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"THROUGH FAITH WE UNDERSTAND"

The Bible's examination of the relationship between faith and reason (Heb. 11:1–3)

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Introduction

How do faith and reason relate to one another?

As Christians we often experience that reason positions itself against faith—and faith against reason. We very often experience the affects of reason quite negatively. We know however that in everyday life, at home, at school, in studies, and in work the use of reason is not only permitted but unavoidable. We need good sense or as it's called in Finland common sense or horse sense.

How do faith and reason relate to one another?

We will approach this problem from the perspective of the entity of faith. We ask: What is living Christian faith? How does faith function and operate?

1. Regarding the Entity of Faith

The Letter to the Hebrews defines faith:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)

Two issues belong to the entity of faith:

Faith hopes and faith sees.

A Christian's hope is based on the promises given by God's Word. Faith points forward. Hope carries from this life to eternal life. We have strength to continue in the tribulations of the times when the hope of everlasting life lives in our faith. This hope possesses the gift of eternal life already here and now and carries us over tribulations in this life.

A child's faith operates in hope. For example, when Christmas was still far ahead, small children lived in anticipation of Christmas. They believed that Christmas would come. They lived in hope. They lived the reality of Christmas beforehand. This hope gave their life light through the entire dark fall.

A Christian lives in anticipation of eternal Christmas—in faith and hope. Faith is a hope that is aimed at the invisible world. Faith is convinced that the invisible world is real, for faith "sees the invisible," as Hebrews says (11:27). The eye of faith reaches beyond the time of this sad world and sees the joy of heaven. For this reason hope, which possesses eternal life as a most precious treasure already here and now, is kindled in the heart. This hope gives strength to move past the difficult issues of this life.

According to Hebrews, we have hope "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:19, 20). When we have been anchored in faith and hope in the promises of God's Word, we have already been attached to the shore of salvation. We will not drift off course with the currents of the time (Heb. 2:1).

2. Faith Helps Us to Understand

*"Through faith we **understand** that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3).*

Hebrews opens the relationship between faith and reason: "Through faith we understand." [With the help of faith we understand.] Reason is not the antithesis (or opposite) of faith. Reason [here] is an adjective that describes faith. Faith is the main word. One of faith's attributes is understanding. Faith helps to understand matters of the visible world. Faith understands that "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Reason has use in the visible world, that is, in the matters of temporal life.

3. Reason in the Service of Faith

Faith belongs to a Christian's relationship with God, reason to the relationship with neighbors. Faith is God's gift for the purpose of owning the message of salvation and serving of God. Reason is God's gift for the purpose of serving our neighbor and the management of our earthly vocation (tending to our earthly vocation).

Paul urges: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The question here is of man's response, "sacrifice" and reaction to (*reaction*) God's sacrifice and act (*actio*) of salvation.

Work in everyday life is the vocation that God has given us to "dress and keep" the earth (Gen. 2:15). It is a part of our life's task here in this time. Our duty is to serve our neighbors, beginning at home, with mother and father's duties, children's duties at home and school, youth's duties to study and prepare for work life and establishment of their own families. Our life's mission is not self-fulfillment but rather fulfillment of God's will. God has created us in His own image for this

purpose. Every person, in whom is God's image, is our neighbor,. Our life's duty, our work and career, is serving God in people whom He has created in His own image. In the original language of the Bible (Gk. *logiké*) Paul calls this "daily worship," a "reasonable service."

This service of God is "reasonable" (*logiké*) in the sense that its grace gift is "reason" (*lógos*). A Christian person's reason does not exclude the gift of faith in everyday service of God. On the contrary, reason is God's great gift for the serving of neighbors and doing work as well as possible. Faith and reason can function in parallel and complement one another. Reason must be subordinate and obedient to faith, according to Hebrews: "Through faith we understand" (Heb. 11:3).

4. The Conflict of Reason and Faith

In Paradise Adam and Eve encountered a conflict between faith and reason: God had forbidden them to eat of but one tree!

Everything went well until the devil came in the form of a clever serpent and called God's Word into question: "Yea, hath God said...?" God's Adversary appealed to reason and showed that there was no sense in the prohibition. It was a great secret of faith, a mystery (*mystérion* < *myoo* "close eyes, lock, seal"), which men initially honored because they believed God's Word. But God's Adversary enticed them to open this mystery of faith. He appeared in the form of a serpent or the form of reason.

At first, Eve with her answer corrected the false information of God's enemy and staved off the doubts of her own reason. But the serpent continued the discussion when it had gotten to talk with man, whom God had created for His own conversation companion.

