Faith

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What does it mean to know God? Sometimes, "to know something" means to come to a conclusion through a logical argument. Sometimes, it means to see as a fact. In the Old Testament it was said that a man "knew" his wife if he had sexual intercourse with her. In other words, they knew each other because they were intimate or in a relationship with each other, and this is what I believe is the meaning of knowing God. It means to be in relationship with Him – the very meaning of Eternal life. It's impossible to know Him as a fact. If we did it would be putting God in a box.

Where do faith and knowledge meet in our relationship with God? Is it possible to know His attributes? After all who of us have seen God's spirit, and so can tell what He is like? Even if we saw Him and His actions when He became man we may never have recognized Him for who He was.

Being in relationship with Him now, we experience His grace and love, but are these enough to keep us from disowning Him when He gives us the bread of adversity and the water of affliction? For when we experience this hardship won't some misconstrue Him as being a malevolent tyrant? This dilemma is known as the fight of faith. If we doubt, how can it be knowledge? Can we trust our eyes? Can we trust our senses or our memory? Ultimately it takes faith in these gifts in order for us to say we know something. And by faith I simply mean a personal trust in Jesus.

I'm afraid! And I think that it is a good fear. A fear of saying I know something when in fact I only have faith in it. It is easier for me to say I'm certain about something than for me to say I know it. What is more the area from my life where it counts the most, I have the most confusion about it.

It is like this. God has given me irrefutable evidence that He exists. But I can't necessarily prove this to someone else. He has also given me strong evidence that He is good and loving. So much so, that when He gave me the evidence, I had to say that I was peering inside the heart and mind of God. It was like white hot metal…with the qualities of love, morality, and justice somehow within it. This is the evidence that I hold onto in the face of life's hardships.

This seeming conflict I call a paradox because of my faith or apparent knowledge of God's goodness. When I talk about the apparent knowledge of God's goodness, I mean that I have tasted from that goodness in ways I never dreamt possible until they occurred.

Do we have a God that is capricious or fickle like some people like to think and teach, or is He Love like the Bible teaches? I quoted Francis J. Roberts elsewhere in this Website

when he said, “O my little one, you have not begun to fathom the depths of my love” as if he were speaking for God. But at the time when it was given to me I really didn’t understand the significance of this statement.

That God would some day somehow let me peek inside His heart was unimaginable at the time. I thought that I would always be left to interpret the good times as His favor, and the bad times as His discipline. Instead of interpreting the good times as being a product of chance, and the bad times as God’s curse. The idea being that the interpretation can go either way depending on one’s faith in the goodness of God or lack thereof.

I suppose what I’m trying to get at is this. Things are either true or untrue in their given contexts. Some of those in the past that have claimed to know the truth for absolute certainty have also committed some of the most heinous crimes imaginable. Once we know the truth it’s supposed to set us free as Jesus said. Yet obviously sometimes we are mistaken about what that truth is.

The chief priests a long with the leading citizens thought that they knew what was right and arrested Jesus in order to crucify Him.

Then again, many people have claimed to not know what truth is yet have landed up doing just as much harm. Pilate the man who passed the death sentence onto Jesus claimed to not know what truth is at Jesus’ trial.

Faith is always accompanied with doubt. Sometimes the faith is so strong that the doubt seems to dry up. Other times the faith is so weak that the doubts torment us something horrible. Faith has its useful purposes, but most people would agree that there is something called knowledge. Sometimes knowledge if it is the right kind can erase the need for faith and so blow away the doubt too. But how do we get to this place of knowledge?

I am convinced that relational knowledge is held within each of our spirits. Each spirit has the ability to discern and read the energies, motives, intents, and characters of the people we meet when we listen to it. This intuition has an uncanny ability to get it right so often, but we can dismiss it so easily. It enables us to trust, or warns us to not trust. It stabilizes us…and allows us to feel the peace and goodwill of others in our lives as well as that belonging to God because it is the place in us that connects us to people and God through trust. It is the place that gives us a sense of meaning and purpose or when it is discounted we don’t connect to that meaning and purpose so we feel purposeless and meaninglessness instead. Ultimately this spirit-knowledge gives stability and allows us to function more confidently, with certainty, with foundations, and with peace more so than if we were to just go by faith alone.

