

## The Reasons for Faith

*By Faith: Pt.2*

The entire chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament is all about faith, and we're looking at it *all* Summer because Christian faith is not only an vital thing, but it's a multi-dimensional thing – a complex and nuanced thing. What is faith? What does it mean to believe? That's what we're looking at. And last week we mentioned faith has three elements. Faith begins with understanding, which leads to conviction and completes itself in commitment.

Understanding, conviction, commitment. Unless all three are present, it's not Christian faith. Now starting this week we begin to look at each of those elements in turn, and today we're going to talk about the first one. Faith begins with understanding. But before we do so, let me read for us, once more, our opening passage from the chapter. I want us to become familiar with these words and phrases.

**Hebrews 11:1–6**, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

*4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*

*5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

You notice already in those opening verses we begin to get a litany of names – historical figures – who did things, “by faith”. And that's what makes this chapter so fun, all the case studies. And we'll get to those, but first we have to set the groundwork. Before we can see what faith does, we have to understand what faith is - that's the authors intent. And to do that, again we have to understand that faith *begins* with understanding. It begins with thinking. It begins with reasoning. That's what we read in v.3, “By faith we understand...” Let me put it another way, a paraphrase: “By faith we *think*...”

The Bible tells us faith is thinking. It begins with thinking. It starts with *reasoning*. Now, this is *not* the popular conception, I know. The popular conception is orthodox-believing Christians are people who *don't* like to think. They would rather *not* think. They would rather not ask a lot of questions. They would rather accept what they're told. They would rather rest on tradition. You see, "It's always been this way," is not thinking. Now, we have to be honest and admit that such a critique is not completely without merit.

I've been re-reading a book in the last couple of weeks that had a real impact on me – and on a lot of people – back in the 90's. Mark Noll is one of my favorite, and most trusted, church historians and he wrote a groundbreaking book called *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. It's a criticism of elements of my own particular religious tribe for *failing* to base their faith on thinking in recent years. Really for about the last 100 years.

Let me set the historical context; after the Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, everything became focused on reason and rationality and one of the side affects was that the supernatural largely came under attack from the sciences. And that's a problem from the standpoint of a religion *completely* founded on the belief in a man rising from the dead – which I think you would agree is pretty supernatural.

And so one branch of the church said, "Fine, we'll just do away with the supernatural and make Christianity totally about naturalistic principles. If we can't dissect something in a lab - angels and demons for instance – we'll just call them metaphors or primitive superstitions. This was the idea behind Thomas Jefferson's famous "Bible" in which he cut out all the miracle stories from Jesus and just kept his ethical teachings. That's an alternative gospel, I'm afraid.

And Christians who took the Bible seriously were right to push back against it. So you had some, like Swiss theologian Karl Barth – a hero of mine – who created a whole academic system of countering the pure rationalists and became the father of what's called Neo-Orthodoxy. An intellectually rigorous way to view the classical orthodox faith that has been shared for 2,000 years.

But there was an alternative movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – that became especially powerful in America – called fundamentalism. First of all, American fundamentalism was very fear-based, which is a whole other sermon in itself. It was a reaction to many of the rapid changes taking place in the world in the early 1900's.

And so while they defended many worthwhile doctrines that had been targeted by the theological liberals, the fundamentalists threw the baby out with the bath water – so to speak - and established a largely anti-intellectual strain of American Christianity.

I can tell you, it was a profound moment for me in Seminary as a young man when I decided that one need not be a fundamentalist to take the Bible seriously. It was foundational to my direction in ministry and ultimately to this church. Mark Noll, provides a good description of what an intellectual approach to faith. – or really to any knowledge base – entails: “If intellectual life involves a certain amount of self-awareness about alternative interpretations or a certain amount of tentativeness in exploring the connection between evidence and conclusions, it was hard to find any encouragement for the intellectual life in the self-assured dogmatism of fundamentalism.” (126)

That’s a good quote. And so it is the fundamentalist strain that is responsible for the popular mindset of putting faith over *against* thinking. But I’m here to tell you that is not true Christianity. It’s not even historic Christianity. It’s a very modern – and I think arrogant – attempt to paint the entire faith off one modern strain.

