

Questions About Knowing By Faith

By David Feddes

Faith is not just a matter of opinion, or guessing, or wishing. Faith is knowing. Faith includes, combines, and surpasses other ways of knowing that we accept.

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

Some of the things we know we simply take as **givens**, or presuppositions. For example, we know that other people are real, even if we can't prove their existence by logic. It could all be a dream, but we take them to be real. We take that as a starting point, not something that needs to be argued for. We take certain forms of logical inference as givens rather than trying to prove them. We take two plus two equaling four as a given.

When it comes to the things of God, there are things we know by faith that are quite similar to taking some things as given. The Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). We know by faith that God made the worlds, and we simply take that as a given. We know that our minds have an ability to grasp certain patterns about the world God has made, and we take that as a given. These are the beginning of all knowledge. If you don't believe that your mind has the ability to grasp any kind of patterns, or that the world has no patterns in it, then you will never get started knowing anything. But you can't take as a given that your mind has the ability to discern or that the world has patterns unless there is somebody who made your mind and made that world with its patterns. So faith has many aspects that are simply taken as givens, or what are sometimes called presuppositions. They don't need to be proved. They're more fundamental, basic, and foundational than many of the other truths that are out there.

Faith also has something in common with our capacity for **credulity**. Credulity sometimes has a bad reputation: you just believe anything you're told. But the fact is, most of what we know is gained by believing what we're told, either by books or by reliable people. Credulity is accepting testimony, and nearly everything we know is accepting somebody's testimony. We didn't discover it for ourselves. We were told it, or read about it, and that's how we came to know it.

When it comes to the things of God, we accept God's testimony. Who has a more reliable word than God himself? We read God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, and we believe what God's testimony tells us. We believe what reliable Christian parents, Christian pastors, and teachers have told us. They might not be right about everything, but that are right a lot.

If we're super skeptical and say, "I'm not going to believe any of it until I prove it all to myself," we would end up knowing very little, because so much is gained through the testimony of others. That's true in knowing the world around us, knowing the news, knowing scientific matters, and knowing how to conduct our lives around the home. We accept what other people tell us and show us, not simply what we've managed to discover for ourselves. Likewise, in the world of God's truth, we very often know things by believing what we're told by someone reliable.

Another way that we know things is through our **faculties**. We know things by seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. We also have mental faculties, such as deduction or induction. We recognize that certain things about the past have occurred in a regular manner, and so we expect them to continue that way. That's called induction. There are other faculties as well. When those faculties are working properly in the right kind of situation, they give us knowledge.

This is also true of knowing by faith. God has given human beings a heart faculty for knowing him and for perceiving him. The Bible speaks of the eyes of your heart being enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). Your heart has a special kind of eyes, a special kind of ability. Ecclesiastes speaks of eternity in the heart of man (Ecclesiastes 3:11). There's a capacity within us for discerning something about God.

If that capacity is wrecked, it won't know much about God, just as if your eyes were poked out, you would not be able to see very much. If your ears were destroyed, you wouldn't hear anything. So if your capacity for knowing God, your heart eyes, has been ruined by sin, you can't know very much of God. But if you're born again and God renews that heart capacity, the eyes of your heart, then you can perceive the things of God and know those things to be true.

The fourth way that we learn many things is through **relating**, personal interaction with other persons whom we know. We can't just learn about them by mathematical or scientific means. We learn through conversation, through seeing how they react to certain things, through learning about them, and through learning to trust them.

So it is with God. We know by faith because God comes to us, relates to us, and draws our heart to relate to him. We live in his world. We become part of God's team and work alongside him, and he works beside and within us. We become part of God's family, relating to him as children to our dear Father. Through personal relating, we come to know more and more about God.

Faith is not just a wild leap in the dark that has nothing in common with other ways of knowing. Faith has much in common with other ways of knowing. We accept givens, we accept testimony, we accept what comes to us through our faculties, and we learn things through relating. These are the means we have of knowing.

So it is in relation to God. There are givens. There are testimonies given by God's Word and by God's people. There are the faculties of our inner heart that God enlightens. And there is ongoing personal interaction with God by which we discover more and more of him and of his ways. By faith, we embrace God's interaction with us. We perceive his glory with our inner heart. We accept his testimony. We take his written and living Word as our starting point and our standard by which we measure all other truth.

