

Knowing by Faith

By David Feddes

What is faith? A feeling? A guess? Is faith whatever opinion you happen to have about spiritual things? Is faith a blind leap where you have no idea what the facts are? Is faith a wager where you bet on Jesus just in case he's for real? Is faith a fantasy that makes you happier but has no basis in reality? Is faith a wish, wanting something so much that it comes true? Is faith visualization, making something more likely to happen by picturing it in your mind? Is faith a decision, a commitment? Is faith a value, something you hold dear? Is faith a tradition? People sometimes speak of their "faith tradition."

Some of these ideas aren't entirely wrong, but notice what they all have in common: none involves knowing. There's a saying, "If you knew, you wouldn't need faith." Is faith the opposite of knowledge? Many people think so. But they are mistaken.

Real faith is knowledge of reality! Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen" (HCSB). Another translation says, "Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see" (CEV). Faith deals with reality that is unseen but substantial; faith involves solid, accurate knowledge.

Sure Knowledge

What is true faith? Here's how the Heidelberg Catechism answers that question:

True faith is not only a *sure knowledge* by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a *wholehearted trust*, which the Holy Spirit creates in me by the gospel, that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit (Q&A 21).

Faith involves the vital element of personal, wholehearted trust that the Holy Spirit creates in us. It also includes sure knowledge of truths that God reveals. Faith involves knowing. In speaking of faith as sure knowledge, the Catechism is echoing the Bible. Here's a sample of biblical statements that speak of knowing by faith.

"You will *understand* the fear of the Lord and find the *knowledge* of God. For the Lord gives *wisdom*, and from his mouth come *knowledge* and *understanding*" (Proverbs 2:5-6). This passage does not speak of guesswork or educated opinions; it speaks of knowledge.

Jesus tells his followers, "To you it has been given to *know* the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11). People who believe in Jesus have God-given knowledge, Christ-given knowledge.

"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, has made him *known*" (John 1:18). Jesus, God the Son, came from the Father's side to make him known. This comes through clearly in a prayer that Jesus prayed to his Father the night before he went to the cross.

“This is eternal life: that they may *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent... O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I *know* you, and these *know* that you have sent me. I have made *known* to them your name, and I will continue to make it *known*, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:3, 25-26 ESV).

Like Jesus, his apostles speak of faith as knowledge. The apostle Peter writes:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the *knowledge* of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the *knowledge* of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... But grow in the grace and *knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:2-3, 3:18).

The apostle Paul similarly links faith and knowledge. He speaks of “the *faith* of God’s elect and the *knowledge of the truth* that leads to godliness—a *faith* and *knowledge* resting on the hope of eternal life, which *God, who does not lie*, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:1). Shortly before Paul was killed for his faith in Christ, he wrote, “I *know* whom I have *believed*” (2Tim 1:12). Paul doesn’t guess or wish or imagine; he knows!

The apostle John repeatedly speaks of believing in Jesus as knowledge.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may *know* that you have eternal life... We *know* that anyone born of God does not continue to sin... We *know* that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We *know* also that the Son of God has come and has given us *understanding*, so that we may *know* him who is *true*. And we are in him who is *true*—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the *true* God and eternal life (I John 5:13, 18-21).

Notice John’s words: “know... know... know... know... know... true... true... true.”

According to Jesus and all the biblical writers, faith in Jesus isn’t just feeling or opinion; faith is knowledge of reality.

Faith and Other Ways of Knowing

Faith is knowing. In fact, faith has much in common with other ways of knowing.

One way we know things is by accepting them as *givens* without needing any proof. We just know them. We take them as a starting point and standard for evaluating other things we believe. We know as givens some things that are not specifically Christian; likewise, we know some Christian truths as givens that don’t require further proof.

Another way that we come to know things is *testimony*. Much of what we know about life and the world comes through accepting testimony, believing what we’re told, learning from others, receiving their knowledge and embracing it for ourselves. Likewise, much of what we know about God comes from accepting the testimony of others.

A third way of knowing is through our *faculties*. We have abilities that give us knowledge of things around us and within us. We have sense faculties such as seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. We have mental faculties such as memory and logic. When these faculties are working properly in the right kind of setting, they give us knowledge. Faith, too, involves a faculty that gives us knowledge when working properly in the right setting.