Now, we are here today to see the Bible teaches not only that faith is *compatible* with thinking. Weak sauce! We’re not going to settle for that today. We’re not going to say, “Oh, you can have faith and still think.”

No, what we’re going to say is - what the Bible says is - faith *consists* of, *requires*, and *stimulates* the profoundest thinking and reasoning and rationality. You *cannot* be a Christian without using your brain to its uttermost – not a faithful Christian at any rate. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the reason there is not much faith today is because there’s not much thinking today. The decline in American faith goes hand in hand with a decline in American intellectual life.

Norman Cousins was a UCLA professor of Psychiatry and a general philosopher and writer in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He said, “Our age is not the age of the meditative man. It’s a sprinting, shoving age. Silence, already the nation’s most critical shortage, is almost a nasty word. Daily new antidotes for contemplation spring into being and leap out from store counters. Modern man may or may not be obsolete, but he is certainly wired for sound and has ants in his pants.” And he wrote that *before* social media and Amazon Prime ever existed!

And before we're too quick to nod in judgement, how many of you parents of college age kids would be disappointed if they chose to major in philosophy rather than business or engineering or nursing? What you're communicating is make money is more important than learning to think deeply about life. You see, Immanuel Kant was critically evaluating modernist assumptions long before the fundamentalists. In the 1780's in his great work, *Critique of Pure Reason*, he said there are three questions all educated people have to wrestle through and come up with a working answer for if you're going to live a thoughtful life, an examined life. The three questions are...How can I know what's real? What ought I to do that's right? And what can I hope for - or live for?

See, the questions are...How do I know what's real? How do I decide what is right and wrong? And what is it I should be living for? Nowadays, we're told by our culture from the beginning, from the time we're very little, that those kind of questions are for the philosophers. The *really* important things are your standard of living, your career, your appearance, and your psychological needs. And therefore, religion, the philosophy, all that stuff...How do I know? How do I decide right and wrong? What is meaning? You say, "That's not important. That's ivory tower elitism."

That is *not* doubt on the basis of thinking; that's doubt on the basis of an *absence* of thinking, a refusal to think. You cannot have fully-developed Christian faith without a vigorous life of the mind. Faith *consists* of, *requires*, *stimulates* thinking. You have to use your brain. Let me show you. This passage shows us thinking leads to faith. Thinking is the foundation of faith. Let's just look at it in three aspects: *that* thinking leads to faith, *how* thinking leads to faith, and *why* thinking leads to faith. *That* it does, *how* it does, and *why* it does.

**First of all, That thinking leads to faith.** Let's look at the principle in general. That you can't have real Christian faith without thinking. We're told that here in **verse 6**, where it says first of all, "*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone **who comes to him** must believe that he exists...*" In other words, you can't come to God unless you believe He is real, unless you've come to the conclusion He is actual.

There's a bottom layer before you can have a personal relationship with God. Let me put it to you in an obvious way, but then let me show you how people are missing that, especially in places like Austin. Let's just say you lived on a coast, and you'd always heard about this remote island. People talk about this beautiful island off the coast. You're intrigued. You don't just say, "I'm going to go find it" and set off in your boat. No.

What do you do? You research it. You look at maps, maps that are trustworthy. You have used them in the past. You talk to people who have been there, people you know, people you trust. You do the research, and you come to the conclusion the island really is there and where it is. And then you go to it. Before you go to the island, you must *believe* it exists, and you must *know* where it is. And any other approach is really very irresponsible.

You say, “Well, of course. That’s obvious.” But listen, I’m continually finding people will come to church in a time of crisis. People will come to Christianity when there’s a great need. They come. Sometimes they’ll come and talk to me – I tend to be the most visible figure in this church because I’m up here - so they’ll often come to me, and they’ll say, “I’m ready. I want this. I want Jesus.” And you talk to them, and you see there are great needs there.