Christianity isn't just feeling; it is fact. Faith isn't mere opinion; it is knowledge. We *know* by faith. The instant we say this, questions arise.

- Is it arrogant to be confident in knowing God?
- Is it hateful intolerance to know Jesus is the way?
- Is it judgmental to say others are wrong?

- Can you really know you have eternal life?
- Is faith ever unclear or unsure?
- Why do we need faith if we have knowledge?
- Is it irrational to believe despite contrary evidence?

Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Is it arrogant to be confident in knowing God?

If you are confident in knowing that God is real, that the Bible is true, and that God loves and saves you, then some people might say, "You are arrogant. If you were humble, you'd be less sure. You wouldn't say that you know these things."

Is it arrogant to know something for sure? Not necessarily. We know the physical world is real. Would it be humbler to say we don't know? It's not a matter of being humble or proud. If we know it, we know it. Nobody calls us arrogant for knowing the physical world is real. The reality of the physical world is knowledge we can take as a given. Likewise, God's reality is knowledge we can take as a given. God is real. It's not arrogant to know this; it's just recognizing reality.

We know Abraham Lincoln was president. Would it be humbler to doubt this? No. Books and historians say Lincoln was president, so we believe it. In fact, we know it. We know by testimony that Lincoln was president. Knowing this with confidence does not mean we are proud. Likewise, we accept God's testimony that Jesus is his Son and that he raised Jesus from the dead. It's not arrogant to know this; it's just recognizing reality.

We know fire burns flesh. Would it be humbler to be unsure about this? Suppose I say, "Rather than arrogantly claiming to know that fire burns flesh, I encourage you to stick your hand in the flame and find out for yourself. I don't want to push my opinion on you." If I said this, you might say, "What kind of nutcase are you?" It's not arrogant to know that fire burns flesh. We know it by the experience of our faculties or by what others have said about their experience of fire. Likewise, a Christian knows that sin hurts and destroys. It's not arrogant to know this; it's just recognizing reality.

I know my wife loves me. Would it be humbler for me to worry and say, "Maybe she really hates me. Even though she promised at our wedding to love me 'till death do us part,' and even though she's been showering me with kindness and affection for decades, maybe she secretly hates me." No! I know my wife loves me. If you doubt whether your spouse loves you, that's not a sign of humility. It means either that you don't have a very trusting heart or that you don't have a very good spouse. I know by relating that my wife loves me—and I know God loves me. It's not arrogant to know this; it's just recognizing reality.

Confident knowledge is not necessarily arrogance. Some things you just know. So why do some people say you're arrogant if you claim to know things about God or about good and evil? It's mainly because we live in a society with a false division between facts and values. This mindset wrongly imagines that all claims of science and math are objective truth, while all claims of religion and morality are subjective opinion.

In this view, it's not at all arrogant to know something about science or math. If I say I know the moon orbits the earth, people won't say, "How can you be so arrogant?" If I say I know $3 + 3 = 6$, they won't say to me, "You are so arrogant! You should be more humble and consider the possibility that $3 + 3 = 5$." People won't accuse me of arrogance for confidently knowing something from the realm of science or math, because they view science and math as facts, as matters of objective truth.

When it comes to religion and morality, however, I might be accused of arrogance for claiming to know. That's because there is a bad habit of assuming that religion and morality are matters of subjective opinion or personal taste. In this view, faith deals only with values, not facts. It's okay to have confident knowledge of facts but not of values. If something is just a matter of taste or opinion, then it's arrogant to insist that you know the truth and that everybody else also ought to regard it as true.

This false dichotomy, this mistaken way of dividing facts and values, overestimates the factuality of science and math, and underestimates the factuality of Christianity. The Christian faith is about facts, not personal opinions. If you take God to be real and the Bible to be true, you are dealing with facts, with reality, and you are not arrogant for knowing what you know. Knowing by science and math is no more real or objective or certain than knowing by faith. Science is a human set of models for explaining reality. Math is a human set of symbols for interpreting reality. Math and science are not pure realities but are models and symbols that give us partial knowledge of reality. In some respects, the knowledge of God is more real and more objective than math. God is more real, unchanging, and permanent than anything else, so God as the object of knowledge is more objective than any other object. The Bible is God's Word expressed in human words, so no merely human symbols or models can give us the same level of accuracy and certainty as the Bible provides.