A fourth way of knowing is through *relating*. We know other people through personal interaction, through our dealings with them and their dealings with us, by conversation and communication. So it is with God. Knowing God involves relating by personal interaction.

Let's look at each of these four ways of knowing in more depth and detail. We'll see how faith overlaps them and sometimes surpasses them.

Givens: Starting Point and Standard

All knowledge starts with accepting some things as givens. These presuppositions, these first principles or assumptions, require no proof. They are basic for knowing other things, and they are a standard for evaluating other ideas. Givens, or first principles, include: the world is real; my senses are experiencing real things; my mind can know truths; other persons are real and not just illusions; memories really happened; some things are right, and others are wrong.

We accept givens without proof. Has anyone proved to you that the world is real and that your senses are experiencing real things? Has anyone proved to you that you're not just dreaming everything? No, you don't wait for proofs that the world is real and that your senses are in touch with real things; you just assume these things—and you are right.

Has anyone proved to you that your mind can know truths? No, you assume this. Before you can know anything at all, you must assume that you have a mind capable of knowing things.

Has anyone proved to you that other people are real and not just illusions in your mind? No, but you know they are real without needing proof. You don't need evidence and arguments before you can know they are real; you take it as a given that the people you meet really do exist outside your mind.

Has anyone proved to you that your memories really happened? Has anyone proved to you that your memories weren't all implanted in your brain five minutes ago, filling your mind with a lifetime's worth of things that didn't happen? You don't have proof that your memory connects with a real past; you assume it. You take it as a given, and you are right to do so.

Has anyone proved to you that kindness is good and cruelty is evil, that faithfulness is good and betrayal is evil? No, but you know deep down that there's a difference between right and wrong. It's a given and doesn't need to be proven.

Some of our most important knowledge must be accepted as givens without proof. Knowing has to start somewhere; it can't all be proven on the basis of prior knowledge. Whatever we call these givens—presuppositions, assumptions, first principles—they are knowledge. The fact that

there is no way of proving them does not make them irrational. These givens form a starting point and standard for everything else we know.

Not every starting point, not everything that somebody takes as a given, is correct. For example, atheistic science has a starting point. Richard Lewontin, a geneticist at Harvard, says,

We take the side of [atheistic] science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs ... because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation... but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes ... no matter how counterintuitive. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.

Lewinton assumes as a first principle that God is not real, that nothing exists except matter, that everything has a material explanation. He accepts this without proof, no matter how absurd it sometimes seems, no matter how it goes against our sense of things, no matter how much evidence seems to indicate the reality of God. He assumes as an absolute first principle that no belief in God can be allowed into his mind: “We cannot allow a Divine foot in the door.” For Lewinton and other materialists, that is a given—or, dare I say it, an article of faith.

A first principle may be hard or impossible to prove or disprove, but you can at least ask whether it fits with your other first principles or contradicts them. If you assume that matter is all that exists, how well does that fit with the assumption that your mind has the ability to know things outside it, and the assumption that the world is real and has features that are knowable? If your materialism means your brain is a randomly evolved blob of meat, can you still assume that your mind has the ability to know things outside it? If the universe is only matter flying randomly through space, should you expect to find any real patterns within it that the mind can make sense of? If you assume there is no Mind who created the universe, that assumption clashes with the assumptions that your mind has the ability to know and that the world is knowable. Lewinton’s first principle of atheistic materialism contradicts first principles that are essential for any knowing. Thought itself is an act of faith that the mind can know something.

It is idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all. If you are merely a skeptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, “Why should *anything* go right; even observation and deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic?” They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered ape (G. K. Chesterton).

Beware of accepting a first principle that destroys other first principles. That’s what atheistic materialism does.

On the other hand, faith in the Creator is a first principle that supports other first principles. If we begin with God, we don’t destroy understanding; we gain understanding. The church father Augustine said, “I believe in order that I may understand.” Anselm, who lived about a thousand years after Jesus’ resurrection, spoke of “faith seeking understanding.” The Bible itself says, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was

not made out of things that are visible” (Hebrews 11:2). By faith we understand! Faith does not destroy thought. Faith brings understanding.