And I, of course, know the needs will be met by Jesus, but more and more I’m coming and saying, “Well, let me ask you something. Before you say, ‘I want to become a Christian,’ before you get baptized, before you receive Christ, before you do that, do you know that He is *true*?” And I am finding people sometimes are puzzled. Sometimes they’re even a little irked. But one way or the other what they say to me is, “It’s true *for me*. I can’t speak for other people. I just know it fits me. I know it *excites* me. I know it’s connecting right where I am. It’s true for me. I can’t speak for anybody else, but I know it’s true for me. That’s all that matters.”

And more and more I’m saying you cannot skip over what it says here in verse 6. Before you come to God, you must not just think it’s true *for you*. You must think it’s *true*, period! That’s what verse 6 says. When a person says, “Oh, I don’t know if it’s true, period. I don’t know if it’s *objectively* true. I certainly wouldn’t want to tell other people it’s true for them, but I know Christianity is true for me,” that is an alien view of faith that you are *importing* into Christianity.

It’s another religion we’re talking about, another whole approach to truth, another whole view of the world. See? Thinking leads to faith. Christian faith starts with thinking. It’s not enough just to say, “Oh, I know it’s true for me.” You have to also know it’s true, *period*. Thinking is the very foundation for faith.

Let me show you this way. When Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:7**, “*For we live by faith, not by sight.*”

Notice, he *doesn’t* contrast faith with reasoning. He doesn’t say we live by faith, not by reason. That’s what people think, but that’s not what Paul says. He says we live by faith, not by *sight*. He contrasts it with sight. Deconstruction is very popular in my circles of faith at the moment – and I am all for it. Before you can build something of worth, you must almost always deconstruct what’s already there. You have to tear down to build back.

But I have a number of friends who haven't built back. Who have left the faith – I think *temporarily*, but that will be up to them. And so it's very popular in the more fundamentalist aspects of my tribe to attack deconstruction itself. "You shouldn't be asking those kinds of questions. The idol of your mind is leading you away from religion." But I don't think that's the problem at all. I think questions are a powerful part of faith development. With respect, I'd say my friends are not guilty of too much thinking but too little. You see, a loss of faith is not too *much* thinking but too *little*.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you go to the doctor and she tells you that you need to have a surgical procedure done. She explains that it's not a big deal but it's necessary so it doesn't turn *into* a big deal. But it's simple. You do it with a local anesthetic. You do it in the office. It's really a necessary thing, but it's certainly not a dangerous operation by any account. And so you are convinced. You talk to other people who have had it done and you make a rational choice to have the procedure.

Now, the day of the procedure arrives – maybe you didn't sleep so well the night before, it's on your mind – and when you actually walk into the office and you sit down and you see the knives and you smell the smells and you see the white coats and you see the straps on the operating table, you say, "What are those straps for?" And your heart rate is elevated. In other words, you start to have doubts.

Where are the doubts coming from? You start to lose your faith. "Why am I doing this?" Where are the doubts coming from? They are *not* coming from new evidence. They're not coming from new reasons. No, as a matter of fact, they're coming from *sight*. I was walking by faith. Now that I'm losing my faith, it's not because of reasoning. "Ah yes, faith versus reason. Reasoning is what gets us into trouble." No! I'm losing faith because of the *sight* of the knife. I'm losing my faith because it *looks* much more awful than I thought.

So how do I get my faith back? I *think*. I remember *why* I'm doing this. I remember *what* I was told. The way to renew my faith is to renew my *thinking*. In fact, my doubts and my fears come from an *absence* of thinking, just reacting. You know, a doctor comes to you and says, "I want you to know you have a major heart problem. You're right on the edge. If you eat steaks, it will kill you."

You believe him. You've seen the evidence. Other people have told you the same thing. You had a friend die of the same situation, so you have *faith* in what the doctor says, and you're going to walk by faith. But I'll tell you something. The first time you actually get into the presence of a great big juicy steak, it's not going to *feel* true.