I believe in absolute truth. But I won’t pretend to have it. Mathematics contains what I would call truths. Are they absolute? No, because they are incomplete to us, we do not see all their conclusions or results, where they sit in the whole fabric of Mathematical knowledge, what they don’t or can’t answer, and their complete context. To God, they are absolute because He knows every detail, every scope, every weakness, every

strength, every application, and every angle. We aren't so knowledgeable and that is a good thing. It can keep us humble when we keep perspective.

Math is a tool that we all rely on to some degree or other. All mathematicians would say that math is a good thing. Yet both good and bad has come from mathematical knowledge.

I'm more passionate about God than I am about math these days. Some claim that God doesn't exist. Yet God has set me free from many sins, much of that I was blind to for a large part of my life. I know that God exists and that He has set me free. I therefore "believe" that God is absolutely good. But I'm too afraid at this juncture to say that I "know" He is completely and absolutely good. I agree that we can know that He has some goodness in Him partly from how we are made, partly from experience, partly from our spirit-intuitions, and partly from logical arguments.

Here is an Argument:

I claim that if God were pure hatred, then He would have no self-love if in the beginning He was all that existed. To see this, suppose that we are starting out with a God who is pure hatred. Before He created anything, He would have to hate something. That something would have to be Himself since initially He would be all that there is.

If God were pure hatred, He could not even love to hate, He would hate to hate. Every moment would be weariness for Him. What a terrible existence. God could not create creatures that had joy or happiness like we do because He would only create those things that are consistent with His character, which would be things that are consistent with hatred. Since humans in some cases do love, we can't have a God that is pure hatred.

A God with any measure of self-love will love whatever He does with that same measure of love. This is because one loves what one produces when one loves oneself.[1] The fact that love exists means that pleasure exists. The ultimate end of love is wholesome life (the ultimate end of pleasure is not always love). To the measure that God loves Himself, He will love His creation, because He would want to find pleasure in it.

A selfish God would never create any happy or joyous creatures because He would be jealous of their joy or happiness. A selfish God would want everything for Himself and so could not share His life with His creatures. If He did create creatures, He would want their loyalty at all costs. Any rebellious creatures would not be tolerated – He would will them out of existence the moment before they defied Him. A selfish God would want robots, and not creatures with free will, because He could not stand being rejected. Therefore a selfish God does not exist, because we aren't robots.

A proud God would be just as insecure as a selfish God. He would never create a creature that could be happy when He himself wasn't the attention of that happiness. He would envy them, and since self-love would be part of His identity, He would not want to lose any pleasure because of His creatures' disloyal behavior. Because people exist and experience joy and happiness that they don't glorify God for at different times, God must

[1] I am in debt to my dear friend Alex Pruss for this insight.

be humble enough to permit this. This evidence points to a God who Loves, and has no defects.

This isn't a watertight argument for why God must be good. It is good as far as it goes, but one still needs to explain why bad things apparently happen to supposedly good people. Peter Kreeft attempts to answer this question in his book entitled Making Sense Out Of Suffering.[2] His conclusion is that the question doesn't apply to us to begin with because we aren't completely good. Except for Jesus and His mother there are no completely good humans according to the Bible and Catholic Traditions. And the Gospels tell why these completely good people suffered in detail.

A better question to ask is: Why do good things happen to bad people?[3] The logic behind this question comes down to justice. Certainly a just God would oppose evil, wicked, proud, and rebellious people. But He apparently does not do so, at least not in ways we can always see in this life.

Christianity teaches that God is both loving and just. A loving God will forgive people their wrongs if they practice mercy because only merciful people understand and desire forgiveness. Brutal people don't seek forgiveness. I used to think that a just God would punish proud people when the time comes, but not necessarily immediately, because He would want to give them time to change their proud attitudes in to humble ones. But now I believe that God is into restorative justice not retributive justice. Yes, God shows Himself merciful to the merciful. But I think unmerciful persons do experience God in a dark ways because of they fear and mistrust Him… even though God loves them. God wishes them no harm…but He can't change the way they see Him without violating their respective wills. He won't violate another person's will.

So much for one of the many arguments for why God is good.

For most people the struggle isn't so much on whether or not God is good, but rather it has to do with whether or not God will be good to them.

This is because we aren't God, and since God is different from us, He will have different desires, hopes, expectations, and plans for our lives than what we do either some of the time, or all of the time. And so faith will be needed if we are to cooperate with Him to achieve His will.

