

IN RESPONSE - NO BLIND LEAP REQUIRED, PART I

by Dennis Prutow
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At a college convocation the acting academic dean was one member of a panel discussing the question, "What is the Purpose of Chapel?" During his presentation he said, "Sometimes it seems that in Christianity we're asked to check our minds at the door of the church or maybe at the door of the chapel service so we can experience the feeling with our hearts alone. The fact is, however, that that's not the way of life Jesus taught about during His ministry here on earth. And I'm thinking blind acceptance is not what He or the New Testament writers advocated at all."

A student response included this statement, "One of the main contingents of your speech was blind faith. And you said that this was not the case. And I wholeheartedly disagree... [W]hat is faith but blind reliance upon God's Word. Faith does not work with proof. It never has." A second student added, "It is by our understanding and faith, our blind faith in Christ, that we grow in His Name."

Here was a most startling situation. On one side, a college professor disavowed so called blind faith. On the other side, evangelical, Christ committed, Bible believing students contended for blind faith as an integral part of biblical Christianity. And these students, sincere in their own faith, confirmed the worst fears of the college professors on the panel that evangelical Christianity is a mindless, uncritical, and irrational belief.

I was deeply disturbed because these well meaning Bible believing students were not very articulate. And they were totally unable to defend the faith of the Bible. Not only so, I found myself more in line with the *thinking* of the academic dean even though my *spiritual kinship* was with the students!

All of this begs for an adequate response. But *how* is a response to be given? *How* are the students to be shown that there is a rational defense for Christianity? And *how* are the college professionals to be shown that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God as proposed by the students? Since the context of the argument is within the framework of belief in God, it is possible to pass on to the argument for the Bible as the Word of God.

But interestingly enough, the standard procedure in Reformed circles today is to beg the question. That is, we are told we must begin our argumentation with the assumption that the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is self authenticating. We *believe* it is the Word of God because it says it is the Word of God!

I am troubled at this point because we have the very line of reasoning set forth by the well meaning students just mentioned. And it includes the very supposition rejected at the outset by the college professor. If we would say to the professor that he should assume our position for the sake of argument so that we might show him its utter consistency, he would laugh. He rejects the position out of hand. We are left in the same quagmire.

The standard response is that we must argue on the basis of presuppositions. To fail in this regard is to compromise our faith with the world. We all have presuppositions. And we need to show that the presuppositions of our opponent lead to irreconcilable contradictions. At the same time we must show that if we begin with the Bible and the God of the Bible we have the only truly rational and consistent explanation of all of reality. But I submit that we end up in the same difficulty! If the complaint against us is that we are 'anti-intellectual' in demanding this leap of faith assumption, there is no possible way to overcome our opponent. The impasse reflected in the student-professor confrontation is ours. We lose before we begin!

Dr. Wayne Spear of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary suggests that we use evidences while maintaining a sensitivity to presuppositions. Is this a solution? It very well may be. How so? Let me attempt to briefly explain. We may argue for the Bible as the Word of God based upon certain evidences. For example, if we begin with taking the Bible as a set of historical documents much like other historical documents, we can present a very strong case for both the authenticity and reliability of these documents. The manuscript evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament for example is

overwhelming.¹ We actually know more accurately what the apostle Paul wrote than we know what Shakespeare wrote!

In addition, both the external and internal evidence for the reliability of these authentic documents is great. For example, we may examine the geographic and historic facts enumerated by Dr. Luke in both his Gospel and Acts. We will not find Luke wanting in either area. His accounts have proven reliable! In addition, the way the New Testament writers approach their subjects, including themselves, is totally un-embellished. We commonly put the best face on our picture of ourselves. But these men wrote about all of their failings, shortcomings, and sins. For these reasons, and many others, the New Testament authors present themselves as reliable witnesses. The point to grasp here is that judged as other historical documents, the evidence is that the New Testament is in fact an authentic and reliable record. And once again, in point of fact, the evidence is overwhelming!

But if the New Testament is an authentic and reliable historical record, what do we find in this record concerning Jesus. Here was a man attested to be a prophet of God by miracles. Nicodemus recognized Him as such because of the miracles (John 3:2). In fact, Jesus' enemies never denied He performed miracles (John 11:47). And so Jesus was an authentic prophet of God.

But this prophet of God declared Himself to be the Son of God (Luke 22:70). Are we to believe this prophet? We are! The proof is in the greatest miracle, the resurrection. And this miracle is well attested! Nothing else could have had so profound an effect on the disciples. Because of the resurrection, these men were transformed from a fearful band into bold preachers of Christ! But this same Christ declared that the Bible is the very Word of God (Matthew 22:31-32). Dare we stand

¹ See for example, F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

against the very Son of God in His declaration?²

To answer, we must be aware of two things. First, there is the presentation of the argument. We must present all the *evidence* in as persuasive a form as possible. But second, although we may present *evidence*, we cannot bring assent to the evidence. *We cannot persuade!* Here is where sensitivity to pre-suppositions comes in. Although the line of reasoning in the argument is acknowledged as valid, it will not be found persuasive. Why? Because of the preconceived liking of our opponent, he is predisposed to reject any argument for the Scriptures as the very Word of God. An acceptance of the argument would require a complete shakedown of his world view. It would require the abandoning of presuppositions held for a lifetime. And so despite the evidence, the argument is rejected because of closely held presuppositions. But now, those presuppositions can be directly attacked *because* they are inconsistent with the evidence. At the same time we pray that the Holy Spirit will change the disposition of the opponent so that he will be persuaded of the validity of the argument *and* the invalidity of his closely held pre-suppositions!

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² For this argument set forth more fully, request my lesson "A Proof for the Bible as the Word of God."