We must reject the fact-value dichotomy and realize that biblical truths about God and morality are facts, not mere values or opinions. When we understand this, we will recognize that it's not a matter of arrogance to say that we know God and his truth when we accept Jesus and the Bible. Granted, it's possible to be arrogant, to be surer of things than you should be. If you really don't know what you're talking about, it is foolish and arrogant to talk as though you do. But if you really do know God, your confidence is not necessarily arrogance.

Is it humbler to be skeptical? Some people think so. They equate humility with uncertainty. They say, "When it comes to God, I'm agnostic. I don't know. And nobody else knows either." Often they think they are humble in saying this. *Agnostic* comes from a Greek word; it sounds trendy and smart. But the Latin equivalent is *ignoramus*. That doesn't sound so trendy or smart. *Agnostic* sounds better than *ignoramus*, but the root meaning is the same: "I don't know." If you say, "I'm agnostic," are you humbly admitting that you're an *ignoramus* who doesn't know God? Or are you proudly boasting that you're a brilliant skeptic? You don't know, so nobody else can possibly know—and you're smart enough to know that! Some skeptical agnostics are very arrogant to assume that if they don't know something, nobody else could possibly know it either.

Humility is a virtue, but it's harmful to have a phony "humility" that insists nobody can know anything.

What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place... A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert—himself... The new skeptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn... We are on the road to producing a race of man too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table (G. K. Chesterton).

In recent years, postmodernism has spread the notion that nobody knows objective truth. People are too mentally modest to believe the truths of God or the basic facts of math, yet they're very sure that they want what they want when they want it. That's misplaced humility. We ought to be much more humble about our own desires and urges and our sense of how things ought to be, and a bit less humble about the facts that can be known if we pay attention to God. If we know God's truth, we can be confident without being arrogant.

Is it hateful intolerance to know Jesus is the way?

Jesus has plainly said that he is the ultimate truth, the only way to God. There is no other. Some object to this and say it's hateful intolerance to know Jesus is the only way.

But what is tolerance? Does tolerance mean we assume that everyone is equally right? No, in that case, there would be no need for tolerance. Tolerance is not the notion that all views are on the right track; tolerance is putting up with people even when we think they are on the wrong track. There is no need for tolerance except when there is sharp disagreement on important matters. In such cases, tolerance means that although we are convinced other people are badly mistaken about something, we try to persuade them in a kind and respectful manner, rather than forcing them to change or killing them if they refuse to change.

If you try peacefully to persuade people to change their minds and their conduct, you may sometimes be accused of "hate speech." But is that because you hate them, or because they hate you? You might tolerate them and even love them very much. In fact, the more you love them, the more you want them to change for the better and try to persuade them.

Tolerance is not approval or agreement; tolerance is gentleness and respect in spite of disagreement. Religious tolerance is not the notion that all religions are true and lead to God; religious tolerance is recognizing the differences among religions and at the same time loving those who differ from us. Indeed, a hallmark of true tolerance is that people of different religions can speak freely to one another and try to persuade each other.

Christians who try to persuade others to follow Jesus are sometimes accused of hate and intolerance, but how tolerant are people who tell followers of Jesus to shut up about him? Hindu David Frawley says, "In the modern world we must recognize a pluralism not only of races and cultures but also of religion, which means that Christianity is not the only way. Such religious hate statements should no longer be tolerated and the organizations promoting them should be challenged." Without asking whether it's true that Christ is the only way, he simply dismisses the

claims of Christ as “religious hate statements.” Mr. Tolerance insists that efforts to share Jesus as the only Savior “should no longer be tolerated.” He is so tolerant that he’s intolerant!

Frawley objects to Christian missions and evangelism:

There is only one God, one book, one saviour, one final prophet and so on. Most Christian missionaries try to get people to accept Christ as their personal saviour and Christianity in one form or another as the true faith for all humanity.

A religion that is pluralistic in nature like the Hindu cannot have such a conversion-based ideology. Hindus accept that there are many paths, so naturally they will not feel compelled to get everyone to abandon their own path and follow the Hindu path instead. In fact there is no one Hindu path but rather a variety of paths, with new paths coming into being every day.