See, when people say to me, “Look, I know it’s true *for me*. That’s all that counts. I don’t know if it’s true for anybody else. I know Christianity is true for me,” what’s going to happen when things get bad? What’s going to happen when God doesn’t deal with you in a way you understand? What’s going to happen when your *feelings* change? It won’t feel true for you anymore. Christianity will not always feel true for you because things that are true...period...don’t always *feel* true.

And to keep your faith in the truth of something is to keep thinking about it, to renew your thinking, to say, “This steak will kill me eventually.” You see? It’s the *sight* that will destroy your faith, not your thinking. Oh my, no! When Jesus in Matthew 6 looks at these anxious people, and he says, “O ye of little faith...” Then what does he say? He tells them how to get faith.

What does he say? He says, “*Consider* the lilies of the field...” He says, “If there’s a God, look at how He takes care of even the grass. Look at how He takes care of the lilies of the field. Look how He takes care of the birds. Now if you are more valuable than they, why in the world would God take more care of a lily than you?”

What is Jesus saying? Is he saying, “Just believe”? No! What does he say? “If you want to have faith, *think, consider, deduce.*” What Jesus is saying, what Paul is saying, what the writer of Hebrews is saying is people with little faith or no faith are people who just react instead of think, are people who let their *feelings* bludgeon them, people who let their *circumstances* choke them. Faith is *founded* in thinking. It takes faith to think, as we’re going to see, but it takes thinking to have faith. Very, very important, to see *that* thinking leads to faith.

**Let’s move on to number two, How thinking leads to faith.** Now a lot of people say, “Okay. Reasoning and thinking *lead* to faith? How could that be?” In verse 3, we have a clue, but it’s a powerful clue. It’s a short but a tremendously suggestive sentence. We looked at it just briefly last week, but let me open it up a little bit more. In **verse 3** it says, “***By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.***”

“By faith we understand...” Now this is tremendously powerful. Let me show you at least the outlines of how it works. I can’t get into all of it - I couldn’t possibly - but the outlines. What it’s saying is Christians are people who look at the visible world and say the visible world, the physical world, what is seen, is not self-explanatory. That takes a lot of thinking to come to that conclusion. It says, “By faith we understand the world, that which is visible, did not come from that which is visible.”

In other words, by faith, we start off and we say, “*If* there’s a God, *then* the universe makes sense. What I see is explanatory, is explainable. But if there is no God and all there is is matter, all there is is the visible universe - there’s nothing else but that – then the universe doesn’t make sense.” Christians are people who have not skipped over the footnotes. They didn’t skip the reading. They’ve come to a place – not just of mere agreement - but understanding.

Well, how do you get there? This is the way. Christians are people who have looked at the universe and thought about it - taking plenty of reflection, plenty of reasoning - and have decided if all that exists is what we can see empirically with our five senses, if all that exists is the natural, it doesn’t add up. See, verse 3 actually tells us something very profound. Philosophers of science – in the post-modern world - are now telling us the way in which all knowledge of the physical world progresses is the same way the writer of Hebrews mentions in verse 3.

In other words, philosophers of science say when a scientist observes a phenomenon, how does the scientist account for it? How does the scientist understand it? The scientist has to say, “What *causes* this? What *governs* this?” That’s what it means by an explanation. “What causes or governs the thing I’m observing?” And the way to find out, say the philosophers of science, is you posit a premise. You pose a theory and then you try out the theory.

How do you try the theory out? By observation. Does the theory lead us to expect the things that actually happen? Does the theory make sense out of it? And the theory with the most explanatory power, is the one that is determined to be “true” or at least dominant for the time being until another, better theory comes along.

But the way you understand things is you *start* with a faith premise. You can’t prove it. You start with a premise. You say, “Let me try that theory on,” and then you *look* at the phenomenon, and then you try another theory on. And the one with the *greatest* faith – “by faith we understand” - the one with greatest explanatory power, is the one you say, “This is the only one that explains what I see. This is the only one that *accounts* for it. This is the only one that leads me to expect the things that actually happen.”

