Last time we were together I argued that for the Christian believer belief in God and the great truths of the Gospel are properly basic beliefs which are grounded in the inner witness of God's Holy Spirit.

If that is the case for the believer, what about for the unbeliever? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of an unbeliever? The unbeliever is not regenerate and therefore is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore does not experience the witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth of the Christian faith as we Christians do. Since the unbeliever is bereft of the Holy Spirit, does this mean that he has to rely on arguments and evidence in order to convince him that Christianity is true? I think the answer is no, not at all. According to the Scripture, God has a special ministry of the Holy Spirit which is geared to the needs of the unbeliever in particular. Jesus describes this ministry in John 16:7-11. Jesus says,

> It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Notice here Jesus is addressing the ministry of the Holy Spirit not to the church but to the world. He is talking about people who, as he says, “do not believe in me.” The ministry of the Holy Spirit that is here described is three-fold: he convicts the unbeliever of his own sin, secondly of God’s righteousness, and thirdly of his condemnation before God. The unbeliever who is so convicted can therefore be said to know such truths as “God exists,” “I am guilty before God,” and so forth.

This is the way it has to be. For if it weren’t for the work of the Holy Spirit, no one would ever become a Christian. According to Paul, natural man left to himself does not seek God. Romans 3:10-11: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.” Unregenerate man, Paul says, cannot understand spiritual things – 1 Corinthians 2:14: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” The unregenerate man is hostile to God – Romans 8:7: “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot.” As Jesus said, men love darkness rather than light. Left to himself, unregenerate natural man would never come to God.
The fact that we do find people who are seeking God and who are ready to receive Christ when we share the Gospel with them is evidence that the Holy Spirit has already been at work in their lives, convicting them and drawing them to him. As Jesus said in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

Therefore, when a person refuses to come to Christ, it is never just because of lack of evidence or because of intellectual difficulties with the faith. At root, he refuses to come because he willingly ignores and rejects the drawing of God’s Holy Spirit on his heart.\(^1\) This convicting power and drawing of the Holy Spirit may take time. It may take years in order for the unbeliever to finally come to Christ. Nevertheless, no one in the final analysis really fails to become a Christian because of lack of arguments or evidence; he fails to become a Christian because he loves darkness rather than light and wants nothing to do with God. But anyone who does respond to the drawing of God’s Spirit with an open mind and an open heart can know with assurance that Christianity is true, because God’s Spirit will convict him eventually that it is true. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 7:16-17 – I think two of the most remarkable verses in the New Testament. Jesus said, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man’s will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” Here Jesus said that if anyone is truly seeking God, if his will is to do God's will, then he will know that this teaching is from God or Jesus is just speaking of his own opinion. Jesus is affirming here that if anyone truly wants God's will – is truly seeking God – then he will come to know that Jesus' teaching truly is from God.

So then, I think, for the unbeliever as well as for the believer, it is the testimony of God’s Spirit that ultimately assures him of the truth of Christianity. The unbeliever who is truly seeking God will be convinced of the truth of the Christian message.

### START DISCUSSION

**Student:** I read years ago when I first became a Christian in 2006 a book by Dinesh D'Souza called *What Is So Great About Christianity?*. In that book he talks about this idea of people looking at evidence and trying to get to God and can you argue your way to God? He said for most people, most people don't believe in God because of an argument. Most people just either know that Christianity is true through the witness of the Holy Spirit and that kind of thing. He said if you think about it, if you had to argue your way to God then getting into heaven would be like getting into Harvard. You'd have to be a certain intellectual smart person in order for God to go OK. Dinesh D'Souza said God tends to like more humble folk than us like intellectual whatever. I thought it was a really insightful idea anyway.

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\(^1\) 5:08
Dr. Craig: I agree with you. If God were to just abandon us to our own intelligence and ingenuity to work out whether or not he exists, he would be a very cruel God indeed. But God loves us. He loves people. So by his Holy Spirit he seeks to draw them to himself. That doesn't mean, as we will see, that there aren't evidence and arguments sufficient for knowing the truth of Christianity, but it is to say that they are not necessary and that a loving God can bring people to a knowledge of himself apart from argument if that needs to be the case.

Student: We have been visited in our home by the Mormons. They sit down and the thing they say over and over again is, *I can feel it in my heart. I can feel it in my heart.* How do you explain that? Is it indigestion?

Dr. Craig: I will say something more about this. That question was asked last week as well. I keep putting people off because this is a major objection that we need to deal with. But what I would simply say in a nutshell is this: spurious claims to a witness of the Holy Spirit do nothing to undermine logically the authenticity of a true claim to the Holy Spirit. Just because someone falsely claims to know something by the burning of the bosom or an immediate experience of God doesn't mean that a person who has the genuine article is therefore unwarranted in what he believes. I think that is sufficient to undermine that objection. We will say more about it when we get to it.