Conversion is a sin against the Divine in man... As we move into a global age, let us set this messy business of conversion behind, along with the other superstitions of the Dark Ages.

We are all God. There is only one Self in all creatures. Who is there to convert and what could anyone be converted from? The soul is Divine... The soul cannot be saved. It is beyond gain and loss.

It sounds open-minded and tolerant to say all religions are true, but in the same breath, Christianity is said to be false. Christian teachings that all people should believe one Bible and one Savior are called “superstitions of the Dark Ages.” God says, “You shall have no other gods before me,” but Hindus flatly deny this. They honor various gods and goddesses and even say, “We are all God.” But we’re not God; we’re human sinners. There are not many gods and goddesses worthy of worship; there is one God. There are not many paths to God; there’s one. His name is Jesus.

If you think all religions work equally well, you are not thinking like a Christian. You are thinking like a Hindu or a humanist. Hindu doctrine teaches that all religions are true because everything is God, including you. Humanist doctrine teaches that all religions may be “true” as useful myths only because all religions are false as fact. There is no God, say the humanists, but they grant that religious stories and rituals may help some people. If you believe that there is no God (like an atheistic humanist) or that everything is God (like a pantheistic Hindu), you can claim that all religions belong on the same level. But if the God of the Bible is real, and if Jesus died to pay for the sins of the world and then rose from the dead, you must believe it and do all you can to persuade others to believe it.

Is it hateful to say, “Jesus is the only way of salvation?” No. It’s hateful to say, “We don’t need Jesus for salvation.” Consider these words from the Bible:

The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar ...

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 (1 John 1:7-10; 5:9-12).

If you say, “I don’t need Jesus,” you are saying, “God, you’re a liar. When you say I’m a sinner, you lie. When you say you sent your Son to die for my sin, you lie. When you say anyone who does not have the Son of God does not have life, you lie.”

It’s hateful to call God a liar, and it’s hateful to call Jesus a liar. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). If you say there are many ways to God, you are calling Jesus a liar.

Is it hateful to know Jesus is the only way? No, it is loving toward Jesus to believe what he says, and it is loving toward other people to let them know what you know: that Jesus is the only way to eternal life. What’s really hateful is to pretend there are other ways for people to be made right with God when there aren’t. The most loving thing I can do for others is to introduce them to Jesus as the only one who can make them right with God and give them eternal life.

Is it judgmental to say others are wrong?

Many people think that being judgmental is a terrible thing, and they think it’s judgmental for Christians to say we are right to believe the Bible and others are wrong to reject it. But is it always judgmental for a person to say someone else is wrong?

Is it judgmental for a mother to say that $8 \times 7 = 56$ and that her child is wrong to say that $8 \times 7 = 54$? The mother is not being cruel, mean, harsh, or judgmental. She is simply showing the child’s error and teaching the truth.

Is it judgmental for a scientist to say the earth orbits the sun and to say earlier scientists were wrong to say the sun orbited the earth? In one sense, of course, it’s a judgment, but not a nasty, mean judgment. It’s simply recognizing that one view is right and the other is wrong.

Is it judgmental for a doctor to say that penicillin will cure an infection and that a patient is wrong to believe snake oil will help? It’s not wrongly judgmental to say that. We all have to make judgments. We need to make right judgments. Penicillin cures infections; snake oil doesn’t. A good doctor will say so, not to be judgmental, but to help a patient.

As a believer in Jesus and the Bible, you can know non-believers are wrong and you are right without being wrongly judgmental. You can make a right judgment about truth without having an eager-to-condemn, judgmental attitude toward other people and wanting the worst for them.

Can you really know you have eternal life?

Knowing by faith that you are saved is considered rare or even bad by some church traditions. Official Roman Catholic theology says that most Christians should not be sure of their own

salvation. A favored few can know their eternal destiny, but the rest can only hope, wait, and work. But according to the Bible, God wants Christians to 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” (1 John 5:13). God wants you to know not just eternal truths about him and historical facts about Jesus, but he also wants you to know that you belong to him, that you have been forgiven, and that your future glory is secure and certain. The Heidelberg Catechism says,

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.

When you know the gospel and trust Jesus, you can know that you have eternal life.

Is faith ever unclear or unsure?

