

GOD AND REASON (2)



T. M. Moore

A ReVision Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

God and Reason (2)

God and Reason (2)
A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe
Copyright 2015 T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing

Waxed Tablet Publications

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

Welcome to <i>God and Reason (2)</i>	4
1 Reason and Revelation (1)	5
2 Reason and Revelation (2)	7
3 The Mind of Christ	9
4 Knowing beyond Reason	11
5 Reason and Witness (1)	13
6 Reason and Witness (2)	15
7 Reason and Witness (3)	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

Welcome to *God and Reason (2)*

Reason is a great gift of God, given to help us know, enjoy, love, and serve Him. We must develop the use of reason as fully as possible, so that we may grow in the mind of Christ. Thus we will both increase in the knowledge of God, which is eternal life, and be ready to follow and serve Jesus in our daily lives as His witnesses.

The knowledge of God is not limited by reason, but goes beyond it, so that we can neither fully understand nor explain everything about our faith in a manner that will satisfy the demands of finite human reason. Yet reason takes us into this deeper, more personal and intimate knowledge of God, where we grow in the hope of glory, and are transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From there we go into our daily lives as His witnesses. As we live in agreement with Him Who has saved us, we may expect others to ask about the hope that is within us. Then we can bear a reasoned witness to Jesus, and invite others to join us in the joy of our salvation.

We hope you find these studies helpful. Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Reason and Revelation (1)

*“Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?
For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little.”* Isaiah 28:9, 10

Isn't it obvious?

We who have the Spirit of God have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Such knowledge piques our souls and makes us want to increase in knowledge of our Lord. The Bible is the place to turn in satisfying this hunger. Because reading and studying the Bible requires us to process words and sentences, and to decipher the meanings of passages and books, it might seem obvious that reason should play a major role in understanding divine revelation.

God's word to the prophet Isaiah certainly suggests as much. They who wish to learn true knowledge from the Lord must not be infants in their approach to revelation. They must be prepared to partake of more solid food, and to advance by increments, line upon line, precept upon precept (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-13; Heb. 5:14). To *rightly divide* the Word of truth, we must make sure we understand it well (2 Tim. 2:15), and this will mean giving our *minds* to careful, systematic consideration of the divine will, as revealed in His inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Obviously, we should expect to use reason and all its elegant tools in seeking to understand the revelation of God in Scripture. This holds as well, by the way, for the revelation of God in creation (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:18-20), although I will not be treating of this aspect of divine revelation in the remarks that follow.

God uses language

Reason is a valuable tool for understanding divine revelation, for it has pleased God to couch His self-disclosure in language, ideas, doctrines, and, over all else, in His own Son. Could God have done otherwise? Could He have simply impressed upon our souls an understanding of Himself and His will, that did not require the use of reason? Undoubtedly He could. But He did not; therefore, we need to employ and sharpen our reasoning powers as we apply them to the task of understanding divine revelation provided in the Scriptures.

What does this require? In this and the next segment, I want to commend five disciplines as necessary facets of an approach to understanding the Scriptures. Mastering these can help us engage and enhance our reasoning powers as we wait upon the Lord to make Himself known to us in His Word.

We begin with the necessity of *reading* the Word faithfully.

Continuous, comprehensive reading

There is no substitute, in exercising our reasoning powers for understanding divine revelation, for daily and comprehensive reading of Scripture. All the counsel of God in His Word is available to us, and has been provided to equip us for every good work (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). The Bible is a remarkable book, the product of divine inspiration working through the minds and circumstances of chosen human authors (2 Pet. 1:21). It tells a single story about God's glorious plan to redeem a people for Himself and to bless and prosper them in a world which refracts His glory and goodness on every hand. That story unfolds by

segments, within a framework of divine covenant, and is related through various types of literature, and by various themes and doctrines. Only continuous, comprehensive reading of Scripture can train our thinking to grasp the divine narrative, understand and relate the parts to the whole, and appreciate the beauty and sublimity of each particular section and book of the Bible.