Student: When we were in San Francisco, before I was a Christian, they had a church out there – Glad Memorial – that was an incredible ministry to the street people. The drug dealers and the prostitutes and all of the gang members showed up on Sunday morning and they danced around and they sung the songs and they felt great. They left the church and went right back out on the street and did the same things all over again. That is a terrible way – or at the time was a terrible way – for me to see Christianity. I just said, Wow! This is really neat. You can just do whatever you want, as long as you go on Sunday morning and sing.

Dr. Craig: That is what James calls a dead faith – a faith without works. It doesn't have any fruit in a person's life. It is not enough just to go to church for emotional experiences. It needs to manifest itself in your life. If it is a genuine witness of the Holy Spirit that you've received then you will bear the fruit of the Spirit, right? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. These are the fruit of the life of a person who is genuinely indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit.

END DISCUSSION

I've argued that belief in God and the truths of the Gospel are properly basic both for the believer and for the unbeliever alike, grounded in the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Does
this mean that it is simply rational to believe in God and Christianity or does it mean that
this belief is actually warranted? What is the difference between these?

Plantinga distinguishes rationality and warrant. He argues that belief in God is not merely
rational for someone on the basis of the Spirit's witness, but that it is actually warranted
for them so that they can know that God exists. A belief can be rational even though it is
in fact false. When we say that a belief is rational, we mean either that the person doesn't
violate any epistemological duty in believing that. He is within his epistemological rights
in believing that. Or we mean that he exhibits no defect in his cognitive structure. He is
not doing anything wrong or misshapen with regard to his system of beliefs. It is clear
that a belief could be rational in that sense and yet be false. For example, if you were to
meet someone for the first time and he were to say to you, “Hello, my name is Mark,” I
would be rational to believe that his name is Mark. But it is possible that it is not Mark.
He might be lying for some reason to me. It could be some other name. So I would be
rational in believing what turns out to be a false belief. Being properly basic merely
enough to be rational isn't really enough. What we want to know is: is this belief
warranted for us in such a way that we can be said to actually have knowledge of the
existence of God and of Christianity's truth?

In Plantinga’s view we do have warrant and not merely rationality. For Plantinga, the
inner witness of the Holy Spirit is the close analogue of a cognitive faculty that we have.
In that sense it is a belief-forming “mechanism” which can be reliable. He thinks that the
beliefs formed by this “mechanism” meet the conditions for being warranted. Therefore
he would say that we can know the great truths of the Gospel through the witness of the
Holy Spirit. So these are warranted for us. We have genuine knowledge of the truth of the
existence of God and the great things of the Gospel.

Because we know the great truths of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit’s work, it follows
that you don't need to have any evidence for them. Rather they are properly basic for us,
both with respect to rationality and with respect to warrant. Plantinga affirms that
“according to the model, the central truths of the Gospel are self-authenticating,” that is
to say, “They do not get their evidence or warrant by way of being believed on the
evidential basis of other propositions.”

I've argued that this is in accord with New Testament teaching. For the believer and
unbeliever alike it is the self-authenticating work of the Holy Spirit that supplies
knowledge of Christianity's truth. So I would agree with Plantinga that belief in the God
of the Bible is a properly basic belief and I would simply emphasize that it is the
testimony of the Holy Spirit that grounds this belief and therefore makes it properly
basic. And because this belief is formed in response to God's own witness (God's own

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self-disclosure via the witness of the Holy Spirit), it doesn't need any external authentication. It is not merely rational for us to believe what God says, but it constitutes knowledge. We actually have knowledge of Christianity’s truth through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

What then is the role of argument and evidence in knowing Christianity's truth? I’ve already said that the fundamental way in which we know the truth of Christianity is through the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the only role that is left for argument and evidence to play is a subsidiary role. Here I think Martin Luther correctly distinguished between what he called the magisterial and the ministerial uses of reason. What are these? The magisterial role of reason occurs when reason stands over and above the Gospel like a magistrate and judges its truth or falsity on the basis of argument and evidence. By contrast, the ministerial use of reason occurs when reason submits to and serves the Gospel message. In light of the Holy Spirit’s witness, I would say that only the ministerial use of reason is legitimate. Philosophy is rightly the handmaid of theology. Reason is a God-given tool to help us better understand and defend our faith; as St. Anselm put it, ours is a faith that seeks understanding. A person who knows that Christianity is true on the basis of the witness of the Holy Spirit may also have a sound apologetic which reinforces for him the truth of what the Holy Spirit says. We can imagine a person who has both the witness of the Holy Spirit and good arguments from natural theology and Christian evidences for the great truths of the Gospel. This person can be said to have a kind of dual warrant for the truth of his Christian beliefs. Such a person is doubly warranted in his Christian belief in the sense that he has two sources of warrant for what he believes which are independent of each other.

