

Don't Park Your Brains

by Dennis Lange

Some have taunted religious people by saying "you have to park your brains to become a Christian." They mean that religious people ignore the facts and believe only because of weakness or emotion or some inner need. And, some of the ideas people have about faith indicate the same thing. One person said, "Faith is belief without evidence. Full stop. End of story." Another said, "Faith is belief without evidence or in contradiction to the evidence. Therefore, it is, by definition, unreasonable. If you have sufficient evidence, you do not need faith to believe something."

One of the definitions given in *The Free Dictionary* for faith is "belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence." In *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, one of the characters said, "...every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith – acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove."

Belief without evidence? In the Bible, just the opposite is true. You don't have to park your brains to become a Christian. In fact, the God of the Bible who created our brains wants us to use them!

Ahab was a wicked king of Israel. He and his wife Jezebel led Israel astray in worshipping the false god Baal. Elijah was a prophet of God who called together 400 prophets of Baal and had the people of Israel gather at Mount Carmel. He set up a test between Baal and God with these words, "Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people said, "That is a good idea." (I Kings 18:23-24)

Baal's prophets went first. They leaped, cried out, and even cut themselves as they appealed to Baal to consume the offering with fire. They called on Baal from morning till late afternoon. Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." (v.27)

The idol, of course, never answered.

Then, it was Elijah's turn. He built an altar of 12 stones and a trench around the altar. He arranged the wood on the altar and put the pieces of the ox upon the wood. Then, he said, "Fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. The water flowed around the altar and he also filled the trench with water." (v.33-35)

He then prayed to the God of Abraham and said, "today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again." (v.36-37)

He was asking God to give them proof, to give them evidence that He, Jehovah was God, and not Baal. Fire came down from God and consumed the offering, the wood, the stones, and even the dust. "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.'" (v.39)

Their faith was not what they imagined to be true. Their faith was not without evidence. Their faith was not in contradiction to the evidence. God gave them evidence and they believed BECAUSE of the evidence.

Another example is the case of the apostle we call "doubting Thomas". When Jesus was raised from the dead, He appeared that first Sunday to all of the eleven apostles except Thomas, who was missing. The others excitedly told him about the risen Savior, but Thomas said, "'Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" (John 20:25)

The next Sunday, Jesus appeared to them again and this time, Thomas was with the rest. Did He rebuke Thomas for not believing, for needing evidence? No, He provided the evidence. "Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (v.27,28)

Faith in the Bible is based upon evidence.

John the baptizer once sent some of his disciples to Jesus to inquire whether He was the expected Christ or not. Jesus pointed those disciples and John to the evidence, saying, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Luke 7:22). Jesus was telling John to consider the evidence.

One of the Greek words used to refer to the miracles of Jesus means "attesting" signs. They were signs that attested to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah that the prophets had spoken of in the Old Testament. The gospel of John contains 7 miracles of Jesus, carefully documented, showing that they were inspected by the Jewish authorities in the first century. John came to the end of his gospel and wrote, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30,31). The gospel of John gives the evidence of the miracles performed by Jesus as proof that He was the Christ.

When the apostles went into the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, they were enabled by God to perform miracles and other signs so that those who listened to them might have evidence that they spoke the message of God. "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." (Acts 14:3).

We in the churches of Christ invite you to examine the evidence carefully. That's what God wants. In fact, He praises those who carefully look at what they're being taught. "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11) By the inspiration of God, Luke wrote those words of praise about the Bereans – that they were more noble-minded because they checked things out.