Here a plan for reading can be of much help. Like faithful scribes we must work to bring forth treasures of divine insight from both the Old and New Testaments (Matt. 13.51, 52). Thus, we will need to make certain that our daily reading takes us regularly through both, perhaps by reading a chapter or two from each.

In addition, since all Scripture teaches us about Jesus (Jn. 5.39), it would be helpful to spend time each day reading from some portion of the gospel accounts and seeing the ways all aspects of the divine economy come into focus and fulfillment through our Lord Jesus' active and passive obedience (2 Cor. 1.20). By so doing, we train our minds to seek Jesus in all the different parts of Scripture, and to see in Him how all the Bible points to His glorious Person and work.

Daily reading in the psalms can enhance our prayers and worship, and some meditation in the commandments and statutes of the Lord can make a sure contribution to growing in righteousness (Ps. 1).

Thus, a daily reading strategy that includes something from both Testaments, the gospels, a psalm, and some aspect of the Law of God, will train our minds to discern the story of Scripture and to be able, increasingly, to relate the parts to the whole. Daily reading in Scripture is the starting point for training reason to encounter God in His revelation.

For reflection

1. It makes sense, since God has taken such pains to give us His Word, that we should apply ourselves diligent to reading and studying it. Why?
2. What is your present plan for reading the Bible? Is it sufficient to help you to grow in the mind of Christ? For learning about the Lord line upon line and precept upon precept? Can you see any ways your reading plan might be improved?
3. How can Christians help one another to be more consistent and fruitful in their reading of God's Word?

Next steps – Transformation: How faithful are you in the daily reading of God's Word? How might you improve your Bible reading so that you read regularly through all Scripture, meditate deeply on the Word, and discern God's leading for your daily life?

2 Reason and Revelation (2)

*One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27.4*

Meditation

Daily and comprehensive reading of Scripture are the starting point for using your reason responsibly in seeking and knowing the Lord. But *reading* the Bible can only exercise our powers of reason to a certain depth or extent. To engage our minds more fully, and to draw on and strengthen reason's powers more effectively, we will need to add a few more disciplines to our time in God's Word, beginning with meditation.

Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096-1141) explains meditation as follows: "Meditation is sustained thought along planned lines...Meditation takes its start from reading but is bound by none of reading's rules or precepts. For it delights to range along open ground, where it fixes its free gaze upon the contemplation of truth, drawing together now these, now those causes of things, or now penetrating into profundities, leaving nothing doubtful, nothing obscure. The start of learning, thus, lies in reading, but its consummation lies in meditation."

Meditation is focused reflection, when we pause over a section of Scripture – a chapter, story, paragraph, or even a verse or two. We ask more pointed questions of the text as we wait upon the Holy Spirit to convey us through the veil into the very presence of God Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18). In focused reflection, we are seeking the Lord in our passage, not just an understanding of the narrative or themes or teachings of Scripture. We want to encounter Him personally, in all His glorious weighty presence. So we wait patiently, asking questions about each word or thought, and perhaps jotting down whatever reflections or notions come to our mind as we meditate on God's Word, or praying them back to the Lord with thanksgiving and praise.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture

To enhance our meditation and draw on the benefits of our comprehensive reading, we will want to look to other passages of Scripture to shed light on the one that has come into our focus. The third discipline for using reason to understand divine revelation is what is referred to as the *analogy of Scripture*. The Spirit of God delights to teach us the deep truths of God's Word by comparing one section or passage of Scripture with another, so that the more light we bring to bear on the questions and reflections prompted by our text, the greater will be the likelihood that we will actually encounter the Lord speaking to us in His Word (1 Cor. 2.12, 13 ESV marginal note).

Searching, accumulating, and comparing Scripture like this engages and strengthens reason's powers of association, memory, synthesis, and conclusion. As we set our minds like this on the things that are above, as these are revealed in God's Word, we may expect to increase in our knowledge of God and His will (Col. 3.1-3; Rom. 12.1, 2).