And therefore, here’s what it means to be a Christian, according to verse 3. A Christian is somebody who says, “Ah yes, Christianity...the teaching there is a supernatural God, a personal yet immaterial God who created all that I see. Christianity. I believe it, not because it is perfectly coherent, not because there are *no* intellectual problems with it, but because every *other* faith premise, every *other* alternative theory, every other way of trying to understand the universe is far, far, far less persuasive in its explanatory power. It has far more problems, far more contradictions, far more incoherence.”



A Christian doesn't say, "Well, I'm a Christian because I have *no* intellectual problems in my system." A Christian is somebody who says, "Every other system, every other way of understanding the universe, is just worse - more problematic." Christians realize if you doubt Christianity, you can only doubt by standing on some ground and believing something from which you doubt Christianity. See? You can't prove there's a God nor can you prove there isn't a God. Therefore, to doubt there is a God is to *stand* on a faith premise and doubt from this position of belief.

Christians are people who realize the place where you're standing, to doubt Christianity, is giving way – it's eroding ground. The place where I'm standing may have its problems. But the place where you're standing is a disaster. That's why Christians become Christians. Let me put it to you this way.

There have basically always been two faith premises. There is no God; therefore, the universe is self-explanatory and it's ultimate. All that exists is the physical. Alternatively, there *is* a God; therefore all that exists – at least at it's original point – was designed, was created. So a Christian looks at a person who is a strict materialist and says, "All right. Let me ask you some questions. Does your premise have explanatory power?" Let me just give you a couple of examples.

The reason modern people are impatient with these things is we have been taught to doubt Christianity through the absence of thought, not through thinking. We're impatient with those big questions that Kant says you can't be an educated person without working your life out on the basis of those questions. We hate that idea. But he was right. So listen. First thing. A Christian asks a person who says, "Oh the visible is all there is. The universe is self-explanatory."

The first thing you can say is, "All right. Why, on the basis of *your* understanding, on the basis of your view, if there is no God, if the world is an accident and, therefore, all my thoughts and all of my feelings and everything about me is just the chance fusing of molecules, if everything I think and everything I feel is *really* explained in terms of chemistry and physical laws and molecular actions, why be rational?"

Here you are arguing with me, but on the basis of your view, weeds grow because they're weeds. Laws of physics. Minds just do whatever minds do. You're acting as if we're free to think about different kinds of ideas and listen to different arguments and then choose the best one. On the basis of your view, that's impossible. Your mind is just a bunch of atoms vibrating around. You will do whatever you've been programmed to do.

There's no freedom. When you use logic and when you use language, when you assume the world is orderly, when you assume there is a uniformity of nature - that if the fire burns you once, it will burn you later on - you assume all these things, but there's no basis in your view for assuming reason works."

See, modern philosophers, especially the most influential modern ones, they *know* that if there is no God and if this visible universe is all we have, there is no reason to trust reason. There is no basis for logical. There is no logical basis for logic if there is no such thing as anything besides what we see.

Here's a quote from Thomas Nagel, a prominent philosopher and atheist, who is honest about what the evolutionary process would mean for rules of logic. He writes, "Can we have any continued confidence in reason as a source of knowledge about the non apparent character of the world? In itself, I believe an evolutionary story of the human race tells against such confidence." (*The Last Word*, 134-135)

Why should I trust my mind if it's just the product of evolution? Why should I trust it? The Christian says to the person who is a skeptic, "Ah! You *do* trust your thinking. You *do* trust your reason, though you have no basis for it. You have no explanatory power in your view to explain why reason still works and why we *know* it works."