We can know divine truths by faith and know our own salvation by faith. Does this mean real faith is always absolutely clear and certain? Does this mean that if we don’t understand doctrinal details clearly and precisely, or if we’re not 100 percent sure about something, then we don’t have real faith? No, it’s possible to have some confusion and uncertainty but still have real faith and real knowledge.

Jesus often said, “You of little faith” (Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20). Little faith is different from no faith. Many of us are people of little faith. Our faith knowledge is sometimes vague; there are many things we need to understand in clearer detail. Our faith knowledge is sometimes weak; we lack full confidence in what we know. Little faith might not see clearly or know surely, but though small, it is real. Even small faith may hold real knowledge. We know things with varying degrees of clarity and certainty. We might be unclear on some points, yet have real knowledge. We might be unsure at times, yet know to at least some degree.

Little faith can seek increasing clarity and certainty. The range and precision of our knowledge should continue to grow so that we have not just small, vague knowledge but vast, clear knowledge. The certainty of our knowledge should grow so that we have not just weak, trembling assurance but strong, bold assurance.

Meanwhile, don’t be discouraged if your knowledge is still small and your assurance is still weak. If you know that Jesus saves and you go to Jesus—even with hesitations, even with uncertainties—he will surely save you. If you sometimes have questions or difficulties understanding the Bible but you keep going to God’s Word, then you have a genuine faith in God’s truth and his promises. As you keep searching, your little faith will grow. God will make your knowledge of him clearer and surer.

Why do we need faith if we have knowledge?

Some people say, “If you know it, you don’t need faith.” But knowledge is not just a thing you store in your mind like you store a tool on a shelf. Knowledge can decay or be lost. Your social

setting, actions, and heart can affect your mind and change what you previously thought you knew. Knowledge of God requires ongoing faith because sometimes you get into a negative social setting, or slip into bad behavior, or have heart struggles, and your knowledge of God will collapse without faith.

Your *social setting* shapes your knowledge. Instead of being among Christians, you may be among people who don't believe what you believe. What you knew as long as you were in a godly social setting will fade unless you have the commitment and the knowledge that come through faith. Faith will keep you believing the things you know to be true, even in a hostile setting; and faith will draw you to the church community that supports your knowledge of God.

Your *actions* shape your knowledge. Sinful actions make it harder to believe; good actions make it easier to believe. Sinning is like splattering mud on the windshield of your car: the more you sin, the more your vision is blocked. If faith motivates you to keep acting as God directs, you will continue to see clearly instead of constantly splattering mud on your windshield and making it harder to see and to know the things of God. When you sin, faith will send you to Christ for cleansing, and this will enable you to see truth rather than being blinded by your sin.

Your *heart* shapes your knowledge. If your heart is divided or corrupted, any knowledge of God that you had will fragment or fail—unless faith gets the heart back on track. By faith the heart trusts and longs for God and gets back in tune with God, and the mind is then able to hold on to what it knows about God.

We tend to view knowledge as firmer than faith, and faith as weaker than knowledge, but it turns out to be the opposite: knowledge depends on faith. We gain knowledge by faith and maintain it by faith. Without faith, knowledge of God tends to slip away from us. If you lack faith in God, Satan can overthrow your knowledge at any time.

Reason may win truths; without Faith she will retain them just so long as Satan pleases. There is nothing we cannot be made to believe or disbelieve. If we wish to be rational, not now and then, but constantly, we must pray for the gift of Faith, for the power to go on believing not in the teeth of reason but in the teeth of lust and terror and jealousy and boredom and indifference that which reason, authority, and experience, or all three, have once delivered to us for truth. (C. S. Lewis)

Satan can make you believe or disbelieve just about anything. How can a man who is totally male in his anatomy and chromosomes and has fathered several children declare, "I am really a woman?" How can other people consider such a man to be a woman? It turns out people can be made to believe just about anything, even when it totally contradicts biology and all observable facts. Without faith in the true and living God, knowledge is not so firm and solid as we might think. Strong faith in God's truth makes knowledge strong; otherwise, all knowledge is weak and vulnerable. Faith is not the enemy of reason; faith is the friend that keeps reason strong and clear so that we can hold onto knowledge when all sorts of irrational forces attack what we know. In our most rational moments, we can see that God is real, the Bible is true, and Jesus is Lord. When we think about the claims of Christianity clearly and logically, we find them solid and

well substantiated. But when our desires or fears or boredom kick in, Christianity seems unreal to us. When Satan turns up the heat, what seemed certain can suddenly seem ridiculous.

