

Introduction

I'd like to begin by identifying what is, sequentially, the first worldview question – the one from which the others flow. That question is, **"What is real."** I'd also like to identify what is, sequentially, the first answer to that first question – the one from which the others flow. That answer is, **"God."** God is real.

Now let me ask you two personal questions about that answer. First, do you believe it – that He is real? And second, for our purposes today, why do you believe it, if you do? A secularist once told me that the only reason people believe in God is because they need to. They're weak and in order to cope with life, invent an imaginary God that makes them feel secure even though they aren't. Is that why you believe in Him? Is it because you need to?

That isn't why I believe in Him. I don't believe in Him because of what I need. I believe in Him because of what I know. Most of what I believe in fact, I believe because of what I know and that's what I'm going to preach about today - believing competently (making knowledge the basis of our beliefs).

Beliefs Defined

Genesis 22:1-14 is one of the most gut-wrenching narratives in the Bible. Verse 1 states that God **"tested"** or **"proved"** Abraham. The object of that test was his faith. God did what He did to reveal what Abraham truly believed. Verse 2 records what He did. He commanded him to take his only son Isaac to Mount Moriah, kill him, and offer him as a sacrifice to Him. That's what He commanded and Abraham set out to do it. He left for Moriah in verse 3 and arrived in verse 4. He then told his servant, in verse 5, **"Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."** After that, according to verses 6-11, he did go over there, took the necessary steps to sacrifice Isaac, raised his dagger to kill him – and God stopped

him. He stopped him because Abraham's actions, at that point, demonstrated what he truly believed.

It's obvious that Abraham intended to kill Isaac. So why did he tell his servant what he did in verse 5, that they'd both be back? Hebrews 11:17-19 explains it. It's because of what he "**considered**" or believed. It's that God would resurrect Isaac from the dead after he killed him.

This is the third Sunday in our worldview month and we're addressing our beliefs. Well, Abraham illustrates for us what beliefs are. Notice something. He was convinced that God would resurrect Isaac and acted accordingly. That defines what beliefs are: convictions that things are real or true. Because they're convictions, they involve tendencies to act. When we truly believe something, we're ready to act as if it's so. I believe, for instance, that flossing teeth helps prevent cavities. That is my belief and I act as if it's so. I buy floss and use it at least twice a day. I also believe that God wrote the Bible. That is my belief and I act as if it's so. I frequently read and study it in order to know it.

That makes clear just how vital our beliefs are. They not only condition or even determine what we do, as I just illustrated, but how we feel as well. Suppose I find out that I have only three months to live. How will I feel about that? Depressed and afraid or excited and joyful. It depends to a large extent on what I believe. One author sums it up well. Our beliefs are the rails upon which our lives run.

Knowledge Defined

Now let's go back to Hebrews 11:17-19. That text reveals not only what Abraham believed, but what he knew as well. According to verse 18, it's that he would have descendants through Isaac. He knew that because God Himself had unmistakably told him so in Genesis 21:12 (which verse 18 quotes). He had also told him on several other occasions that his descendants through Isaac would multiply and become a great nation. Of that, therefore, Abraham was sure.

That fleshes out what knowledge is. It's the awareness of reality. We "**know**" when we think about things as they actually are. Inherent in

that knowledge of ours is the certainty that things are so. I know from 61 years of experiencing and observing, for instance, that people react adversely to criticism. Or I know (because I've read the verses) that the Bible claims that God wrote it. I'm certain those things are so.

Knowledge, as you can see, is different than beliefs. It is in several ways. Beliefs may or may not be true. Knowledge, by definition, is always true. Beliefs may or may not be based on evidence and experience. Knowledge is always based on evidence and experience. Beliefs are convictions about what is so. Knowledge is certainty about what is so. Years ago, a newly widowed man said, "**There's nothing worse than being alone.**" Then, only a year after marrying a woman he called "**the nag,**" that same man said, "**Remember when I told you there is nothing worse than being alone. I was wrong.**" He believed the first. He knew, by experience, the second. There is a difference between beliefs and knowledge.

Make Knowledge the Basis of Faith

Because there is, they aren't necessarily linked. There are two possibilities in that regard.

First, we can know something and not believe it. We can have overwhelming evidence at hand and be certain that something is so. But for one reason or another, we're prepared to act as if it isn't so. It's what we call "**head knowledge,**" which is knowledge without belief. Consider these facts. According to the Powerball Lottery, the odds of winning the Powerball Jackpot are 1 in 147,107,962. That means a person is more likely to flip a penny and have it land tails 27 times in a row than to win the lottery. Or a person is more likely to get killed driving 10 miles to claim the ticket than to actually win it in the first place. Everyone knows that – maybe not the statistic but the fact that he or she isn't going to win. And yet, I met a man in a convenience store who spent over \$100 on tickets. Why was that? It's because he has "**head knowledge.**" He knows something but doesn't believe it.

There's a second possibility when it comes to beliefs and knowledge.