By faith we understand that we have minds that can know and a world that can be known. Faith recognizes Jesus as the one who made the entire world by his wisdom and the one who gives wisdom to the human mind. “In the beginning was the Word [*Logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (John 1:1-14). Jesus is the eternal Word, the *Logos*, the logic of the world and the light of human intellect.

Faith doesn’t have to prove God; belief in God can be a first principle, a starting point. This is not inventing a God who isn’t there; it is beginning with the God who is there.

Imagination projects unreal images out of the mind and seeks to attach reality to them. Faith creates nothing; it simply reckons upon that which is already there. God and the spiritual world are real. We can reckon upon them with as much assurance as we reckon upon the familiar world around us. Spiritual things are there (or rather we should say here) inviting our attention and challenging our trust (A. W. Tozer).

It is rational to presuppose some things as givens without any proof. Thinking has to start somewhere. We can’t avoid first principles; we just need sound first principles. Starting with right presuppositions gives us a firm foundation for other knowledge and a measuring stick to evaluate various claims. Given that God created the universe and that God created our minds, we have a first principle that fits with and supports other first principles, such as the assumption that our minds have the ability to know and that the world is real and has patterns that can be known.

Knowing by faith overlaps other ways of knowing. This is certainly true of presuppositions. All of us, whether religious or not, accept some beliefs as givens, as presuppositions that need no proof. Similarly, key truths of Christianity can be accepted as givens, as true knowledge not requiring proof. God’s revelation in his written Word, the Bible, and in his living Word, Jesus, can be accepted by faith as givens, as first principles to ground our worldview and to provide a standard for deciding what else is true. You don’t need to prove that God’s revelation is true. You can take it as a starting point. What could be a better starting point? What is more certain than God’s own truth? Faith can accept as givens the reality of God, of his creative work, and of Jesus as the one who has established the patterns and logic of all reality. Believing these givens is not mere opinion; it is firm knowledge of solid truth.

Testimony

Testimony is another area in which knowing by faith overlaps other ways of knowing. Much of what we know comes through accepting testimony, believing what we’re told. In our early years, we learn a lot from parents and family members. As we grow up, our knowledge of math, science, and history comes mostly from accepting what we’re told by teachers and books. Our knowledge of parenting, gardening, cooking, business, and much else comes mostly from accepting what we’re told.

Some skeptics have insisted, “It’s irrational to believe something just because someone else told you. You need to discover it and prove it for yourself.” But it would be irrational to disbelieve all testimony. Rejecting everything you’re told would make you an ignoramus. Very little of what you know about math, science, business, or parenting comes through your own personal discoveries and experiments. If you insisted on not believing anything except what you discovered by personal observation, you could only have a tiny fraction of the knowledge that’s available to you. Believing the testimony of reliable people is a very important way of knowing. Even in court cases, our knowledge often comes from testimony. If we dismissed testimony in courts and elsewhere in life, we wouldn’t know very much. We need to accept testimony.

If it’s okay to learn about many areas of life from the testimony of reliable people, why would it not be okay to learn about God and his ways by accepting testimony, by trusting what others tell us? Many of us came to know who God is and how he relates to us by learning from trustworthy parents or from friends. They told us many things we didn’t know, and through their testimony we came to know those things for ourselves.

Besides the testimony of Christian people, there’s another level of testimony that is far greater. The Bible gives human authors’ eyewitness testimony to God and his actions in Christ. When the people of Israel received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, they saw fire and heard the thunder of God’s voice. They were eyewitnesses of Moses coming down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments written in stone. The Bible records eyewitness testimony of this and many other things God has said and done. Jesus’ dear friend, the apostle John, wrote,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life... We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard” (1 John 1:1-3).

Likewise, the apostle Peter emphasized that the apostles were not making stuff up but wrote as eyewitnesses: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

The Bible deserves to be believed, not only because it provides eyewitness testimony to God’s words and actions culminating in Jesus Christ, but also because the Holy Spirit guided these eyewitnesses. The Spirit gave them accurate memory of what they saw and heard, and the Spirit guided them to write in the Bible exactly what God wanted them to write.