Learning from others

Fourth, it is also important that we submit to the teaching of others more capable in the Word of God than we. Pastors, Bible study leaders, commentators, theologians, and others – both contemporary and from the past – can help to engage and strengthen our reason in understanding God's Word in ways that can lead us

beyond whatever limits of understanding our own reasoning powers might have achieved. They can lead us into new depths of meditation, illuminate nuances of meaning we may have overlooked, and urge us on to deeper understanding and greater devotion to God's Word.

No shortage of opportunities or resources exists for us to learn from others, but we must always take care that whatever we read or hear should be sifted through the teaching of Scripture, lest we be led astray by some perhaps well-meaning but misguided wind of doctrine (Acts 17.11; Eph. 4.14).

Speaking truth in love

Chuck Colson often insisted that we never truly learn something until we teach it. In this he echoed Paul's own teaching (Col. 3.16). What reason allows us to bring to richness in our own souls we must be ready to share with others, to encourage and edify them in the Lord, or to bear witness to His truth. Speaking with others about what we're learning is the fifth discipline that can aid reason in understanding divine revelation.

Talking with others about what we've been learning – whether in informal conversations or more formal teaching situations – engages reason at other levels, such as recall, association, synthesis, and argument and persuasion, so that we learn more about God's Word even as we talk through it with others.

The human mind is made for reasoning. We are the image-bearers of God, and God is the Logos, the *Reason* or *Explanation* of all things. We learn to reason as children and improve our ability to use reason through schooling, friends, work, and by various other means. We can study reason, to understand how it works and learn to use it better. And we can discover the proper ways of applying the tools of reason to the task of understanding divine revelation by reading, meditation, comparing Scripture with Scripture, learning from others, and talking about what God is teaching us in His Word.

For reflection

1. Why is it important to take time to *meditate* in Scripture, as well as to *read* it?
2. How does meditating on Scripture help to shape us for sound reason?
3. What place does talking with others about your reading and meditation have in your walk with the Lord?

Next steps – Transformation: We have mention four disciplines in this article to build on the first discipline of daily, comprehensive reading from God's Word. Which of these disciplines are in place in your life? Where might you improve in using any of these disciplines?

3 The Mind of Christ

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. Philippians 4.8

Submitting our minds to God

Reason is an important tool for knowing God, learning from Scripture and creation, and for helping others to hear and understand the Good News of Jesus Christ. Reason also can aid us in constructing a Christian worldview that reflects the way Jesus thinks about and works in the world. We accept that reason cannot enable us to plumb all the depths of the mysteries of God and His will. There are aspects of the divine economy and Word of God of which we cannot make complete sense. God's thoughts are simply far above our own (Is. 55.8, 9). The full explanation of various mysteries lies beyond our ability to understand, and we must learn to rest our reason in the mind of God, accepting what we can understand as far as we can understand it, and trusting in God for the full outworking and resolution of mysteries which lie beyond our ken.

Here I'm thinking of such mysteries as the divine Trinity, the Incarnation and atoning work of Christ, the work of the Spirit in bringing us to salvation, election and predestination, the interface between soul and body, and between divine Word and the material cosmos, free will and total depravity, and many more. We must use our reason to gain as full an understanding of these mysteries as is possible for the human mind. But we must not expect to be able to achieve complete knowledge of these, as if we could explain them fully and convincingly to others.

God intends for us to submit our reason to His, once we have reached the limits of reason's powers, and to trust His wisdom, goodness, might, mercy, and love. He alone can enable us to receive these mysteries by faith, even though we cannot make full and complete sense of them in our own minds. But by seeking to develop the mind of Christ, which we have by being born again in Him (1 Cor. 2.16), we may expect to grow in the use of reason for framing and living a Christian worldview.

Thinking like Jesus

We have the mind of Christ. We should expect to see the world as Jesus does; to think like Jesus about people, work, culture, creation, and much more; and to use our minds to bring the world, as much as we can in our own spheres of influence, into line with the character of Christ and His rule.