The series of falls began from precisely this, that man consented to converse with God's Adversary. Man began to listen to the voice of reason and abandon the discussion with God, which was based on faith. The devil gained man for his conversation companion with rational reasons. He put himself in God's place, interpreted God's Word and promised:

"In the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing [all, both] good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

The devil produced a conflict between faith and reason. He subtly enticed woman to defuse this tension with the fruit of the forbidden tree, which "would give understanding" (Gen. 3:6). Reason overcame faith. Sensory pleasure sped up the fall for: "the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes" (Gen. 3:6). Reason and sensory pleasure won. They stepped ahead of obedient faith.

5. Faith Overcomes Reason

5.1 Abraham's example

Abraham is the most important in Hebrew's description of examples of faith. In Ur of the Chaldees, on the banks of the Euphrates, Abraham heard God's Word: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1).

Abraham was over 70 years old when he departed. Was it very reasonable? Abraham nonetheless left with his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, tens of servants, and hundreds of animals.

Hebrews explains Abraham's departure: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8).

Abraham's faith was the conviction "of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

As God had promised, Abraham and Sarah received a son even though they were already very old. But then an incomprehensible trial occurred. God commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah.

How was this possible? How could the same God who had given them a son, require them to sacrifice the son?

How could God act in such a contrary fashion? And so contrary to reason? How did Abraham proceed?

Hebrews relates: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac."

Hebrews explains: By faith Abraham reckoned "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb. 11:19).

Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son when he placed Isaac upon the firewood and drew the knife. It was absolutely inhuman and unreasonable. But Abraham trusted in God. Blindly. In his blindness however he saw with the eyes of faith. In faith Abraham reckoned (*logisámenos*) on the basis of God's promise that he was to receive Isaac again in the resurrection of the dead. Faith helped Abraham to understand, to surpass human understanding (Heb. 11:3).

5.2 Moses' Example

As a child Moses grew up in the palaces of Egypt. He became the adopted son of the king's daughter. He was schooled "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22).

Moses had the opportunity to inherit a king's power. Egypt was a super power at the time. Moses had a possibility of becoming the world's mightiest ruler.

What an opportunity! How did Moses use this opportunity? Because Moses believed in God when he came of age he refused to present himself as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose rather to suffer affliction with the children of God than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season (Heb. 11:25).

Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt because he fixed his gaze upon the coming reward (Heb. 11:23–26). Faith is seeing that which is not seen (Heb. 11:1).

5.3 The Virgin Mary's Example

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. The angel's words perplexed Mary. Mary contemplated and thought, considered and pondered what the angel's salutation might mean (Luke. 1:29). The verb "ponder," which pictures Mary's reaction (*dialogidsomai*) comes from the Greek word *logia*, which means "logic/understanding/deliberation." Mary believed and tried to understand the angel's proclamation or the meaning of God's Word with the help of faith. Mary did not understand with reason, but with the help of faith she understood. Mary did not place the angel's proclamation in question on account of rational reasons. Mary's understanding opened when she in faith pondered the angel's message and asked and sought its meaning and explanation.

On Christmas night the shepherd's came from the fields of Bethlehem to the manger. They related everything that the angels had told them about this child. "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Mary also believed the message of the despised shepherds because therein was God's revelation and God's Word.

In Paradise, Eve and Adam listened to the devil and the voice of reason and fell into doubts and then fell into mortal sin. In Nazareth, the Virgin Mary heard the angel's message, believed, was content with her lot, and consented to her calling: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38.) Mary believed. She did not wish to know everything or rise to God's level. She was content with the lot of the Lord's handmaid. Mary, a young virgin and the mother of Jesus, left us a model of believing person. In Mary's faith there are three main parts:

1. She received and believed the message of God's Word,
2. She kept the Word in her heart,
3. She constantly pondered/examined in her heart all that she had heard and seen, and she understood with the help of faith.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the new Adam (1 Cor. 15:47). Our Lord's mother, the Virgin Mary, is like a new Eve. Whereas the Fall happened through Eve's unbelief, through Mary's faith the atonement for our sins began.

Conclusion

Faith is such a great gift that it is many times more than that which we can understand. We cannot with reason comprehend perfect bliss in eternal life. Nonetheless we can possess this treasure already here and now—by faith, due to the merits of Christ.

Abraham did not need to sacrifice his own son on Mount Moriah. But God had to sacrifice His own only Son. He placed His own Son upon the wooden cross on Golgotha, or the same Mount Moriah. We can never understand this with our reason. But we can believe. We can believe that we have in the sacrifice of God's only Son, in Jesus' name and blood, the forgiveness of our sins, everlasting life, and salvation.