As the Holy Spirit guided Bible writers, he guides Bible readers. As the Holy Spirit testifies through words on a page, he also testifies through working in a heart. There is a double movement. When the outer testimony of Scripture produces belief in the Son of God, we have the inner testimony of God’s Spirit. Faith accepts God’s testimony. The Bible puts it this way:

We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son

of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:9-13).

By faith in God's testimony, you know God's reality, and you know that you have eternal life. The testimony of God does not produce mere opinion or feeling. You know!

Accepting testimony is a major way we know all sorts of things about the world; likewise, accepting testimony is a major way to know God. Knowing by faith involves accepting the testimony of people who know God, accepting the testimony of God's Word in the Bible, and accepting the testimony of God's Spirit as he seals the Bible's message on your heart. If we gain valuable knowledge by believing the testimony of ordinary humans, then surely we can gain valuable knowledge by believing what God himself says.

Faculties Working Properly

A third aspect of knowing is knowledge gained through our senses and other abilities. We have knowledge when our faculties are working properly in a suitable setting for which those faculties were designed to produce true beliefs.

For example, take the faculty of seeing. Suppose you're looking at a chair. You're able to see it because the chair is really there, light is bouncing off the chair, and that light is entering your eyes. Your eyes and brain are working properly to produce knowledge of the chair. But suppose instead that there is no light in the room. Then you can't see the chair because it's not a proper setting for seeing: no light is reflected from the chair to your eyes. Or imagine yet another scenario. You're in a room, the light is there, and the chair is there, but you are high on drugs. You don't see a chair; you see a pink elephant. Obviously, it's not enough to have a faculty for seeing. To produce real knowledge, your faculty must be operating in the right setting, and your faculty must be working properly.

Although it's possible for the setting to be wrong or for a faculty to malfunction, there are many times when a faculty is in the right setting and is working properly. Then we gain knowledge. Our faculties give us access to many kinds of knowledge. We have sense faculties such as seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. We have mental faculties like memory and logic. When these faculties are working properly in the right kind of surroundings, they give us knowledge.

This is true of knowing in general, and it is true of knowing by faith. You might think that faith is totally different from knowledge gained through the senses and other faculties. But what if we have a faculty for sensing God? What if faith is what happens when our God-sense (our faculty designed to produce knowledge of God) is made healthy and is in a setting where God is showing something of himself for us to know? In that case, faith is knowledge!

The physical senses involve organs receiving signals. You see only if you have eyes that work and light from an object reaches you. You hear only if you have ears that work and something sends sound waves. You taste only if your taste buds work and something is in your mouth. You smell only if your nose is working and molecules from something are in the air. You feel touch

only if your skin and nerves are working and something touches you. That's how our bodily senses work: by organs receiving signals from something outside us.

Something similar occurs with our God-sense. The Bible uses sensory language about receiving signals from God.

- *Taste* and *see* that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).
- My sheep *hear* my voice (John 10:27).
- How sweet are your words to my *taste*, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103).
- For we are to God the *aroma* of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the *fragrance* of life (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).
- Were not our hearts *burning* within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? (Luke 24:32).

Tasting, seeing, hearing, smelling an aroma, feeling a burning within—something happens within us as God comes near and shares himself with us.

Spiritual faculties sense and know things by experience, not just by description. Although you sometimes can gain valuable knowledge from descriptions of things, there are other kinds of knowledge that you can't get except by experiencing them through your senses. You know red by seeing it. If you're blind or colorblind, no description of red is going to help you know what red is. You know music by hearing it. You could look at musical notes on a page, or you could have someone talk to you about music theory, and this might give you knowledge of sorts. But if you never heard music, there would be much that you couldn't know about it. You know a scent by smelling it. You know honey by tasting it. Experience gives you a kind of knowledge that description alone cannot give.

So it is with knowledge of God. You know things of God by seeing with your inner eye. You know the music of God's voice by hearing with your inner ear. You know the scent of the gospel when it smells good to your inner self. You know the taste of God's truth not just when you mumble, "I believe the Bible is true," but when your God-sense is feasting on the delicious bread of life. You know God's burning reality not just through doctrinal description but by feeling his flame within. When your heart burns within you, when the flame of the Holy Spirit warms your God-sense, then you're experiencing something of God's reality.