By training our minds to think in line with the teaching of Scripture, we will have light from God to bring to bear on all other areas of creation, culture, and life where God is revealing His glory, so that we may have wisdom to reconcile and restore all of life to the Lord (Ps. 36.9).

As Christians we hope in the glory of God – hope to *know* that glory, even beyond the limits of reason, and hope to *show* that glory in every area of life (1 Cor. 10.31). Living for the glory of God in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, we expect to pique the interest of others, so that they ask a reason for the hope they see reflected in us.

Thus, the more we apply reason to studying God's Word, the more our reason will be in shape to enlarge our Christian worldview, and the more reason we may have to expect that others will ask a reason for the hope they see in us.

Growing in the mind of Christ

God and Reason (2)

So, how can we grow in the mind of Christ? Paul's instruction in Philippians 4.8 is a good place to start. Use his teaching as filter and grid for looking out on the world, and you will nurture the mind of Christ to think about all of life as He does.

Start jotting down things that you read, observe, or hear that conform to the tenets of Philippians 4.8. Meditate on these things. What makes them true, noble, just, pure, or lovely? Why would this be something good to learn more about? To talk about with others? How can you give praise and thanks to God for what you have observed or learned?

Train your mind to select what occupies it according to Paul's guidelines – and all the counsel of God in Scripture – and gradually, line upon line and precept upon precept, subject by subject and situation by situation – you'll begin to think with the mind of Christ about everything in your world. And where you discover things that are not in line with the mind of Christ, there you can begin to pray and take considered steps to try to bring more of the glory and goodness of God to light in the land of the living (Ps. 27.13).

We have the mind of Christ, so we should expect our reason to refract His. But we'll have to work hard to realize this objective, and to nurture the kind of Christian worldview that finds us realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of God's Kingdom every day of our lives.

For reflection

1. What should having the mind of Christ look like in our lives?
2. What are some disciplines you have found helpful for growing in the mind of Christ?
3. In what ways would you like to increase in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Preparation: What practical steps can you take to begin thinking more consistently and comprehensively with the mind of Christ?

4 Knowing beyond Reason

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3.14-19

Reason and beyond

God has given human beings the gift of reason so that we may know Him, and knowing Him, find the fullness of life and joy for which we have been created.

As we saw in Romans 1, people do in fact know God, reasoning from the things He has made that He exists and is divine and sovereign. However, the law of sin, operating in the souls of every human being, leads us to suppress what reason tells us, erect new foundations for our thinking, and on that lying foundation, reason wrongly about God, the world, and ourselves. Only as God grants the gift of His Spirit unto salvation in Jesus Christ can our reason be restored, and we begin to use reason as God intends for knowing and loving Him.

At the same time, the knowledge and love of God, in which we seek to increase, goes beyond anything we can know by reason alone. There are things about *knowing* the Lord, living in Him, obeying and serving Him, that we cannot fully understand by reason, or that we may not be able to explain completely to others. Knowing the Lord requires that we *use* the gift of reason as fully as possible. But it also requires that we not be *limited* by reason as we seek to increase in love for the Lord.

The Spirit and reason

The convicting, teaching, filling, prompting, leading, fruit-bearing, gift-bestowing, power-enabling Spirit of God works *with* but not exclusively *by* the powers of reason. As the Spirit brings us into the presence of God and His glory, we *experience* and *know* things that we cannot explain, and we grow to love God in ways more agreeable to *feeling* than *thinking* (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Rom.11.33-36). In the presence of God and His glory we encounter mysteries we *know*, and know *truly*, but which we can neither fully fathom nor explain. These experiences of God and His glory overwhelm us. We do *plan* these encounters, and we may not always be *prepared* as they break in upon us.