<u>Crazy Faith:</u>

Frederick Buechner said:

> Without somehow destroying me in the process, how could God reveal Himself in a way that would leave no room for doubt? If there were no room for doubt there would be no room for me.[4]

The kind of faith in God that seems absurd to have in the face of one's circumstances is

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[2] Peter Kreeft, Making Sense Out Of Suffering, Servant Books (1986)
[3] I am in debt to my friend Chris Brion for this question in this context.
[4] Philip Yancey, Disappointment With God, Zondervan publishers (1988), p. 45

what I like to call crazy faith. The kind of faith talked about in Hebrews 11. This kind of faith goes on despite the insurmountable odds that seem to be against it from a human perspective. Despite the unknowing it perseveres. Despite the doubt it continues.

This is the kind of faith that God expects all of us to exert at some time in our lives. Life is not easy, and the circumstances that it throws at us can shake our faith in God to the very core of our soul's foundations, so much so that we might follow through on the idea of abandoning our faith in God completely. The fact that most of us don't abandon our faith in God when we are tested is a miracle! Testing will come, sooner or later, with God there urging us on to the finish line.

To understand faith a little better, let us look at the time recorded in Matthew 14:22-32, when Jesus walked on water towards the disciples who were in a boat rowing against the wind. At first they saw Jesus and thought that He was a ghost, but Jesus quieted their fears by letting them know that it was He. Peter then asked Jesus to call him out of the boat so that he too could walk on the water with Jesus. Jesus called Peter, and Peter walked on the water until when?

Some say until Peter took his eyes off of Jesus. This is compelling, but that's not where he makes his error. Some say it's when Peter sees the wind and the waves. Again this is compelling, but that's not where he makes his error. Peter, like all of us at different times, made the mistake when he relied on his own understanding of what is true. He went from believing that Jesus had power over the waves and wind, to believing that the waves and the wind had more power than Jesus.

When Peter was first walking on the water, he was aware of his success. As the wind continued to blow and the waves did their dance, the faith in his heart switched its allegiance from Jesus to what made more sense to his spiritually impoverished mind. He relied on his own understanding of how things ought to work instead of exercising his frail faith in Jesus. Deep down inside Peter's heart, he trusted his natural instincts more than Jesus.

Initially, Peter's faith allowed him to accomplish small things, and to travel short distances. Most of us, like Peter, start out believing Jesus for the little things, but when things get a little difficult we can't seem to go on. As we grow up in the faith, we become able to do more courageous acts with less doubt and worry. That's why life is so bumpy. It provides the opportunity for this growth. Life ought to help us grow our faiths. Stagnant faith, life, boredom, and ruts that limit and tell us we are not progressing are often a result of rebellion and stubbornness both rooted in pride and not knowing more full God and what His promises are. God wants to exercise our faith so that it can grow up into crazy faith. A faith, that when it encounters the need to walk on water, won't allow our limited understanding of the world (including the wind and waves) and the laws that govern them, to oppose our trust in Jesus.

There is nothing wrong with thinking, and that's not what gets us into trouble. What gets us into trouble is our understanding of what the believable premises are in given situations! Should we believe God or our circumstances? Should we believe and see

things negatively? Should we believe and think according to the voices of the world, flesh and devils, or God? This is what the Holy Spirit is talking about when He speaks:

> Trust in the Lord with all your heart
> and lean not on your own understanding;
> in all your ways acknowledge him,
> and he will make your paths straight.[5]

It is of utmost importance that we trust whole-heartedly in God even when we don't understand what He is doing through the circumstances in our lives. When we do this we have crazy faith in God, and so can claim to know Him. That is to be in relationship with Him.

For a long time, I felt that the saying, "We walk by faith, and not by sight, or feelings" to be very distasteful because I did not understand or see the power that the idea has. In the past I used to be at the mercy of my emotions, and get all riled up over a lot of nothings. Or I'd get full of despair, or become self-effacing, or start to feel guilty…thinking, "I should not have done this or that", and I'd get apprehensive; thinking, "Am I going to lose my job now?" "What on earth does so and so think about me now…" Or I'd have a Whip-master (a devil) behind me (or in my head) saying, "You really should not have done that René, look at you now…you're nothing, you're hoping for far too much, no one cares for you, you have no friends, no one likes you" …etc. It was all fear focused.