We can believe something and not know it. We'd be greatly disadvantaged in practical living if we couldn't. That's because knowledge isn't always available to guide our actions. When that's the case, beliefs without knowledge must do so. I only go to restaurants that are clean. But I can't know they are by thoroughly inspecting them. I can only believe they are based on reputation and appearance. If I only believed what I knew, I would never go to restaurants. We can believe what we don't know and when knowledge isn't possible, need to.

Those are the two possibilities and they clearly imply that beliefs and knowledge aren't necessarily linked. But they can be. Notice something. Abraham's belief (God will resurrect Isaac) was based on knowledge (I will have descendants through him). He believed because he knew. The truth is that most of the subjects and issues that matter to us have bodies of knowledge that are related to them, and that are accessible to us. When that is the case, knowledge can be the basis of our beliefs. We can believe because we know.

Take a belief to which almost all of us adhere. God wrote the Bible. Let me ask you. Why do you believe that? What is the knowledge upon which your belief is based? I'd suggest an instructive little exercise. Sit down and list all of the facts you know to be true that have led you to believe that God wrote the Bible. If there aren't any, then you believe what you don't know. Do you know, for instance, that the Bible claims that God wrote it? If it didn't, I wouldn't believe He did. Or do you know that it contains strikingly detailed prophecies that were historically fulfilled, the most remarkable of which, in my view, is Daniel 11? Or do you know that there are no proven historical mistakes in it, not one? Those are just samplings of the facts that relate to God writing the Bible. We can believe He did because we know them.

My point is this. For most of the subjects and issues that matter to us, we can believe because we know. Knowledge can be the basis of our beliefs about them.

And it should be. I want to emphasize that. Whenever it's possible, knowledge should be the basis of our beliefs. When we *can* believe

because we know, then we *should*.

Dallas Willard explains why in the reading Timothy recited earlier. Knowledge gives belief **“a very different bearing on life.”** Specifically knowledge **“stabilizes true belief and makes it more effectual for good as well as more accessible and shareable.”** I’d say it this way. Basing them on knowledge makes us more passionate and confident about our beliefs. Those beliefs then direct our feelings and actions more definitively for good than they would otherwise.

To die is gain. I once counseled a Christian dying of brain cancer, who was having regrets about leaving life on earth. **“Do you believe that to die is gain?”** I asked him. **“I do,”** he replied, **“But it doesn’t help.”** I realize now why it didn’t. It was because he believed what he didn’t know. Knowledge wasn’t the basis of his belief. He didn’t know, for example, that his levels of consciousness and activity would increase unimaginably the moment he died. Contrast that man’s dying experience with William Wilberforce’s, who believed what he knew. He declared, **“My affections are so much in heaven that I leave without a regret.”**

It’s true. Beliefs that are based on knowledge are far more “effectual for good” than those that aren’t. Consequently, whenever it’s possible, we should do just that. Base our beliefs on knowledge.

How to Make Knowledge the Basis of Our Beliefs

That’s what we should do and here’s how we do it. It’s a three-step process.

First, we identify the subjects and issues that matter to us or that should matter to us. The first of those of course is God and His kingdom at hand. Those and others are obvious but some aren’t so obvious. What about the subjects of gambling, grumbling, or gossip, for instance? They don’t matter to most people as much as they do to God but they should.

Second, we gather as much information as we can about the subjects and issues that should matter. There are primary resources for doing that: the Bible, insightful teachers, books and magazines, the internet, insightful acquaintances, observation coupled with analysis and thought,

and experience coupled with analysis and thought. We employ those resources and learn as many facts and truths as we can about the subject or issue that's before us.

Third, we determine what necessarily follows from the information we've gathered. We do that by using the logical relations of implication and contradiction, which I've explained before. We apply those logical relations to the facts and truths we've learned. We then draw valid conclusions about the subject or issue before us.

Those are the three steps and with their completion, we have knowledge. We then base our beliefs on that. We believe what is consistent with it. We do need to rely on the Holy Spirit's help in that regard. Belief is a gift He gives us as we come to know.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. First, I identified a subject that matters – anger. It is a defining concern of both our personal and societal lives. Second, I gathered information from the Bible, my own observation and experience, and from teachers like Dallas Willard. Fact – anger lets loose more than one can predict or control. Fact – anger by itself (not acted out) wounds people. Fact – anger creates and feeds on anger. Fact – anger is almost always laced with malice and self-interest. Those are the facts and I learned them. And third, I determined what necessarily follows from them. They mean that people suffer and circumstances deteriorate whenever anger is involved. At that point, I had knowledge and with the Holy Spirit's help came to believe this. Anything that can be done with anger can be better done without it. I believe that because it's consistent with the facts about anger and with what follows from them.

Conclusion

I once heard a pastor preach in positive terms about “**blind faith.**” The fact is that many Christians think God wants us to have blind faith, but He doesn't. He wants us to have in'sight'ful faith instead. So let's have just that – in'sight'ful faith. Let's make knowledge the basis of our beliefs whenever we can. We believe competently when we do.