Why do we need faith if we have knowledge? Because faith is the key to knowing many things in the first place, and faith is what gives knowledge its strength and staying power when irrational urges and demonic deceptions attack our knowledge.

Is it irrational to believe despite contrary evidence?

Sometimes Christians are confronted with things that seem to contradict Christianity. Should you continue to believe even in the face of contrary evidence? Or should you follow the latest evidence wherever it seems to lead? In that case, if the evidence supports Christianity, it's rational for you to believe it. If there seems to be strong evidence against it, it's rational to reject it. And if there seems to be about equal evidence for and against, it's rational to say, "I don't know" and wait for more evidence one way or the other. With that approach, it might seem irrational to continue believing despite contrary evidence. However, it's not necessarily irrational to continue believing strongly.

Would it be irrational to believe you did not commit a crime even if lots of evidence seemed to point to your guilt? If you knew you didn't commit a murder and somebody was trying to frame you with a lot of evidence indicating that you did it, would it be rational for you to say, "I have to go with the evidence. I did it." No! Evidence cannot change your mind about something you know for yourself. You didn't do it. You know you didn't do it. It would not be rational to go against what you know just because some evidence seemed to point in the other direction.

The same is true if you've come to know God. Once God has revealed himself to you and showed you your sin and your need of a Savior, once God has implanted his life in you and given you personal trust in the living Lord Jesus, it is rational to continue believing strongly in your Lord even if various things arise that seem contrary to your faith. You know what you know, and no amount of additional evidence can change what you know to be true.

Would it be irrational to believe in a dear, wise, capable friend even if things happened that you couldn't understand or explain? You know your friend has excellent character and always wants what is best for you. He does some things you can't understand, but you know that he's smart and that he loves you, so you continue trusting. It is rational to say, "I can't figure out why he's doing things this way, but I trust him."

So it is with God. Once you come to know him as Father, to know that he loves you, that he has your best interest in mind, that his wisdom and his ways are too great and mysterious for you always to understand, then you trust him even when evidence seems to point in a different direction. Believing "evidence" rather than believing God might show disloyalty, not rationality. God might say to you, "You should have known me better." If some stranger were to accuse my wife of something horrible, should I just believe that stranger the moment they present a bit of evidence? That would not be fair to my wife. I know her. She's loved me for decades. It would take a lot more than a few shreds of evidence from a stranger to overturn everything I know of my wife and destroy our entire relationship.

It is sometimes wise and rational to believe strongly in a person despite some evidence to the contrary. Knowledge by material analysis is not always better than knowledge by personal acquaintance. In material analysis, you examine a thing that you can measure, control, and dissect. In personal acquaintance, you understand through interaction what a person is thinking and feeling, and how that person regards you. This kind of knowledge depends on the other person's revelation to you and on your receptivity to what he is revealing of himself. You can't know much about me by killing me, dissecting me, and cutting up my brain. You would learn a few things about my anatomy, but you would learn very little about what makes me the person I am. You'd learn a lot more by spending time with me and interacting with me than by trying to analyze me. You could know very little about me if I refused to reveal anything about myself or if you refused to pay attention to anything I said. That is certainly the case with God. We know nothing of God unless he shows himself to us and unless we're receptive to what he shows us. But if God does communicate his reality to us and we come to know him through personal acquaintance, then "evidence" gained from analysis won't count against him.

It makes sense to believe strongly in the Lord even when we can't make sense of contrary evidence. Our minds are too small to figure God out. The Lord says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). If God could fit into that small space inside your skull, if your little brain could figure out the infinite God, then he wouldn't be God. God's ways are far beyond ours. Faith is very rational when it says, "Lord, I am like a little child. I'm not going to concern myself with things too great for me. I'm going to trust that you know what you're doing because you've shown yourself to be a loving and faithful Father to me." That's not irrational; it's not turning your brain off. It's realism about who God is in comparison to us.

