

Theology: Faith

Faith

"I don't need evidence; I just have faith."

"Have faith; technology will solve the climate change problem."

"I have faith in God."

"Son, I have faith in you to do the right thing."

"My faith affects everything I do."



What kind of faith is suggested by these pictures?

What kinds of feelings, choices, and commitments might each involve?

Views of Faith

The word *faith* means different things to different people. For some it is a positive word, conveying the sense of security associated with trusting a reliable person. For others it is a negative word, where having faith is seen as laying your brain aside. Many people see faith as being just for the religious minority, who persist in holding beliefs that thinking people have long since abandoned. Those who say these things often ignore the fact that for the majority of people in the world, life is shaped by some form of religious faith.

Christian Faith

For Christians, faith is a precious gift and a response to the grace of God, not something that we generate in ourselves or maintain ourselves. Christian faith is faith in Christ, who gave his life for us, and in order to face the challenges of everyday life, faith needs the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The heart of faith is to trust in God and to live life in the light of that trust. It reflects an unreserved commitment to following Christ, whatever life may throw at you. One way that trust is expressed is in certain core beliefs concerning Christ and people's relationship with him. Most churches have these beliefs written down in creeds (summary statements of the Christian faith). Reciting creeds is not enough, for faith includes a relationship of trust, beliefs that describe that relationship, and a lifestyle that lives it. Many individual Christians may not be able to explain in detail the key Christian beliefs, but their faith is expressed in behavior, practices, and a way of living arising out of their hope and trust in God and their love for God.

Faith and Worldview

Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins are both influential, world-leading geneticists. Both have written books about the relationship between science and religion. Dawkins is an atheist who believes that genetics points to the nonexistence of God; Collins is a Christian who believes that genetics only makes sense in the light of a God who is behind the universe. Dawkins's thinking is shaped by a materialist worldview, which treats human life and the natural world as only physical; Collins's thinking is shaped by a Christian worldview, which treats them as God's handiwork. That means these two men see things very differently from each other, even though, as geneticists, they share the same knowledge.

Which of Them Has Faith?

Faith is related to the idea of worldview. Everyone has beliefs about, say, what it means to be human and how people should treat each other. Many people will not be able to explain their worldview, but their approach to life still will be shaped by the implicit beliefs that are at the heart of that worldview. They will express their trust in their worldview by their behavior and by the practices in which they engage, and in turn the practices they engage in may influence what they come to believe—our worldviews continue to grow and change. Most people imbibe a worldview from the culture around them. To a degree, we all are the creation of our background and culture. Because

everyone expresses trust in a worldview in the way they conduct their everyday life, there is a sense in which is accurate to say that everyone has faith.

When someone is converted, they experience a radical shift of perspective through a shift in their worldview. They shift their trust from one worldview to another and come to see things anew. Professor Alister McGrath is a well-known example of an atheist who became a Christian and completely shifted his perspective in this way. He started his career as a research scientist and is now one of the best-known professors of Christian theology in the world.

In the classroom, the examples we use in our lessons, the way we arrange the furniture, the learning activities that we employ, and the view we have of the purpose of what is being learned—all of these will convey implicit messages about the worldview being assumed, as well as helping to shape students' view of the world. An important responsibility for the teacher is to bring the issue of worldview to the forefront of learners' attention. The question to be asked is, In what are we placing our faith, and how is that influencing our perception of what we are learning? For example, if we teach science as though it has nothing to do with Christian faith, aren't we then reinforcing the message prevalent in society at large that science is the only trustworthy form of knowledge and that it must be seen as the opposite of religion? Simply by not talking about Christian faith in relation to science, it is easy to unintentionally reinforce the message that God has nothing to do with science or that Dawkins's view of science is automatically more acceptable than Collins's view.

This does not mean that the Christian teacher's responsibility is to have in mind a ready-made, fixed Christian version of every area of knowledge that they can explain to students. Christians, like others, continually renew their worldviews as they learn and encounter the world. Faith provides the context within which issues in science, literature, geography, or any other area of learning can be thought through, undergirded by the confidence that it is God's world that we are studying. Christian faith means living from the conviction that the Christian worldview is really true, and that includes the confidence to explore the questions and mysteries that the world offers.