I think you can see there can be great advantages to having this sort of dual warrant for your Christian beliefs. Having sound arguments for the existence of a God and evidence for the reliability of the Gospels in addition to the Holy Spirit's witness in your life could increase your confidence in the truth of Christian truth claims. On Plantinga’s theory, at least, that would mean you have then greater warrant for what you believe as a result of these arguments and evidence as well as the Holy Spirit's witness. Greater warrant then, in turn, could lead, for example, an unbeliever to come to faith more readily when he sees this great warrant that Christianity has, or it could inspire a believer to share his faith more boldly because he has greater warrant for what he believes and therefore more confidence. Moreover, the availability of independent warrant for Christian truth claims which are apart from the work of the Holy Spirit might prompt an unbeliever to be more open to the drawing of the Holy Spirit when he hears the Gospel.4 He might not come to Christ because of the arguments he hears but nevertheless these might make him more

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open to responding to the Holy Spirit when the Spirit bears witness with his heart. Or, in
the case of the believer, having independent arguments and evidence could give the
believer support during times of spiritual dryness or doubt when he is struggling in his
Christian life and the witness of the Holy Spirit seems eclipsed. Then having this
independent warrant could shore up his faith when going through these times of doubt or
struggle. I am sure you could think of many, many other ways in which this sort of dual
warrant would be of great benefit in the Christian life.

So I would argue that as Christians we have in the work of the Holy Spirit and in the
arguments of natural theology and Christian evidences dual warrant for the truth of our
Christian beliefs so that we can be said to know these things via these two sources of
warrant.

START DISCUSSION

Student: What do you think makes a person to hold either magisterial use of reason or
ministerial use of reason?

Dr. Craig: What would make a person hold to either one?

Student: Yes. Does the Holy Spirit have any effect in changing their basis?

Dr. Craig: Well, I would say that a person who holds to the magisterial view of reason
may not have reflected sufficiently upon the data of the New Testament about how we
can come to know Christian truths through the witness of the Holy Spirit, and that that
Spirit can be so powerful that it can even overcome objections and defeaters of the
Christian belief. I am persuaded that what I've said is right in line with New Testament
teaching. My belief that Luther was right in thinking that the ministerial use of reason is
correct is that I just can't imagine any circumstances under which a person would be
justified in apostatizing. I can't imagine any circumstances in which a person would find
himself where the rational thing for him to do – the thing that he should do – is to reject
Jesus Christ out of his life and revert back to being a non-Christian again. Apostasy
seems to me as an unforgivable sin. It can only be unforgivable if a person could never be
justified in doing it. Yet, on a magisterial view of reason one can easily imagine
circumstances in which believers might find themselves where they don't know the
answers to the objections and the arguments that are brought against them and so if they
just follow the arguments and evidence they should de-convert – they should apostatize.
To my mind that is just unconscionable. There must be – there's got to be! – some other
warrant that would enable the person justifiably to persevere in his faith despite his
inability to answer the objections.
Student: Would you say that at the decision of accepting Christ a person makes such a shift? Would you say that that is what that decision does to a person when they actually shift from magisterial use of reason into a ministerial use?

Dr. Craig: I don't think so. As I've argued, I think also for the unbeliever ultimately the reason an unbeliever fails to come to God is because he willingly rejects and ignores the drawing of God's Holy Spirit on his heart. Otherwise an unbeliever like Bertrand Russell, say, might be able to stand before God on the Judgment Day . . . Russell was actually asked this by a woman. She said, *What would you say if you found yourself standing before God on the Judgment Day?* And Russell replied, *I would say not enough evidence, God. Not enough evidence.* Well, some people might be able to be justified in saying that if there were no witness of the Holy Spirit. Imagine somebody raised in Soviet Russia who never had a chance to hear the Gospel and was indoctrinated with Marxist propaganda at the university. Such a person might find himself in that sort of situation. Yet I don't think, again on the New Testament, anybody would ever be justified in rejecting Jesus Christ. Nobody would be able to stand before God on the Judgment Day and excuse his unbelief by saying there wasn't enough evidence. I think that it is the witness of the Holy Spirit that is the fundamental factor in how we know Christianity to be true. Even people who have been given no good reason to believe and persuasive reasons to disbelieve are still ultimately accountable before God because the reason that they do not believe is ultimately because they reject and ignore God's own testimony to the truth of the Gospel.

Student: How does the passage in Romans 2 about God's law written on one's heart tie in with this?

