all, has bestowed upon man both faith and reason (intellect). Correctly used, the reason is an aid to the spirit, an ally or confederate.

Humans were created as rational beings. We are able to think and exchange thoughts with others with the help of language, for example. Reason is a gift of God, a dowry from the Creator to mankind. In his explanation to the first article of the creed, Luther says: God has given and still preserves to me my "reason and all my senses, ... All of which He does without any merit or worthiness in ffeie, but out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy. For all of which I am duty bound to thank, praise, serve and obey Him." Luther says that reason is the essential and main earthly blessing for man, and therefore man stands far above all other living beings. Through it man excercises that stewardship over the earth which was given to him in Gen. 1:28. Reason provides the light by which man can see and administer

the affairs of this world. Reason is the source and bearer of all culture. It has discovered all arts and sciences, all medicine and law, and it administers them. None of this is to be despised; rather all is to be regarded and praised as the noble gift of God.

All great inventions, which simplify man's everyday life, are products of the mind of man. In them we can see God's infinite greatness. Thus Luther greeted the new flowering of the sciences in his time. He was very happy about the new art of printing books [invention of the Guttenburg press, which revolutionized the world] and praised it as the highest and final gift of God before the end of the world.

We can observe the advances in the areas of technology and medical science that have taken place in the past decades. There has never been a revolution in technology during the history of civilization to equal that which we have experienced in this century. New cures have been found for diseases that were incurable only a few years ago. Advances in technology have been mind-boggling. During there lifetime, many have seen technological progress ranging from the flight of the first airplane in 1909, to the moonlanding in 1969, to the recent launching of the Hubble Space Telescope that is searching for the outer limits of the universe. Today computer chips have been reduced to pinhead dimensions, allowing computers to shrink from room-size to suitcase-size and smaller. Many systems have a storage capability that enables users to work efficiently

with millions of characters of information. The speeds of today's fastest computers are expressed in terms of billionths of a second (nanoseconds). God the Creator has given men the power to do all these things by originally implanting and creating the abilities within him. This is part of man's creation in the image of God, that is, so that he may rule over the earth.

The reason of man and the functioning of his brain are of utmost importance in this life it is one great gift from God. A severe stroke, resulting from the interruption of the flow of blood to the brain, may destroy so much of the brain that death or total incapacitation results. A less severe stroke may damage tissue in the brain, temporarily or permanently destroying functions dependent on that tissue. A person may lose his speech or the movement and control of his limbs, for example, depending upon the area of the brain destroyed.

Education

Education is important for a believer. During these times of high technology and science, it is very difficult to get a decent job without any education and professional training. It pays to study, and study as long and progress as far as one has stamina for. In this changing and progressive society, in which the work field is becoming more technological, the significance of studying and education is emphasized and of utmost importance. There are no shortcuts to acquiring new skills; one must go to school and study long and hard. The need for education is also apparent for the older generation, as well. Many adults have had to return to school to gain new skills as technology advances in their work field.

It pays to have trust and faith in the future. We need to have the mind of Luther, who said, that even if he knew that the world would end tomorrow, he would plant an apple tree today. We must remember that the use of the mind or knowledge does not cause one to fall from faith, but it is sin that separates man from God. The opposite of faith is not reason or understanding, or knowledge, but unbelief.

The reason as an aid to the spirit.

Faith is the light of the reason, it is the eye ointment, a word which has been used when alluding to the Holy Spirit. Faith does not snuff out or darken the mind and its ability to reason and think, but it opens up a whole new world. We often have to use reason and thought processes in this life. Spiritual understanding is born from the cooperation of faith and the mind -- something of the kind was said in the Bible: it was acceptable to the Holy Spirit and us (Acts 15). One should never belittle understanding or wisdom. In many instances the Bible exhorts us to strive for it. Of course,

one must remember that wisdom in spiritual matters is not one's own wisdom nor is it based on one's own intellect. A believer who understands much -- if there is such a one -- is no better than someone who understands little, but in these areas the gifts are manifold but the Spirit is one. We must also remember that little children and mentally handicapped individuals, who are not able to think at all, or to a very limited extent, are believers -- for such is the kingdom of heaven, said Jesus.

4. Dangers of reasoning and meditating.

Many points of the doctrine of Christ are very difficult, if not impossible, for the mind to comprehend -- they go above and beyond the mind of man. One great stumbling block for unbelievers is the doctrine of the kingdom. This was even a troubling question for the disciples of Jesus: Are these all that will be saved? (Lk. 13:23). Jesus did not directly answer this question, but replied as follows: "Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

The origin of the universe is a question that many ponder. How old is the universe, how was it formed, what is the origin of man?

For many single men and women in the kingdom, a difficult question is will I ever receive a spouse? The ratio of men to women seems so lopsided that some may wonder will there be someone for me? Everyone can enjoy their lot in life to the fullest for it has been given by God. Whether single or married, individuals have their own calling in life. Seeking for a spouse can become the most important matter in a person's life. It may even go before faith. God will give a spouse -- even without seeking -- if He so sees fit. It is often forgotten that a spouse has not been intended for everyone. One does not need to get envious or bitter. "Human value" is not measured by whether one is married or not. Each human is valued, being created by God and redeemed by Christ.

Is doesn't pay to extinguish the voice of reason in matters of courtship. It pays to be realistic and not superspiritual. One shouldn't think, for example, that two individuals who are mentally immature without a career or job will be "taken care of" by God when they get married. This is a question of tempting God, similar to that with which Jesus was tempted (Matt. 4). But on the other hand, fears about future financial needs do not need to become insurmountable so that one doesn't dare to get married.

5. In conclusion

Scriptures teach us that the man who is "in sin" (in unbelief) is not only

weak and sick, but that he is truly lifeless and "dead" (Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13). Just as little as a person who is physically dead can by his own powers prepare or accommodate himself to regain temporal life, likewise |

can no man who is spiritually dead, in sin, prepare or address himself by his own power to obtain spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life, unless the Son of God liberates him from the death of sin and makes him alive through the gospel.

The sense or soundness of living faith is seen in this, that we have a doctrine that is not conflict with itself. One part of a sermon does not conflict with another part. Speakers with different gifts do not teach in conflict with one another. If one would ask of any believer in any part of the world how one finds the gracious God, the questioner will receive the same answer. By faith God opens the understanding of every believer. We do not comprehend in this life what we will once in heaven, but now only in part as in a mirror, or through a dim glass. God will protect us, His own children, and help us to differentiate the narrow pathway from the broad one, and the voice of the Good Shepherd from the voice of the hireling.

1 Cor. 1:17-31

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