

## OUR READERS ASK . . .

### Is religious faith an emotional crutch?

■ An emotional crutch is a form of self-deception that causes a person to ignore reality and prevents him from reasoning logically. For example, some people use alcohol as a crutch. Initially, alcohol may make them feel more self-confident and able to cope with life's challenges. But in the long run, those who lean on the crutch of alcohol harm themselves. Can the same be said about religious faith?

Some equate faith with gullibility. They say that people who resort to faith do not want to think for themselves or allow hard evidence to influence their beliefs. Such skeptics imply that those with strong religious faith ignore reality.

The Bible has much to say about faith. Yet nowhere does it encourage us to be gullible or naive. Nor does it condone mental laziness. On the contrary, it labels people who put faith in every word they hear as inexperienced, even foolish. (Proverbs 14:15, 18) Really, how foolish it would be for us to accept an idea as true without checking the facts! That would be like covering our eyes and trying to cross a busy street just because someone tells us to do it.

Rather than encouraging blind faith, the Bible urges us to keep our figurative eyes open so that we are not deceived. (Matthew 16:6) We keep our eyes open by using our "power of reason." (Romans 12:1) The Bible trains us to reason on evidence and reach sound conclusions that are based on facts. Consider some examples from the writings of the apostle Paul.

When Paul wrote to those in the congregation in Rome, he did not want them to believe in God just because he told them to. Rather, he encouraged them to consider the evidence that God is real. He wrote: "His [God's] invisible qualities are clearly seen from the world's creation on-

ward, because they are perceived by the things made, even his eternal power and Godship, so that they [those who deny God's authority] are inexcusable." (Romans 1:20) Paul used a similar line of reasoning when writing his letter to the Hebrews. "Of course, every house is constructed by someone," he said, "but he that constructed all things is God." (Hebrews 3:4) In a letter to Christians living in the city of Thessalonica, Paul encouraged them to be selective in what they believed. He wanted them to "make sure of all things."—1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Religious faith that is *not* built on sound evidence can become a crutch, one that causes a person to be misled and suffer harm. Concerning some religious people in his day, Paul wrote: "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God; but not according to accurate knowledge." (Romans 10:2) How vital it is, then, that we follow Paul's advice to the Roman congregation! He wrote: "Be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2) Faith based on accurate knowledge of God becomes, not a crutch, but a "large shield" that protects us from emotional and spiritual harm.—Ephesians 6:16.

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