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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BELIEF, RELIGION,
FAITH AND GOD

Opening Questions:

- What are the differences between the critical concepts of "belief," "religion," "faith" and "God"?
- Do I have an equally valid or plausible explanation for humanity's presence or my existence?
- What is the best definition of "Religion"?
- What if most people misunderstand the vital concept of "faith"?
- Are beliefs *about* God, and God, the same thing?
- Are beliefs and faith the same thing?

I have been talking about the need for a framework or context to properly evaluate whether Christianity is a success or failure. I believe we have accomplished that with one exception. Let's take care of that exception now in this chapter.

Let us perform a brief review of the book thus far. We have learned that it is reasonable for people to be religious since there is a creator and we as human beings have bodies that are extremely complex and aspects to our nature that are more than just molecules. We as human beings have metaphysical or spiritual components to our nature.

Furthermore, we have seen that humanity is not doing well. There are ebbs and flows to the conflict, neglect, and suffering, but as the centuries tick by, the pattern and cycle are the same. Individuals make up the collective humanity, and the vast majority will not come out of their cage of self-pride and fear and selfishness and thus will not do what is right on a consistent basis. Therefore, you have what you have as we took a brief sampling of in Chapter 2, "The State of Humankind."

Religion has not changed the human condition in significant, meaningful ways and has in fact been the cause of much conflict – from outright violent wars to everyday animosity. Just look at the Jews in Israel and the Muslims in "Palestine" for a current day example of the animosity and hatred that religion causes (in that example, most of the hatred is coming from the "Palestinians" due in large part to their religion which is used to justify the hatred).

We have learned that the underlying problem with we human beings is that we exist in a cage of self-pride and fear and selfishness and this is the

fundamental cause of all the human conflict and lack-of-cooperation that plagues the human race. From another perspective, that the individual problem forms the collective problems of conflict with people.

We have learned that all solutions, including the most difficult and important ones regarding human nature, can only be solved by using the tools of reason and logic...that reason will always lead to the solutions we need, and logic can identify when we err on that journey. Of course, we need something more than reason and logic, we need a Source to know right from wrong before we can make progress, and our conscience works well enough to point us in the right direction as we seek answers.

We used reason and logic to look at a few important concepts that many people hold in their minds, which thoughts are wrong and get in the way of finding the solution. We saw that existential relativism is a self-defeating belief that should be rejected by those who want to order their reality by that which is true. We saw how many people who hold to relativism are unable to make sound judgments, contradict themselves, and act hypocritically due to the erroneous usage of “judge-mentalism,” “tolerance” and “respect.” We looked at several of the things people use to hide from truth, like complexity, redefining language, “feel good or positive” philosophies, and of course religion.

Having reviewed all those things has enabled us to get to a place to successfully evaluate Christianity and the Christians that make it up and who claim that Christianity is the solution to the world’s problems—to humanity’s problems. We have set the playing field, so to speak, and provided a framework and context to judge whether Christianity is a successful failure.

One last thing we must do before we look at Christianity is to clarify some essential concepts. Without understanding these concepts correctly, we will not be able to evaluate Christianity successfully, or at least we will not be able to arrive at sound, reasoned conclusions.

Important Misunderstood Distinctions

Let us take a close look at some essential concepts and reveal some crucial distinctions among those concepts. Let us start by contrasting the definitions of the critical concepts identified by the terms "belief" and "faith" and "religion."

Belief: A thought, concept or idea held or understood in a person's mind.

Belief is not faith for it does not reside at the core existential level of a person nor do most beliefs require trust of something or someone. Beliefs may or may not drive or influence a person's behavior. Beliefs are metaphysical things.

The term "believe" can refer either to a mere intellectual concept or it can be used synonymously with a faith concept. If a person has a firm conviction

associated with a belief, then they will typically behave consistently with that belief (and its representation in reality) which they value. For example, people are willing to die for various causes, and thus the beliefs associated with those causes are strongly held or perceived as very valuable. For example, some environmentalists have strong beliefs. However, if someone is willing to die for a view – say to protest the way a government is treating people they care about – that does NOT mean they placed their faith in the people they care about or in the belief that the government is wrong.

All people have beliefs about the fundamental questions of life, the purpose of their existence, and what is truly valuable, even agnostics and non-theists and even if they are not willing or able to articulate them.

Faith: Placing one's deep or core level trust, or having confidence in, someone or something to meet some real or perceived need, especially in people/ things which cannot be validated by our senses.

Faith reaches from the heart to the mind, and thus one can articulate into what they have put their faith. Faith is different than belief for it resides at the core level (the “heart” or will) and will always guide behavior...who or what we have our faith in will have behavior consequences.

Many people have some level of faith in something, usually in themselves, money or material things, their religion or a god of their own making, but NOT the Creator or his Messenger who is only revealed by His Messenger.