At such times, whether through the medium of God's Word or creation, things come to pass within us which are real, and even transformational, yet we cannot fully understand what has happened or how; nor can we make these experiences completely comprehensible to others. They are the work of God's Spirit, and they are *mysteries* beyond our ability to comprehend. We can only say that God, by His Spirit, has made Himself known to us *beyond* what we may know by reason, yet *not entirely without* the aid of reason.

So, since the true knowledge of God lies *beyond* reason, should believers seek to know the Lord by the skillful use of reason?

Certainly they should. But they should also learn to know the Lord *apart* from mere reason – with the *heart*, in the presence of God's glory, in faithful submission to the indwelling presence of Christ.

Knowing God beyond reason

Daniel H. Whittle captured well the essence of this “knowing beyond mere reason” in his 1883 hymn, “I Know Whom I Have Believed”:

God and Reason (2)

*I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He has made known,
Or why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.*

*But I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that Day.*

Whittle goes on to declare that he cannot explain how the gift of saving faith came to be his, or how it brings such peace to his heart; how the Spirit works to convict men of sin and reveal Jesus to them; what his life will be like in the days to come; or when the Lord will come again to lead him home. The best reasoning of all human minds together would not be able to sort out such mysteries.

The most determined reasoning cannot make one who has come to *know* these mysteries deny that they are true. The result is that the things of the Lord which we come to know *beyond* reason serve to extend the *guidelines* for reason as we continue to seek the Lord further each day.

Let us use our reason to know the Lord, and to increase in love for Him. Let us reason actively with others, that they might begin to think differently about their own cherished perspectives and beliefs.

But let us plead with God for His Spirit, so that He might teach us the love of God which *surpasses* knowledge, and bring us into greater mysteries of the knowledge and love of God, than we by reason alone, could ever hope to attain.

For reflection

1. Reason can lead us to the knowledge of God, but the *knowledge* of God goes beyond what reason can grasp. Explain.
2. What does it mean to *know* God?
3. How does the knowledge of God shape the use we make of reason?

Next steps – Preparation: What are some things you “know” about God and your relationship with Him which you have not come to by reason, and which you cannot fully explain by reason? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

5 Reason and Witness (1)

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.* Proverbs 26.4, 5

Be ready

Every believer is charged with the duty of being ready to give an explanation for the hope he shows to the watching world (1 Pet. 3.15), to answer those who, trapped in the folly of unbelief, have seen in us something that resonates with a longing in their souls.

The Christian's hope is the hope of glory (Rom. 5.1, 2), and while the *experience* of this glory may be mysterious beyond reason, the way this hope of glory is *expressed* is in the Kingdom character of righteousness, the Kingdom condition of peace, and the Kingdom consequence of joy, even in the midst of trials and setbacks (Rom. 14.17, 18; Jms. 1.2-4).

Such consistency in Christian living will set the believer apart from the way of things in the world of unbelief, and can be expected to provoke inquiries concerning what it is that makes us different. When these come, as they undoubtedly will, we must be ready with an explanation, a reason, even a *defense* of our Kingdom lifestyle and convictions.

But, given the state of reason in the souls of those who are still under sway of the law of sin, can we hope that *any* explanation of why we believe will be persuasive?

A three-pronged strategy

Obviously, Solomon, Peter, Jesus, Paul, and all the other writers of Scripture believe we can, and we must. Unbelieving people may be trapped in the Lie, so that they have not been able or willing to know God as He reveals Himself daily all around them. But if we are *living* the truth that is in Jesus, and the character and works that issue from surrendering to *His rule* in our lives are visible in us, some people will want to know what makes us the way we are.

And when this happens, we need to be ready to answer them with *reasons* that might help them to see the truth, perhaps for the first time. Arriving at such a place involves a three-pronged commitment on our parts.