These experiences are not just weird things in the imagination that have no contact with reality. These experiences occur when our heart-organs, our inner spiritual faculties, work properly, receive signals from God, and gain knowledge of God through inner experience. Inner experience can bring you real knowledge of the real God, even if some people don't have such experiences and don't believe God is real. Just because other people don't see something doesn't mean you don't know what you're seeing. Sometimes we think of knowledge as something that everybody ought to be able to know and prove to others. But it's possible for one person to see the Grand Canyon and know its splendors, while others don't see it because they are blind or because they are located a thousand miles from the Grand Canyon. There are some kinds of

knowledge that simply aren't experienced or known by everybody. By faith Christians see divine reality, even if others don't see it. Our sight is knowledge, even if unbelievers lack a renewed eye or lack God's light. The Bible says, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). There is much that people cannot know as long as they are under the control of the evil one. "The god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Just because not everybody agrees with you doesn't mean you don't know what you know by faith.

Faith sees and knows. "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). When God makes his light shine in your heart, your God-sense knows that God is real and glorious and that Christ is his revelation. Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Faith sees and faith knows. The apostle Paul writes,

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may *know* him better. I pray also that the *eyes of your heart* may be enlightened in order that you may *know* the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:17-19)

God has designed us with eyes in our heart, a way of sensing him. Everybody has a God-sense. We all have eyes in the heart. But having eyes doesn't help if those eyes aren't working properly. Some people may be blind. Others have partial cataracts and need those cataracts removed from their eyes so that they can see more clearly and fully. Those who have never known God need the eyes of their heart opened. Those of us who do know God and are already believers need our inner eyes opened even wider. We pray that God will make our inner eyes keener and that he will give more light to those eyes so that we can know him better than we already do.

By faith our heart-eyes see what mere eyeballs can't see. By faith, our heart-eyes see that God is real and that God is rewarding. "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Moses was a man who saw God's reality and reward. "Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward... he endured as seeing him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:26-27). What a phrase! Seeing him who is invisible! You're not seeing him with your eyeballs because he's invisible, but you're seeing him with your heart-eyes. And what do you see? You see that it's better to suffer with Christ than to have the treasures of Egypt. You see that Christ on a cross is better than the world on a throne.

True knowledge comes when your faculties are working properly. Faith is the action of the reborn God-sense that takes in God's self-revelation. The Spirit creates faith by reviving the God-sense and speaking gospel truth in such a manner that you accept the facts, know those facts are meant for you personally, and delight in God and in the great things of the gospel. Sin blinds the God-sense or distorts it badly. But God renews the God-sense and communicates to it. God gives you a sense not only that he is real and glorious and good and loving and brings salvation,

but that he does this for you. When your spiritual faculties are working properly and God is sending you his signals, then what you know by faith is real knowledge.

Faith enables our spiritual sense to function. Where faith is defective the result will be inward insensibility and numbness toward spiritual things... Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. Sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts that we cannot see that other reality, the City of God, shining around us. The soul has eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear. Feeble they may be from long disuse, but by the life-giving touch of Christ they are now alive and capable of sharpest sight and most sensitive hearing. As we begin to focus upon God, the things of the spirit will take shape before our inner eyes. A new God-consciousness will seize upon us and we shall begin to taste and see and inwardly feel God, who is our life and our all (A. W. Tozer).

When our spiritual faculties are working properly, when our God-sense is healthy and God is shining his light into our hearts, then our faith knows God. This knowledge is as real as any knowledge gained through our physical senses.

Relating

In addition to givens, testimony, and faculties, there is a fourth area in which knowing by faith overlaps with how we know other things: relating. We know other persons by interaction. If I know a friend, I don't ask that friend, "Do you exist? Could you please prove your reality to me?" No, I interact with that friend, he interacts with me, and we communicate. So it is in relating to God. When God speaks to me and I speak to him in prayer, we are interacting. We know the personal God by interaction, by awareness of another Self making himself known to us and drawing us to know him.