Here's another reason it makes sense to believe despite contrary evidence: Satan will surely bring contrary evidence in an attempt to lead us away from God and his truth. "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (Matthew 24:24). God's elect, God's chosen, cannot be deceived or lose their salvation, but if it were possible and if it depended strictly on strong evidence, the evidence from Satan would be more than enough to make everyone stop believing. Of course there will be evidence and arguments against the truth of the Christian faith! Of course that evidence will seem strong! Satan is constantly manufacturing and presenting such evidence. It is not rational to change your mind every time the enemy of your soul sends new "evidence" to deceive you.

Faith involves knowledge by acquaintance. It makes sense to believe in God, to know his reality and trust his goodness despite contrary "evidence," because personal encounter outweighs impersonal analysis. When you become personally acquainted with God, you're not just analyzing evidence or propositions or things; you are in relationship with the living Lord. You also know that a different sort of personality is out to ruin that relationship, so you remain alert to Satan and his schemes. You do not allow Satan to manipulate "evidence" in a way that undermines your knowledge of God and your confidence in him.

In a Nutshell

Is it arrogant to be confident in knowing God? Not necessarily. God wants us to be clear and sure in our knowledge of him. We can be confident of God without being proud of ourselves.

Is it hateful intolerance to know Jesus is the way? No. It's hateful toward God to say Jesus is not the only way; that is calling God a liar. It's also hateful toward people not to help them find the one way to eternal life.

Is it judgmental to say others are wrong? Not necessarily. We may simply be stating the facts, and we may be stating those facts in order to help others discover more truth.

Can you really know you have eternal life? Yes. God wants you to know.

Is faith ever unclear or unsure? Yes. We may have faith that is real but small, faith that is genuine but not perfectly clear or fully certain. Sometimes we have to pray like a man who said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Why do we need faith if we have knowledge? Knowledge can be twisted or lost. Satan can get us to believe just about anything if we don't have faith and commitment. Our minds can change very easily without faith to receive God's ongoing help.

Is it irrational to believe despite contrary evidence? It is rational to continue believing if we know God by personal acquaintance and find him trustworthy. God's ways are not our ways. Besides, Satan is eager to feed us misleading evidence. It is rational to trust God and to refuse Satan's ploys.

Having faced these questions about knowing by faith, we can say with the apostle John, "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).

Questions about Knowing by Faith

By David Feddes

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

Questions about knowing by faith

- Is it arrogant to be confident in knowing God?
- Is it hateful to know Jesus is the only way?
- Is it judgmental to say we are right and others are wrong?
- Can you really know you have eternal life?
- Is faith ever unclear or unsure?
- Why do we need faith if we have knowledge?
- Is it irrational to believe strongly in the face of contrary evidence?

Is it arrogant to be confident in knowing God?

- We know the physical world is real. Would it be humbler to say we don't know?
- We know Abraham Lincoln was President. Would it be humbler to doubt this?
- We know fire can burn flesh. Would it be humbler to be unsure about this?
- I know my wife loves me. Would it be humbler to worry that she hates me? **Confidence is not necessarily arrogance.**

False dichotomy between facts and values

- **Facts:** The claims of science and math are objective truth.
- **Values:** The claims of religion and morality are subjective opinion.

It is false to say all claims of science and math are objective truth. It is false to say all claims of religion and morality are subjective opinion. Knowing by science and math is no more real or objective or certain than knowing by faith.

Is it humbler to be skeptical?

- *Agnostic* is a word coined from Greek, meaning "without knowledge."
- A Latin equivalent would be *ignoramus*.
- If you say, "I'm agnostic," are you humbly admitting that you're an ignoramus?
- Or are you proudly boasting that you're a brilliant skeptic? You don't know, so nobody else can possibly know--and you're smart enough to know that!

Misplaced humility

What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place... A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert--himself... The new skeptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn... We are on the road to producing a race of man too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. (G. K. Chesterton)

Is it hateful to know Jesus is the only way?

In the modern world we must recognize a pluralism not only of races and cultures but also of religion, which means that Christianity is not the only way. Such religious hate statements should no longer be tolerated and the organizations promoting them should be challenged. (David Frawley, a Hindu also known as Vamadeva Shastri)

Objecting to Christianity

There is only one God, one book, one saviour, one final prophet and so on. Most Christian missionaries try to get people to accept Christ as their personal saviour and Christianity in one form or another as the true faith for all humanity. A religion that is pluralistic in nature like the Hindu cannot have such a conversion-based ideology. (David Frawley)

Objecting to conversion

Conversion is a sin against the Divine in man... As we move into a global age, let us set this messy business of conversion behind, along with the other superstitions of the Dark Ages.