First, we need to *make sure our own lives make sense*, that the way we live supports the reasons we might give for why we live this way. This is just another way of reminding us that Jesus has given us His Spirit to *know* Him, so that we might *be like Him* and *be* His witnesses to the world. As we daily seek the Lord in Scripture, and as His Spirit brings us into His glory, we want nothing so much as to be transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ – to become like Him more and more (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

We want the Spirit daily to search our lives – heart, mind, conscious, words, and deeds – and to repent of anything that doesn't make sense according to the Gospel, so that we may continue to increase in the knowledge of God and the life of salvation. As we begin to speak of Him Who is the Source of our hope, Him Who is the very *Reason* of God, we want to make sure our lives give living evidence that this *Word* and *Reason* of God is alive in us.

Second, we must *make sure that we know the Gospel*. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of the *Kingdom*, not just of having our sins forgiven and going to heaven when we die. As such the Gospel speaks to every

area of life with the promise of making all things new. The Gospel brings new purpose for all of life, new direction for all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, and new hope for a richer, fuller experience of life. The hope of glory is the hope that in *all things* we might be renewed in the joy and salvation of the Lord.

If the Gospel as we proclaim it does not speak in these broad, challenging, far-ranging, life-changing ways, it won't sound very *reasonable* to someone who's looking for something *other* than the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life. Of course, we want all with whom we share the Good News to come to that point, but we need to speak the Gospel as God's message to *the world*, offering the hope and promise of newness for every area of life.

Finally, we need *make sure we can explain the Gospel's impact on our own lives*. How has the Gospel brought new hope, new purpose, new direction, and new life to us? In what ways have *we* discovered the power of Jesus Christ for making all things new? How is the *joy of the Lord* manifestly triumphant in our lives? If indeed the Lord is working within us to will and do of His good pleasure, and we are experiencing the power of the Gospel making all things new in every area of our lives, then we should be able to explain and give reasons, based on our own experience, for why someone asking about the hope within us should find the Gospel to be Good News for his life as well.

We have been examining the first component of this three-pronged strategy throughout most of this series. In the final two installments, we'll try to make sure we know what the Gospel is, and can relate how that Gospel has impacted our lives as well.

For reflection

1. What does it mean for a Christian's life to "make sense"?
2. What is the Gospel? If you had an opportunity to share it today, what would you say?
3. What has been the impact of the Gospel on your life?

Next steps – Conversation: In what specific ways are you growing in the knowledge of God? Are seeing Him more clearly in His Word? In the creation? Are you encountering Him in His glory, and is this helping you to grow into Christ-likeness?

6 Reason and Witness (2)

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
Acts 2.36

Let's imagine

If we are being faithful in applying our minds to knowing God and Jesus Christ, we will be growing in all the blessings and promises of eternal life (Jn. 17.3). Our lives will be coming together and making sense as visible manifestations of the living Christ, the Word and Reason of God.

Increasingly, the glory of God will be refracted through us in even the most ordinary situations (1 Cor. 10.31). The evidence of the indwelling Spirit – His fruit, gifts, and power – will be more and more evident in us, especially in the manifestation of God's love (Gal. 5.22, 23; 1 Cor. 13.4-7).

In short, we will actually *be* witnesses to the reality of Jesus, risen from the dead, because no other explanation can be given for why we do what we do, are what we are, and talk about the things we talk about (Acts 1.8).

And it's quite possible that, as we persist in such a way of living, and grow in it, some who are still trapped in the Lie of unbelief may notice, and ask a reason for what they see as the hope that is within us.

And the reason why we are so different comes down to two words: Jesus Christ.

Jesus is Christ

We can rather simply explain to any who ask a reason for the hope that is within us that Jesus Christ is the reason. Why do we treat others with grace and kindness? Why are we able to do our work without carping and complaining? Why are we faithful to our spouses? Interested in the people around us? Gracious, loving, kind, patient, generous, or forgiving – whatever the manifestation of our hope may have caught the attention of those around us?

The answer is that Jesus is *Christ*, the Anointed One of God, Who came to rescue us from our sinful, selfish ways, give us a new heart and mind, point us in a new direction, and begin the great reversal of making all things new in our lives.