Nearly everybody in the world has some sense of the reality of God. Conscience gives us a sense of right and wrong rooted in Someone who holds us to his standard. Sometimes when we're in the presence of fantastic created realities—stars, mountains, waterfalls, newborn babies—we have a sense of awe and gratitude come over us that goes beyond anything in the creation. We know that we're in the presence of Someone far greater than anything he's made. This is real knowledge. And our knowledge of God goes far beyond that. By faith we know what God has done for us in Jesus, paying for our sins, crediting to us Jesus' perfect life, and being our companion every day. We accept this by faith, and we go to God's throne in prayer.

When we relate to the Lord, he is not just a theory or a belief or an idea. God is personal. We're glad we know him, and we seek to know him better. This personal knowledge is the richest kind of knowledge. "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true" (1 John 5:20). Jesus came into our world so that we would understand truth and especially so that we would know the real and living God by personal acquaintance. Jesus came to make him known.

The Holy Spirit brings God close to us and draws us close to him in a relationship of love.

This is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us... We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him (1 John 3:24; 4:13-16).

Of all the ways of knowing by faith, this is the deepest and most wonderful: interacting in love with the God who has loved us from all eternity, and getting to know better the God who has already begun to make himself known to us. It's reassuring to know that God knows us totally, that there's nothing about us that's going to surprise him, that he loves us in spite of the bad things he knows, that he creates in us more and more of the good things of Jesus, and that he moves us to love him in return.

Faith is Knowledge

Faith is not the opposite of knowledge; faith *is* knowledge. When it comes to knowing things more generally, we count on givens, testimony, faculties, and relating. Knowing by faith includes, combines, and surpasses these.

We accept some *givens* and take them as true, without question and without proof. It's rational to accept the reality of God and things revealed by God as our starting point, as givens for which we don't need proof.

We gain knowledge in many areas of life by *testimony*, by believing what reliable people tell us. When we accept the testimony of God's people and of God himself, our knowledge grows. No testimony is more trustworthy than God's Word, the Bible.

We get knowledge through our *faculties*, our abilities working properly in an appropriate setting. Along with physical senses, the Lord has given us a God-sense, a heart faculty for sensing God. Sin has clouded and distorted the God-sense, blinding the eyes of the heart. But when God gives us new life, when we're born again, the Holy Spirit restores that spiritual faculty, so that we sense God's reality. We see his light. We taste his goodness. We hear his voice. We breathe in his sweet aroma. We feel his touch and his fire within. Through the Spirit, our God-sense works better and better, and God shines more and more brightly, so that we come to know him more fully and clearly.

The highest form of knowing is *relating*. As we know other persons through personal interaction, so knowledge of God comes through personal interaction: loving and being loved, talking and listening.

Faith is knowledge that includes, combines, and surpasses these four elements of more ordinary knowing. By faith we take God's written Word, the Bible, and God's living Word, Jesus, as our starting point and standard for truth; we accept his testimony; we perceive his glory with our inner heart sense; and we embrace God's interaction with us.

Alvin Plantinga is a specialist in epistemology, the study of how we know what we know. He shows how knowing by faith is similar in some respects to other ways of knowing. At the same time, he shows how knowing by faith surpasses all other kinds of knowing. Dr. Plantinga writes,

Faith is not to be *contrasted* with knowledge: faith *is* knowledge, knowledge of a certain special kind. It is special in at least two ways. First, [what is known] is of stunning significance, certainly the most important thing a person could possibly know. [Second] it is known by way of an extraordinary cognitive process or belief-producing mechanism. Christian belief is “revealed to our minds” by way of the Holy Spirit’s inducing, in us, belief in the central message of Scripture.

Centuries before Alvin Plantinga, the reformer John Calvin wrote, “Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promises in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” By faith we *know* God and where we stand with him. Faith is knowledge.

Knowing by Faith

By David Feddes

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What is faith?

- Is faith a feeling, an emotion, a guess, an opinion, a blind leap, a wager, a fantasy, a visualization, a wish, a decision, a commitment, a value, a tradition?
- Is faith the opposite of knowledge?
- Real faith is knowledge of reality!

Faith: substantial proof of unseen realities

- Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1 KJV)
- Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. (Hebrews 11:1 HCSB)
- Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. (Hebrews 11:1 CEV)

What is true faith?