Let me give you a second one. The Christian says to the person in the no-faith camp, "On the basis of your view, you have no legitimate ability to talk about moral obligation at all. You have no way to appeal to people, and you have no basis on which to work for freedom and justice in the world." I read an article last year by a female physician in Afghanistan about what the fall of the democratic government to the Taliban means for women's rights. They've of course turned back the clock on many matters of freedom for women. And some critics are saying it was bound to happen because the idea that women should be treated with dignity and freedoms are not indigenous to the culture but are "Western values" – and you can't colonize foreign values.

But this physician – and she had served in the government as the minister of women's affairs – argued that, no, "Human rights and women's rights are not 'Western values.' They do not belong to the West. They are universal values." (Dr. Sima Samar, *Ms. Magazine*, 9/22/2021). Now is there anybody in this room who would disagree with her? We would say, "Of course, women's rights are universal rights. That's not just true for America, that's *true!*" As a Christian, I agree with that view. We *know* some things are always wrong.

*But* if this world is all there is, then all moral feelings are the product of atoms and molecules. In the end, everything is an accident. The fact that I *feel* people should be free is an accident, because the universe is an accident. All my thoughts are accidents, and they're all *programmed* by chemistry and physics.

Here's atheist Noble prize winning philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre being very honest about "rights": "It was true, I had always realized it - I hadn't any 'right' to exist at all. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. I could feel nothing to myself but an inconsequential buzzing. I was thinking...that here we are eating and drinking, to preserve our precious existence, and that there's nothing, nothing absolutely no reason for existing." (*Nausea*)

Again, the most current influential philosophers - the post-modernists and those folks - admit if this universe is all there is, there is no reason to trust reason. And the moral argument is not just fanciful imagination. For Sartre and others, it was the Holocaust *itself* that proved the lie of the Enlightenment project. 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany was the pinnacle of human achievement in all areas of humanities and sciences. They had the best philosophers *and* engineers. The greatest violation of human rights in recent memory happened not *in spite* of evolutionary thinking, but directly because of it.

In post-modernism the smartest thinkers – Christian or not - are realizing that if the visible is all there is, there is no basis for reason, and there's no basis for morality or moral obligation of any sort. Which is why many say we live in such a nihilistic age. *But* don't you see? We *do* know our thoughts work, and we *do* know some things are wrong. Here is the person over here who says, "I don't know that there's a God," but you go home, and you kiss your loved ones as if love was real, but on the basis of your own view, there is no such thing. Love is *really* just chemical reactions.

Ah, but you see, if you start with your premise - the visible is self-explanatory; everything I experience can be explained in terms of natural laws and physics - and it leads you to the conclusion reason doesn't work, love doesn't exist, and my thoughts, my loves, my plans, my trusts, my choices, my achievements...all those things are personal. Those things are not really real. They can just be reduced to molecules. They can just be reduced to physics and chemistry. If your premise leads you to a conclusion you know is wrong, look at your premise.

See, there are a lot of people who say you can live a full life without Christianity, without religion, but I want to know...full of what? It's not a life of integrity, because you *will not* be able to take what you believe and apply it to what you do. There's no integrity. You believe one thing. You act in another way. You have to, because the theory that the material universe is ultimate has no explanatory power.

You *know* your mind works. You *know* some things are true. You *know* some things are wrong. You *know* love is real. You *know* beauty lasts...but you can't account for it. Christians say to the non-Christian or just the skeptic, "My dear friends, I too have some problems. There's always the existence of evil, for example." - which is another sermon all together - "That's a problem. There's a huge problem!"

But the Christian continues, "But I'll tell you something. At least I'm not in a position of having to contradict my most foundational beliefs about the nature of the universe *every day*. I'm not in a position of having to actually assume the very thing I'm trying to deny in order to deny it. I'm not in the position where I have to live my life in a complete schizophrenia."

Jean-Paul Sartre *admitted* on the basis of his view of the world that he had no right to really say Nazism and fascism are wrong. He knew it. He knew he didn't have a basis, but he also knew they were *wrong*. But if you know your premise leads you to a conclusion that's wrong, why not change your premise? Because to disbelieve takes a lot of faith, and faith that's not based on thinking. Real faith is based on thinking.