Jesus Christ came among us, those many years ago, in order to call the world to new hope, hope which He Himself has made possible by overcoming the power of sin and death and opening the way to eternal life with God. By believing in Jesus we renounce the ways of mere self-interest, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for a *new mind* and a *new heart* and a totally new way of life.

Jesus the Christ saves us from the old ways of selfishness, fear, anxiousness, doubt, and death, and delivers us into the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and *joy* in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is Lord

And this Jesus Who saves is also the Jesus Who rules the world with truth and grace. Jesus of Nazareth is both *Christ* and *Lord*. Having risen from the dead, Jesus ascended to the right hand of God and is advancing His glorious Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. He rules by His Word of truth, and we who have come to know Him as Savior readily and gladly submit to that rule, for in the rule of our King Jesus we find the freedom that sets us free from the fear of death and judgment (Jn. 8.32).

But there is more. Jesus is Lord, and as Lord He is directing all of history toward a day when every knee will bow and every tongue will at last acknowledge Him for Who He is (Phil. 2.5-11). On that day, King Jesus will

God and Reason (2)

render judgment on every human being. Those who have received His salvation and submitted to His rule, all who have tasted of His true *joy*, will enter His Kingdom, glory, and *joy* forever. Those who reject His rule and insist on making their way in life without Him, will be granted the consequence of that choice forever, and be consigned to eternal darkness, doom, and self-absorption in a meaningless existence separated from the grace and glory of God, and from all that is beautiful, good, true, and joyful.

Make sure they understand

The reason why we are different has to do with the way we use our reason as human beings – in pursuit of the greater knowledge of Him Who has saved and is making us new. It is not our task to convert those who ask a reason for the hope that is within us. It *is* our task to make sure, to the best of our ability, that we have explained the Good News of Jesus as clearly as we can, and that they understand fully the hope and promises available to them, how they may gain these, and what are the consequences of refusing to believe the Good News.

So when the opportunity for giving a reason for your hope arises, be ready with the Gospel, because Jesus Christ alone is the *reason* for the hope that is within us.

For reflection

1. The Good News of Jesus is that He is *Christ*. What is the focus and hope of this aspect of the Gospel?
2. The Good News of Jesus is that He is *Lord*. What is the focus and hope of this aspect of the Gospel?
3. The Good News of Jesus is that His Kingdom has come, and is coming. What is the focus and hope of this aspect of the Gospel?

Next steps – Conversation: Make sure you know how to articulate the Good News of Jesus. Talk with some Christian friends and help one another improve your telling of the Gospel.

7 Reason and Witness (3)

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” John 15.11

Joy to the world!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is associated with *joy*. From the announcement of the angels to the shepherds, through all the healings and good works of His public ministry, to the joy of the disciples on the Emmaus road, the experience of joy features large in the accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry.

All who have come to know Jesus as Christ and Lord have entered the *joy* of the Christian life. As every believer knows, we have *every reason to be joyful in Jesus*, and we must be ready to tell others what it is to know true joy, and how they can know joy as well, giving as our reason the joy we have come to know through faith in Jesus Christ.

Like “glory”, “joy” is a term that we often use with only the most meager understanding of what it is. We understand joy to be a pleasant, and therefore, desirable experience. However, many of us find it difficult either to explain joy or to account for it when we know it. Like C. S. Lewis, we are often “surprised by joy,” delighted and lifted to find ourselves in a moment of sheer elation and exuberance, but not knowing quite how we got there, save for the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, many of us have difficulty *expressing* the joy we are *experiencing*, with the result that our joy is not as infectious or enticing as it otherwise might be.

Joy under the circumstances

Habakkuk 3.17-19 is a good place to start in trying to get at the true nature of joy. Let’s make two brief observations.

First, note the *progression* of the passage, how it moves from what is seen to what is unseen. Our immediate experiences and circumstances are not always such as to elicit from us a response of joy. Indeed, we are very often *wanting* in those conditions of life that others look to for happiness. Nevertheless, Habakkuk was able, by engaging sound reason, to rise above even the most unfavorable circumstances to know rejoicing and joy in the Lord.