True faith is not only a **sure knowledge** by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a **wholehearted trust**, which the Holy Spirit creates in me by the gospel, that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit. (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 21)

God-given knowledge

You will **understand** the fear of the Lord and find the **knowledge** of God. For the Lord gives **wisdom**, and from his mouth come **knowledge** and **understanding**. (Proverbs 2:5-6)

To you it has been given to **know** the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (Matthew 13:11)

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him **known**. (John 1:18)

Jesus: making God known

This is eternal life: that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent... O righteous Father, even though the world does not **know** you, I **know** you, and these **know** that you have sent me. I made **known** to them your name, and I will continue to make it **known**, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:3,25-26)

Peter: knowledge of God

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the **knowledge** of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... But grow in the grace and **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:2-3, 3:18)

Paul: faith and knowledge

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the **faith** of God's elect and the **knowledge** of the **truth** that leads to godliness--a **faith** and **knowledge** resting on the hope of eternal life, which **God, who does not lie**, promised before the beginning of time (Titus 1:1)

I **know** whom I have **believed**. (2 Tim 1:12)

John: We know!

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have eternal life... We **know** that anyone born of God does not continue to sin... We **know** that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We **know** also that the Son of God has come and has given us **understanding**, so that we may **know** him who is **true**. And we are in him who is **true**—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the **true** God and eternal life. (1 John 5:13, 18-21)

Knowing by faith

Faith overlaps with other ways of knowing.

- **Givens:** starting point and standard
- **Credulity:** accepting testimony
- **Faculties:** abilities working properly
- **Relating:** personal interaction

Starting point and standard

- All knowing starts with accepting some things as givens. These presuppositions or first principles require no logical proof, are basic for knowing other things, and are a standard for evaluating other ideas.
- Givens or first principles include: the world is real, my senses are experiencing real things, my mind can know truths, other persons are real and not just illusions, memories really happened, some things are right and others wrong.

Prior commitment

“We take the side of [atheistic] science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs ... because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation... but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes ... no matter how counterintuitive. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.” (Richard Lewinton of Harvard)

Does your mind have ability to know things outside it?
Is the world real and does it have features that are knowable.

Thought is an act of faith

It is idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all. If you are merely a skeptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, “Why should *anything* go right; even observation and deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic?” They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered ape. (G. K. Chesterton)

By faith we understand

- **By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:2)
- In the beginning was the Word [*Logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. (John 1:1-14)
- Jesus is the eternal Logos, the logic of the world and the light of human intellect.

Reckon on Reality

Imagination projects unreal images out of the mind and seeks to attach reality to them. Faith creates nothing; it simply reckons upon that which is already there. God and the spiritual world

are real. We can reckon upon them with as much assurance as we reckon upon the familiar world around us. Spiritual things are there (or rather we should say here) inviting our attention and challenging our trust. (A. W. Tozer)

Starting point and standard

- It is rational to presuppose some things as givens, without proof. We can't avoid first principles; we just need sound ones.
- Starting with right presuppositions gives us a firm foundation for other knowledge and a measuring stick to evaluate various claims.
- God's revelation in his written Word, the Bible, and in his living Word, Jesus, can be accepted by faith as first principles to ground our worldview and to provide a standard for deciding what else is true. We can have knowledge of Scripture and Christ as our starting point, without logical proofs.

Knowing by faith

Faith overlaps with other ways of knowing.

- **Givens:** starting point and standard
- **Credulity:** accepting testimony

Accepting what we're told

- Most of what we know comes through believing what we were told.
- Our knowledge of math, science, and history comes mostly from accepting what we're told by books and teachers.
- Our knowledge of parenting, gardening, cooking, business, and much else comes mostly from accepting what we're told.
- Our knowledge in court cases often come from testimony.

Accepting testimony

- We know much about God by accepting testimony of Christians we know.
- The Bible gives human authors' eyewitness testimony to God and his actions in Christ.
- We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater. (1 John 5:9)
- When the outer testimony of Scripture produces belief in the Son of God, we have the inner testimony of God's Spirit. Faith accepts God's outer and inner testimony.