We are all God. There is only one Self in all creatures. Who is there to convert and what could anyone be converted from? The soul is Divine... The soul cannot be saved. It is beyond gain and loss. (David Frawley)

It's hateful to say we don't need salvation.

The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar** and his word has no place in our lives. (1 John 1:7-10)

It's hateful to call God a liar.

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. (1 John 5:9-12)

It's hateful to call Jesus a liar.

- Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)
- It is more loving and humble to believe the all-knowing Son of God than to contradict him. It is more hateful to call Jesus a liar and God the Father a liar than to believe the Father's testimony to his Son.
- It's hateful to block others from Jesus.

Lost without knowledge

Because they hated **knowledge** and did not choose the fear of the Lord... therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way... the simple are killed by their turning away (Prov 1:29-32)

My people are destroyed from lack of **knowledge**. (Hosea 4:6)

Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the **knowledge** of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind. (Romans 1:28)

They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on **knowledge**. (Romans 10:2)

Is it judgmental to say we are right and others are wrong?

- Is it judgmental for a parent to say she is right that $8 \times 7 = 56$ and that her child is wrong to say that $8 \times 7 = 54$? No, it is true.

- Is it judgmental for a scientist to say the earth orbits the sun and to say earlier scientists were wrong to say the sun orbited the earth? No, it is true.
- Is it judgmental for a doctor to say penicillin will cure an infection and that a patient is wrong to believe snake oil will help? No, it is true.
- Is it judgmental to say that Jesus is the only Savior and that others are wrong not to believe Jesus for salvation. No, it is true.

Believing in nothing

In the world it is called tolerance, but in hell it is called despair. The sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, enjoys nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing but remains alive because there is nothing which it would die for. (Dorothy Sayers)

Can you really know you have eternal life?

- Official Roman Catholic theology says that most Christians should not be sure of their own salvation. A favored few can know their eternal destiny, but the rest can only hope, wait, and work.
- God wants Christians to 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. (1 John 5:13)

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)

Is faith ever unclear or unsure?

- Jesus says, "You of little faith." (Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20)
- Little faith might not see clearly or know surely. Though weak, it may be real faith.
- Even weak faith may hold real knowledge. We know things with varying degrees of clarity and certainty. We might be unclear on some points yet have real knowledge. We might be unsure at times and yet truly know, though not with full certainty.

Why do we need faith if we have knowledge?

- Some people say, "If you know it, you don't need faith."
- Knowledge is not just a thing you store in your mind like a bike in a garage.

- Your social setting, actions, and heart can reshape your mind and change what you previously thought you knew.
- If you lack faith in God, your knowledge can be overthrown by Satan at any time.

Heart-faith sustains reason

Reason may win truths; without Faith she will retain them just so long as Satan pleases. There is nothing we cannot be made to believe or disbelieve. If we wish to be rational, not now and then, but constantly, we must pray for the gift of Faith, for the power to go on believing not in the teeth of reason but in the teeth of lust and terror and jealousy and boredom and indifference that which reason, authority, and experience, or all three, have once delivered to us for truth. (C. S. Lewis)

Is it irrational to believe strongly in the face of contrary evidence?

- Would it be irrational to believe you did not commit a crime even if lots of evidence seemed to point in your direction?
- Would it be irrational to believe in a dear, wise, capable friend even if things happened that you couldn't understand or explain?
- Believing "evidence" rather than God may show disloyalty, not rationality.

Analysis or acquaintance?

- **Material analysis:** Examine a thing that you can measure, control, and dissect.
- **Personal acquaintance:** Understand what a person is thinking and feeling, and how that person regards you. This knowledge depends on the other person's revelation and on your receptivity.

It makes sense to believe strongly despite "evidence."

- **Our minds are too small to figure God out:** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)
- **Our minds are too fickle to hold out against Satan without God's help:** For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. (Matthew 24:24)
- **Faith involves knowledge by acquaintance.**

Questions about knowing by faith

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- Why do we need faith if we have knowledge?
- Is it irrational to believe strongly in the face of contrary evidence?

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)