Religion: People's beliefs and practices regarding God things, spiritual things and the afterlife, which beliefs and practices have NO REASONABLE BASIS in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Religion's primary behavior consequences are ritual and moral “don't do” rules. Without faith, the “don't do” rules are generally not objectively applied or observed but instead are usually followed when one perceives they will benefit from doing so or to avoid punishment.

The world is filled with many religions as well as billions of religious people.

A person can believe that God exists and have other associated God beliefs but that person could not have placed their faith in that God. *In fact, most people reasonably will not put their faith in someone or something they do not know, are not familiar with or of which they are afraid or uncertain.* That is why Joshua taught that everlasting Life itself is facilitated by "knowing God through himself" (John 17:3). If you get to know Joshua by reading his words and deeds, you will likely place your faith in him and the Creator he represents because you will understand his core nature of love, Light, and Life.

A religious person can have many God beliefs that they could be tested on to see if they know them, and take a test and pass that test about their God, but that does not mean they have placed their faith in that God. It also certainly

does not mean they have put their faith in the actual Creator of life on the earth who is only well revealed and represented by Joshua of Nazareth.

A person can –and most do - have faith “in an unknown god,” or a god that is part or all of their own making often created in their likeness and with the same nature. That is why the schizophrenic Bible god is so popular – wrath and love, vengeance and forgiveness!

The world's mass media are confused regarding the distinction between "faith" and "religion," and they work hard to make the terms synonymous. In other words, the world's media on television will as a matter of practice use the terms "faith" and "religion" as meaning the same thing.

The King and His Rules

We have used the concept of faith many times in this book up to this point, and we have defined it several times. However, it is imperative that the reader has a clear understanding of the two terms which are typically used synonymously.

Here is an illustration to help clarify the difference between faith and religion.

There once was a King whose name was Sebastian. He was an outstanding man and was an exceptional leader. He genuinely cared about his subjects throughout his kingdom, and he treated all the servants in his castle really well. As a result, the people in the castle enjoyed working for the King and appreciated all the beneficial things he gave them.

King Sebastian had a handicap that did not allow him to travel easily, so it was difficult for him to go out of the castle and travel around his kingdom. One of the critical tasks he spent his time on was figuring out rules for people in the kingdom. The King wanted his laws to be both fair and just, and he wanted them to both facilitate the freedom of the people in his kingdom as well as prevent conflict. Once every six months, he would publish his latest set of rules for some domain in his kingdom like housing or buying and selling or transportation or resource distribution or conflict resolution. He would have these rules posted on the village squares where all the people could see them and read them.

King Sebastian had both an excellent character and was an outstanding thinker as well, so his rules were excellent and would accomplish what they intended for the people—freedom and peace.

There were four basic kinds of people regarding how they would react to the King's rule postings.

The first kind of person would not even bother to read the rules but would ignore them, and if they ran into a situation where they needed to know the rules, they would deal with that at the time.

The second kind of person would react negatively, along the lines of, “oh, that King thinks he knows better than us. I’m not going to listen to his stupid rules! I want to do what I think is best for me’.

The third kind of person would say something along the lines of, “oh, wow, what a great rule! I can see how that will help us order our lives in this area. That King is very wise; I can’t wait for his rules regarding commerce.”

The last kind of person would read the King's rules—really read them and think about them. After a few readings of the King's laws and thinking about them, they would say something along the lines of, “I need to meet with this King, get to know him and serve him, for he is an exceptional human being.” These people would leave the village they might have lived in for years and set out to find the King and to be with him and serve him in his castle.

And so it is with religion versus faith.

The first two people represent those who don’t believe God exists or that what God wants cannot be known – non-theists and agnostics. They also represent people who are offended to submit to anyone’s authority, believing they are most “free” by living the way THEY want regardless of how their choices might affect other people – anarchists and existential and ethical relativists.

The third person represents the religious people of the earth. Religious people are willing to submit to moral rules and say they believe God exists, but they are NOT willing to change their basic life pattern. In other words, they like assuming that they will survive death and that God will receive them into a happy place, but they are not willing to do anything to hasten or facilitate their being with the God they claim to submit to because there is little or no faith in, or love for, that God!

Religious people like to study “god stuff,” and they like to partake in rituals they enjoy and to gain social contacts through their religion. But they are unwilling to leave their “life in the village” to find, know and serve the King. While they have many god beliefs, and will even kill over them, they lack faith in the One True King and the Father he represents. As stated, they will obey many of the rules, but not the ones that cost them something they value in this life. Most importantly, they don't understand WHY the King gives the rules nor do they want to know why.

The last person is the person who enters into faith in the King. They choose to trust the King to take care of them, and they are no longer bound by fear and a controlling power in their life. They leave their life in the village and journey to the King. They try diligently to get to know the King and what he is like and what he wants so they can express their love for him and serve him well. They experience the King's love and forgiveness and understand that it is love that motivates the King and he gives the rules because he cares about us and wants what is best for us!