**Now lastly, to conclude, *Why thinking leads to faith*.** We said *that* it leads to faith and *how* it leads to faith, but *why* does it lead to faith? Here's the wonderful answer, and it's in verse 6 as well. The reason it leads to faith, the reason our thinking actually *does* correspond to reality, the reason that thinking *works*, is because the God who invented the world is not just an impersonal force, but **He is a person**. It says if you want to come to him, you (v.6) "...*must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*"

This is not an impersonal force; this is a *person*. This is someone who *wants* you to seek Him, who wants you to come into His presence, who wants a *relationship* with you. And suddenly you realize, "Wait a minute! The only way I can account for the fact that I know love is true and that reason works is if the one who created me is not just an impersonal life force but a person."

If this is the God who made me, and the reason friendship works is He *wants* me to have friendship, and the reason love works is He *wants* me to have love, and the reason I do need to find out what is right and wrong is because there's a person behind the universe who *cares* about how we live, it's only natural that your thinking will lead you to want to please Him. You'll want to love Him. You'll want to have a relationship with Him. You'll want to find Him. You'll want to know Him.

And the Bible tells us that if you don't let your thinking take you all the way to Jesus Christ, it will end in despair. It's not enough to believe in God, but *what* God do you believe in? Do you know why? Martin Luther's thinking led him to see there was a God. Then his thinking led along further to see it must be a personal God. Then his thinking led him along a little further to see, "If this is a personal God, I want to please him. I want to be in a relationship in which we are pleased with each other and love each other."

And that led to a problem. The more real Luther beloved God to be, the more terrified he became. Because the more he tried to obey, just the Golden Rule, just the things that everybody knows instinctively you should do, the more he felt like, "I'm *not* pleasing this God. How in the world could I *ever* please this God?"

And the Bible tells us there's only one way. At Jesus' baptism – with John the Baptist in the Jordan River – we're told the Spirit came down from heaven and lighted on Jesus. And God Himself said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." *Well pleased*. The one human being who ever lived a perfect life and pleased God.

But we're told in Romans 8 that when we believe in Jesus Christ and we receive the Spirit, the Spirit comes down on us and tells us we're God's children too, that *we* are well pleasing. And we say, 'Amazing Grace how sweet the sound!' Your thinking will lead you to see there's a God. It will lead you further to see there's a personal God. But eventually your thinking will have to take you to, "How in the world can I please this God?"

And your thinking will lead you to despair if it takes you down any other philosophy that's merely theistic and moralistic and doesn't take you to Jesus Christ, the only one who pleased God and who said, "I died on the cross and rose again so that if you believe in me, all that I have done is accredited to you so that my Father looks at you and is pleased with you in me." That's the gospel.

If there's anybody here who does not understand that to believe in God means you have to have a sense of personal dealing with Him, that when you pray you're not just saying your prayers but you should have a *relationship* with Him. If you don't see that, don't stop until you have that personal relationship. It's not enough just to believe in the terms of mental assent. You have to let it push you through to a relationship in which you know you please Him, and that's only possible through Jesus Christ and his great exchange on the cross. In fact, it's the only religion that even *claims* to give you a way to please - here and now - this great God.

On the other hand, Christian friends, why are you afraid? Why are you worried? Why are you anxious? Do you know why? You're not thinking. Jesus says if you have little faith because you're worried, you have little faith because you're afraid, you have little faith because you're bitter, do you know why? Don't say, "Oh Lord, give me faith" and sort of expect it to come down kind of abstractly. Get out the truth and look at it and renew your thinking. *Consider* the birds and the lilies. Deduce. Think it out.

If you're afraid today, if you're bitter today, if you're discouraged today, don't just say, "Oh, I wish God would zap me with some faith and then I would have this kind of courage. Then I'd have this kind of happiness." What does Jesus say? "Consider. Look to the heavens, look to my words, look to the cross...and I'll open your eyes."

Let's pray...