Faith accepts testimony

We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. (1 John 5:9-10)

By faith in God's testimony, you know you have eternal life

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13)

Knowing by faith

Faith overlaps with other ways of knowing.

- **Givens:** starting point and standard
- **Credulity:** accepting testimony
- **Faculties:** abilities working properly

Faculties working properly

- We have knowledge when our faculties are working properly in a suitable setting for which those faculties were designed to produce true beliefs.
- What if faith is what happens when our God-sense (our faculty designed to produce knowledge of God) is made healthy and is in a setting where God is showing something of himself for us to know?
- In that case, faith is knowledge!

Senses: organs receiving signals

- You see only if you have eyes that work and light from an object reaches you.
- You hear only if you have ears that work and something sends sound waves.
- You taste only if your taste buds are working and something is in your mouth.
- You smell only if your nose is working and molecules from something are in the air.
- You feel touch only if your skin and nerves are working and something touches you.

Heart organs receiving signals

- **Taste** and **see** that the Lord is good. (Ps 34:8)
- My sheep **hear** my voice. (John 10:27)
- How sweet are your words to my **taste**, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Ps 119:103)
- For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the **fragrance** of life. (2 Cor 2:15-16)
- “Were not our hearts **burning** within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

Inner experience

Heart organs sense and know things by experience, not just hearing descriptions.

- You know red by seeing it.
- You know music by hearing it.
- You know a scent by smelling it.
- You know honey by tasting it.
- You know God’s burning reality by feeling his flame within.

Know despite world’s unbelief

- By faith we see reality, even if others lack a renewed eye or God’s light. Our sight is knowledge, even if unbelievers don’t see it.
- We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. (1 John 5:19)
- The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:4)

Faith sees and knows

- For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Eyes of Your Heart

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may **know** him better. I pray also that the **eyes of your heart** may be enlightened in order that you may **know** the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Seeing the unseen

By faith our heart-eyes see what eyeballs can't see: God and his promised rewards.

Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward... he endured as seeing him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:26-27)

Faculties working properly

Faith is the action of the reborn God-sense that takes in God's self-revelation. The Spirit creates faith by reviving the God-sense and speaking gospel truth in such a manner that you accept the facts, know those facts are meant for you personally, and delight in God and in the great things of the gospel.

Faith versus numbness

Faith enables our spiritual sense to function. Where faith is defective the result will be inward insensibility and numbness toward spiritual things... Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. Sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts that we cannot see that other reality, the City of God, shining around us. (A. W. Tozer)

God-consciousness

The soul has eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear. Feeble they may be from long disuse, but by the life-giving touch of Christ they are now alive and capable of sharpest sight and most sensitive hearing. As we begin to focus upon God, the things of the spirit will take shape before our inner eyes. A new God-consciousness will seize upon us and we shall begin to taste and see and inwardly feel God, who is our life and our all. (A. W. Tozer)

Knowing by faith

Faith overlaps with other ways of knowing.

- **Givens:** starting point and standard
- **Credulity:** accepting testimony
- **Faculties:** abilities working properly
- **Relating:** personal interaction

Personal interaction

- We know other persons by interaction.
- We know the personal God by interaction, by awareness of another Self making Himself known to us and drawing us to know Him.
- We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. (1 John 5:20)

The Spirit within

This is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us... We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (1 John 3:24; 4:13-16)

Knowing by faith

Faith includes, combines, and surpasses:

- **Givens:** starting point and standard
- **Credulity:** accepting testimony
- **Faculties:** abilities working properly
- **Relating:** personal interaction

By faith we take God's written and living Word as our starting point and standard for truth, accept his testimony, perceive his glory with our inner heart, and embrace God's interaction with us.

Faith is knowledge

Faith is not to be *contrasted* with knowledge: faith *is* knowledge, knowledge of a certain special kind. It is special in at least two ways. First, [what is known] is of stunning significance, certainly the most important thing a person could possibly know. [Second] it is known by way of an extraordinary cognitive process or belief-producing mechanism. Christian belief is "revealed to our minds" by way of the Holy Spirit's inducing, in us, belief in the central message of Scripture. (Alvin Plantinga)

Firm and certain knowledge

- Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (John Calvin)
- Faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God. (A. W. Tozer)