

# A READY ANSWER

## Harmonizing Faith and Reason

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Renowned mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) once remarked that **“we have to know when to doubt, when to affirm what is certain, and when to submit. Anyone who acts otherwise does not understand the force of reason.”** (Houston, James M., The Mind on Fire, 2006, pg.133). Pascal’s description of reason is accurate and helpful when thinking about how reason and Christian faith interact with one another. It is also Biblical in its approach.

Christianity is a religion to be learned, known and understood. In **Matthew 11:29**, Jesus invited those who would follow him to **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”** There is no instinctive sense of Christ or his teachings in man. Man must learn about the Savior. Paul wrote **“...for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”** (**2 Timothy 1:12**). Paul’s confidence was rooted in things that he claimed to have known. His assurance in the God in whom he believed and in the promises God had made was not grounded upon suppositions and wishful thinking. Paul’s life experiences as a Christian and his understanding of the scriptures caused him to know these things. **“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,”** (**Luke 24:45**). The scriptures are completely without force if there is not in man an ability to understand those same scriptures. The scriptures provide vital answers for the questions of life. The Bible provides the foundation for a person to learn, know and understand the truth. **Romans 10:17** says, **“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** Faith, learning, knowledge and understanding all play a crucial role in man’s response to Christianity and the truth. Yet there is one more important piece that we must consider – Reason.

Pascal believed that **“we have to know when to doubt.”** In the search for truth and meaning in life, it is reasonable and helpful to doubt certain things at certain times. John wrote, **“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”** (**1 John 4:1**). Both true and false teachers claim to speak as the oracles of God. Both claim to be under the influence of the Spirit of God. Both claim to be teachers of truth. Any such claim or posturing is to be met with skepticism...**until they are tried**. Only then may we determine whether or not they are of God. Many people violate this principle. Some live their lives as if everything is true and that nothing claiming to be truth should be doubted. We sometimes hear that 1) All religions are valid and 2) Contradictions between religions are acceptable. These statements simply do not pass the litmus test of reason. It is unreasonable to suggest that two contradicting answers to one question can both be true. By implication, one or both of those answers will be wrong! Preacher A teaches that a man must be baptized for the remission of sins. Preacher B teaches that baptism has nothing to do with a man’s salvation. The Law of Contradiction tells us that two opposing statements, such as these, cannot be equally true. Reason demands that we suspend judgment on both assertions until one or the other can be proved or disproved. In other words, men need to know when to doubt. We try the spirits using the standard of the scriptures. Through a study of passages such as **Acts 2:38** and **Acts 22:16**, we begin to learn, know and understand the truth of the matter. It becomes a matter of faith that a man must be baptized for the remission of sins. Preacher A is relieved from the burden of doubt and Preacher B is proven to be a false teacher. Reason does not supplant faith as some claim. **Reason aids in the search for truth upon which faith is built.**

Pascal also believed that one must know **when to affirm what is certain**. In the search for truth and meaning in life, it is reasonable to expect and insist that some things are certain. It is not all that uncommon to hear that “absolute truth does not exist.” Yet this very statement implies that there is at least one absolute truth...that absolute truth does not exist! In terms of life and Christian faith, it is critical that one affirm what is certain...absolute truth does exist. There are natural forces which demonstrate the existence of absolute truth. Newton’s Law of Inertia explains one of these absolute truths. An object that is not moving will not move until a net force acts upon it. That is an absolute truth. Objects do not move until some force causes them to move. To that statement there is no exception. The existence of just one absolute truth makes the statement “absolute truth does not exist” false. And the fact that there are absolute truths in nature leads us to seek out absolute truths in spiritual matters as well. It would be irrational to affirm that there are absolute truths governing the physical universe and to deny the possibility, even probability, of absolute truths governing the spiritual side of man. Paul speaks of this very thing in **Romans 1:20**. He wrote, **“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”**

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Paul's argument is this. There are things in nature that so clearly point to a Supernatural Creator, that it would take a suspension of reason and rationalism to deny His reality. Men are without excuse. The reality of the existence of a Creator is so clearly on display in nature that reason demands an affirmation of this truth. The things that are "clearly seen" teach this absolute truth – God is real. **No amount of skepticism can change what nature shows... God is real.** An acknowledgement of God's existence then leads us to learn more about Him as He has revealed Himself to us in the scriptures. Again, reason does nothing to supplant faith. It aids Biblical faith in our search for truth.

Pascal's third point is that we must **know when to submit**. In his book, **In The Beginning Was Information**, author and information specialist Dr. Werner Gitt writes about the five aspects of information. One of those is what he calls Pragmatics. He writes, **"If the recipient (man) breaks off the message received from the sender (God) at the semantic (meaning) level, then the purpose intended by God will be missed. The goal of the information in the Bible is that man should be moved to action."** (Gitt, Werner, **In The Beginning Was Information**, 2005, pg. 147). Dr. Gitt illustrates the necessity of submission. Applied to Pascal's assertions, we can see that after first trying the spirits (knowing when to doubt) and then affirming what is certain (absolute truth does exist...God is real), we must then move forward to submission. If we do not, then the **purpose intended by God will be missed**. Jesus said, **"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:"** (**Matthew 7:24**). James wrote, **"But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."** (**James 1:22**). This pragmatic requirement was also illustrated in the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy 32:46-47** says, **"And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it."** Reason, learning, knowledge, understanding and faith serve no purpose if not followed by submission through obedience. Jesus said, **"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"** (**Luke 6:46**). Again, it is common to see people violate this principle by refusing to submit though they may know and even understand what God requires of them. This unreasonable refusal to submit is illustrated in the thought that "faith only" can save. The implication in that statement is that nothing is required of the believer except his unwavering faith. Yet the scripture says, **"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;"** (**Hebrews 5:9**). It is unreasonable to learn and understand what God requires and then refuse to obey. **Reason demands that a person knows when to submit.**

Christian faith and reason go hand in hand when they are used properly. **"God has put enough into the world to make faith in him a most reasonable thing, and he has left enough out to make it impossible to live by sheer reason or observation alone."** (Zacharias, Ravi, **The Real Face of Atheism**, 2004, pg. 112). Christian faith takes us further than reason alone ever will. However, true faith never goes against reason. Reason alone will not declare the path to God. It will point the way though. Reason alone will not illuminate all truth. It will lighten the path to the truth. Reason alone will not instruct a man how he is to be saved. It will lead him to the place where he can find those answers.

Skeptics have long ridiculed Christians as being "simple-minded" and unreasonable. To the contrary, Christian faith is built upon reason, learning, knowledge and understanding. One need not learn, know or understand anything to be an atheist. In the end, skeptics and atheists will be condemned for their own unwillingness to follow where reason leads them. Pray that they see the light before that dreadful day.

## Reason Demands That We:

- 1) Know when to doubt  
(Try the spirits)
- 2) Know when to affirm what is certain  
(God is real)
- 3) Know when to submit  
(The goal is for man to be moved to action)

We are pleased to announce the launch of **A Ready Answer** the website. The site will serve as a companion to this newsletter. You will find an archive section with past issues of **A Ready Answer** the newsletter and other pertinent articles. There are also links to other sites you might find helpful. As time goes on, we hope to add audio as well. You can find our website at [www.areadyanswer.com](http://www.areadyanswer.com). It is fastest to type that into your address bar instead of using search engines. Visit us whenever you can!