Joy is not determined by what we can *see* in our immediate environment. Instead, joy is a condition that attaches to *knowing the Lord* and being able to see *past or through* what is seen to engage what is *not* seen (Heb. 12.1). This is part of what gives joy its great appeal: it is not attached to *changeable circumstances* but to *fixed realities and eternal verities* in which we participate by grace through faith. And joy is always there, always available to tap into in any situation.

Second, the ability to know joy – in spite of any untoward circumstances or conditions – is dependent on the extent to which one actually knows the Lord and is intimately engaged in a relationship with Him. Habakkuk declared that he would rejoice in the Lord and in His salvation, which he experienced as strength, security, and safety (v. 19). The chords, melodies, keys, and pace of our lives are ever changing, like a Baroque keyboard composition; but the *continuo* of joy walks like a solid bass note under and through all the vicissitudes of our lives, and makes them all, regardless of their nature, cohere and make sense.

The experience of joy associated with knowing the Lord thus depends on the extent to which we know the *experience* of His salvation. If salvation is for us only a “by-and-by” experience, something to *hope for* but not necessarily to *know*, then we may struggle to experience joy amid the trials that we must endure as we await translation to eternal glory. On the other hand, if salvation is an experience of living in the Kingdom of God, where we know the hope of glory, *experienced* and *expressed*, as a daily reality, then our joy will be more constant

and full because our relationship with the Lord will be as much for the “here and now” as for the “then and there.”

True joy – a pervasive sense of wellbeing, strength, security, elation, and safety – comes from the Lord. We may know joy in the presence of the Lord and His strength – joy *now* and joy complete in the days to come. God’s Law and, indeed, all His Word, bring delight and joy for the believer (Ps. 16.11). The Spirit of God, Who dwells in each believer, bears the fruit of joy in us (Gal. 5.22, 23). The joy believers may know in the Kingdom of God comes always from the Lord, and it is available to them through all these various avenues. We deprive ourselves of this joy when we neglect the Word of God, fail to walk in the Spirit or to resort often to the presence of the Lord in prayer. Believers must not look to their circumstances for the joy *only God can give*.

Expressing joy

When we experience it, joy should come to expression in a variety of ways. That is, joy is not an affection merely to be *experienced*. For joy to have its full effect, it must be *expressed*.

Once again, the Scriptures provide numerous suggestions to guide us in expressing the joy we have in the Kingdom of God. We may shout for joy, like a home-town partisan whose favorite player has just scored the winning basket (Pss. 47.1; 66.1). Singing songs of joy is also commended (Ps. 92.4). We may express our joy by giving to or comforting others in the midst of our adversity (2 Cor. 8.1, 2); sharing in the sowing and harvest of the seed of the Kingdom (Ps. 126.5); doing justice (Prov. 21.15); and by increasing in our experience of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13.44).

When, because of our knowledge of God – the fruit of sound reason – the joy that fills our souls comes to expression as joy *lived*, then our lives will make sense, our salvation will be visible to the watching world, and we can offer any who may ask sound *reasons* for how that joy can be theirs as well.

For reflection

1. What is the difference between *happiness* and *joy*?
2. Why is the Christian able to know joy *despite* the lack of *anything* that others might think of as making them happy?
3. What are the keys to tapping into the “bass line” of joy that undergirds our Christian life?

Next steps – Transformation: How do you experience the joy of the Lord? How does this joy affect you? How would you explain the joy you have in Jesus as Christ and Lord to someone who might ask about it?

God and Reason (2)

For reflection

1. What is the glory of God? What does it mean to encounter God's glory? Why is this always an experience that goes beyond reason?
2. Why do we say that we both *can* and *cannot* rely on reason when we're sharing the Gospel with someone?
3. Outline a reasoned approach to giving someone a reason for the hope that is within you.
4. Outline a program for improving reason through the careful reading and study of God's Word.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from these studies about reason in the life of faith?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.