But now I know that my spirit-knowledge is meant to do away with these unfortunate fiery darts that the devil is responsible for and loves to sow into minds. My spirit when it chooses to trust God, and the people in my life brings rational, common-sense, and practical structures that keep me safely away from entertaining lies that either have no foundation in reality or as far as possibilities are concerned are so small in probability of occurring that a sensible person in her or his right mind would automatically disregard it without fear or hesitancy. One of the characters in, "The Lord of the Rings" Films named Gollum spoke the negative self-talk like I used too in one of his scenes. The potential for Gollum's attitudes, beliefs, and emotions is in all of us.

I have found that I can believe in the above negativity and get depressed, suicidal, frustrated, want to quit, whimper and beg for mercy from those whom I have given too much power to, or I can trust in God, and not go by what these negative feelings say. Reality is rarely what our emotions say they are. They often reflect our insecurities…we often discount how much others love us…especially how much God loves us. Emotions also reflect out desires. If we desire something that we can't have, then we will usually get sad. But the Kingdom of God is upside down. The world says, "Go by your feelings and desires" or, "If it feels good do it." But God says, "Go by my truth, my light, my promises, and my love." When we do it God's way we will eventually feel His peace where before it seemed impossible to have.

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[5] Proverbs 3:5-6

I now know that I can choose to believe my feelings or insecurities, or I can believe what my faith and spirit say. I also know that my feelings are determined by what thoughts I have running through my head. Negative thoughts mean negative feelings. Positive thoughts mean positive feelings. When I change my thoughts my feelings will follow; I don't have to let the devil set the agenda for what I think…when I do he has a "hay-day" in making me miserable.

While growing up one will rightly or wrongly acquire many beliefs that are either based on fact, on fiction or on a mixture of the two. As these convictions solidify they will bring about certain emotions when challenged. After a while one will not look at how these beliefs were formed but only to the emotions they form when challenged. By this I mean that we will eventually think certain actions are wrong or right because they trigger guilt, pride, joy, or a sense of justice or injustice within us. If the process that formed our consciences was flawed, then many of the teachings from the Bible will look ridiculous because our emotions say so. This is where faith is necessary if we want to embrace a real relationship with Jesus. Prayer is important… but so is meditation on God's word. Basing our beliefs on truth is where it is at and that is where suffering is so crucial.

Suffering allows us to re-examine, refocus, and reassess what is important, true, and to be valued by us. When we feel threatened by pain we will often see how we have threatened others with our judgments, actions and beliefs. Ultimately we will find what we are looking for. The beliefs I now have resemble somewhat what I started out with in 1989 after I re-converted to Christ. But they have been challenged, nuanced, and been corrected in a multitude of ways since then. Love has been my goal. And I have been sorely mistaken by what I initially thought it took to love on many counts. Even though I prize love, I used to be very proud, angry, and judgmental. But I have made a lot of progress because Jesus is leading me on the path to freedom through prayer, meditation, working the Twelve (Plus Four) Steps, reading Joyce Meyer's books, and also practicing Listening Prayer as described by Brad Jersak.

In a conversation with a dear brother in Christ I began to realize that there are times when God reveals Himself to me so unmistakably that in those moments I know He is God the Almighty, Absolutely Good, full of Love, compassionate, merciful, and graceful beyond measure. But when the moments pass and fade I realize that I can't prove in my mind that He has these attributes to others and even myself. In between these encounters I realize that I'm certain about God's Goodness, but that I no longer know it in my mind like I used to prove mathematical theorems on paper with pencils. God is the proof, and when He hides Himself I'm left to depend upon my faith in Him. This used to scare me earlier in my Dark Journey, but now I'm content with it.

Because we can't know anything for complete and absolute certainty, or without doubt to some degree unless God were to constantly reveal Himself, we need courage, the important ingredient that gives life to faith.

True faith in God keeps us from being complacent or too pleased with ourselves. It keeps us from being proud if our hearts are open to the truth. For when we are pleased with ourselves we fall into greater danger of becoming proud. That's why God chose faith to

determine whether one is righteous or not. Only God can afford to know something absolutely without any doubt this side of Heaven continuously. For He is a holy God, and as the Scriptures say, “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”[6] Here, “light” means perfect goodness, or love, and “darkness” means any hint of evil.

It is important to know that faith without love is worthless. First Corinthians 13:2 states, “If I have the faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

[6] 1 John 1:5, New American Bible