Continuing Some Extremely Important Distinctions

So, we can now see the distinction between faith in God and beliefs about God. Those who place their faith in God change, grow, and live differently than the people around them. Those who merely have God beliefs are not

affected by those beliefs if they don't also have faith...they typically do not significantly change themselves or their lifestyles concerning their God beliefs...they will blend into the general culture or society.

God and Religion

Let us continue making essential clarifications and distinctions. Let us focus on the difference between God and religion. Are they the same? No, they are not. God would be a metaphysical being or entity, while religion is the stuff people do or believe in the name of god or to appease or be accepted by their god.

Do you see the difference?

It is like the difference between a famous person (god) and the things that person's fans do to get the famous person's attention or affections (religion). Or like the difference between the real person (god) and that person being described in a non-fiction book about him but written by people who did not know him well (religion).

So religion is the stuff people do – rituals performed or partaken in - or the things they believe about God to be accepted by their god or gods or to try and get to a good after-life; which rituals or beliefs have no basis in the teachings of Joshua of Nazareth. So, can religion bring peace to a person's soul? It might bring a relieving distraction or a temporary comfort or change of focus or even good habits, but will religion consistently bring peace and purpose to a person? No, it will not.

Religion is not a being; therefore religion is not God. Thus, while religious leaders may claim to speak for God, they are not God nor do they have any good way to prove they are accurately representing God with their teachings. Is there a way to get the answers we need directly from God?

Faith and Religion

The world commonly makes faith and religion synonymous, meaning they use the terms interchangeably because they believe they mean the same thing. They are wrong as we have seen. Faith is merely a core level trust or confidence in something or someone, while religion is the beliefs and practices of people regarding God things, spiritual things or metaphysical things apart from the teachings of Joshua of Nazareth.

It should be evident that religion would not have the answers from God in the same way the famous person's fans would not know for sure what kind of person the renowned person is since they do not know him/her personally. If you are looking for answers from the famous person, you need to ask the famous person, not the "stars" fans. The "stars" fans would not know all the things the famous person has done let alone their character or way of life. Only the renowned person themselves (or someone who honestly knew them well, meaning lived with them for a while) could provide, with full assurance,

questions about what they are like, what they want, why they make individual decisions, or about what they value in life or about their existence.

As another analogy, the readers of a book can only know the author if the author tells them about herself in an honest manner. If all the people have are the author's storybooks, then they will have a difficult time personally knowing the author. If, however, the author's good personal friends wrote a biography about the author, then a person could get to know specific vital facts about the author, her character, her motivations and her life.

Therefore religion – the second-hand stuff people claim about God – cannot provide any certain answers about God.

Religious people often do not represent well even the god they claim as their god. Religion is the distorted creation of people claiming they know the Creator. Religion can reveal the Creator just as well as Madison Avenue's marketing claims can reveal the products it describes.

There are often good aspects to religion – it's promoting good moral behavior – but sadly, the bad outweighs the good—distorting the Creator is an evil that far exceeds the ethical aspects. And most importantly, religion prevents people from DOING what the Creator wants.

So what if faith is necessary to “hear” God? How do you know what God in whom to place your faith? What if you put your trust in the wrong god?

Can you have faith in the wrong thing or person? Just ask all the abused children if their faith in the abusing parents was rightly placed. Just ask the boys - who looked to religious leaders to represent God, and who were sexually abused by those men - if they had their faith in the right place.

Religion is *not* the answer, and faith does play an essential role in being able to receive the answers we need. Sadly, most people are putting their faith in the wrong thing, and often that includes a god of their own making.

It is good to believe God exists. It is better to have faith in God, even if you have facts wrong about Him. It is best to have faith in the Creator/Father that Joshua of Nazareth alone reveals.

In the next chapter, we will look at the primary thing that religious leaders have used through the centuries to control people.

Chapter Summary:

- Important distinctions exist between the terms/concepts of “belief”, “religion”, “faith” and “God”;
- All people hold beliefs about their existence and the why's of their existence even if they are unable or unwilling to articulate them. Beliefs about their existence are not faith, and they are not necessarily religious;
- “Religion” is people’s beliefs and practices regarding God things, spiritual things and the afterlife. From Joshua of Nazareth’s

perspective, the definition of religion includes this important qualifier – which beliefs and practices have *no reasonable basis* in his teachings;

- “Faith” is placing one’s deep or core level trust or confidence in someone or something to meet some real or perceived need, especially in someone or something that cannot be validated by our senses;
- "God" is a being or entity, not beliefs about him/her. The actual, real Creator is not the invention of religious people. Instead, He is the Agent or Cause behind human existence—the Creator, Designer, and Father of human beings.