Dr. Craig: Let's look at that passage. Romans 2:14-16,

> When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

I take it that what Paul is teaching here is that the demands of God's moral law are also properly basic, and that people have an inherent knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil, so that the religious relativist or nihilist who thinks that there are no objective moral values and duties is flouting this properly basic belief which is written on his heart by God. I don't think that the passage is teaching that belief in God is properly basic, but I do think that the passage you cite is teaching that a knowledge of fundamental good and evil, right and wrong, is written on our hearts and is properly basic and therefore we are
accountable before God for our failure to live up to the demands of the moral law. That would provide a nice analogy perhaps to belief in God as properly basic.

*Student:* Wouldn't there have to be a basis – a standard – for the right and wrong?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, absolutely! And that is why I would argue for the existence of God on the basis of objective moral values and duties. What I would say is something like this. Objective moral values and duties exist. Second, if God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist. Three, therefore God exists. I think that is a good moral argument for God's existence. The first premise – that there are objective moral values and duties – I would say is a properly basic belief that is grounded in our moral experience.

*Student:* I wonder how you employ this when you are debating against a pious member of another religion. Shabir Ally, for example, himself admitted that he refused to use reason or evidence magisterially against the Qur'an. Remember when he talks about Jesus he says, *I start with the Qur'an.* And you criticized him for doing that. You said, *That is not how proper scholarship is done.*

*Dr. Craig:* Ah, right. Because we were debating on historical questions. But I think that the Muslim has every right to claim that his belief is properly basic and is in the witness of Allah in his heart. But I think he is just mistaken as I was saying earlier about the Mormons. This is getting back to this same question again about what about people who falsely pretend to a witness of the Spirit.

*Student:* I was wondering how you come up with that distinction. How do we decide which system is right without using reason magisterially or using evidence magisterially to decide between this or that?

*Dr. Craig:* The very point of calling it self-authenticating is that for the person who has the genuine authentic witness of the Holy Spirit it authenticates itself. He doesn't need arguments or reason. For the person who really has it, he knows he has it. It is the person who doesn't have it and who has a false counterfeit religious experience who is in trouble and whose confidence may be shaken when we present arguments and evidence against his view. That will be the hope – because we know he doesn't really have an authentic witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth of Mormonism or Islam – that when we share these arguments and evidence against Mormonism and Islam that they may penetrate and shake his confidence and he may lose his confidence in this false religion to which he adheres.

*Student:* It seems like we sometimes use the word “know” and “believe” interchangeably. It seems that we can believe without doubt, but that is different than knowing?
Dr. Craig: Right. That is right. I am glad you brought this up. When my son was 17 years old, he was certain about a lot of things. *Trust me, Dad,* he'd say. And he was wrong. He had belief without doubt, but that didn't mean that he knew those things. Certainty is neither a sufficient condition for knowledge nor a necessary condition for knowledge. You can know things without being certain of them, and you can be certain of falsehoods that you don't really know. What converts true belief (say you have a true belief) into knowledge? It is this elusive quality that Plantinga calls “warrant.” If the belief is in some way warranted for you in sufficient measure then you can be said to know that. But do not equate the word “knowing” with being certain of something. Certainty is a psychological property that is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowledge.

Student: So we walk by faith and not by sight. Doesn't that imply that we don't really know?

Dr. Craig: That was mentioned in the morning service today and made me reflect on that as the pastor was talking about walking by faith and not by sight. It seemed to me that a good example of the Christian life walking by faith and not by sight would be dealing with evils and disasters and suffering that come into our lives for which we see no sufficient reason. When something horrible happens to you – you back out of your driveway and accidentally run over your little daughter that was playing behind the car and you never saw her; horrible things like that that happen – and you can see no good reason for that at all, those are circumstances in which like Job, I think, we walk by faith and not by sight. We don't see God's morally justifying reasons for allowing such things, but we trust him as we go through those. Is that a blind faith? No! Because we have good reasons to believe that God exists. We have the witness of the Holy Spirit; we have the arguments of natural theology. We are warranted in believing that God exists and that he loves us and has our best interests at heart. So when we see things like these terrible catastrophes happening, it is in those kind of circumstances that we need to walk by faith and not by sight.

Student: In saying things like, *There can never be a reason why you would ever de-convert,* or that, *These experiences are enough,* so no one ever gets into heaven through evidence, are we divorcing faith from reason?

Dr. Craig: I didn't say that, though. I never said that nobody gets into [heaven] through evidence. I never said that. What I said was that it is not necessary to have this warrant because you have the warrant of the Holy Spirit so you can get into heaven without argument and evidence. But you can get into heaven through the arguments and evidence, too, if they lead you to put your faith in Christ. What I said before, again, was that no one could ever justifiably apostatize or justifiably resist until the end of his life believing in God because any intellectual difficulties or problems that he might have I would say will...
simply be overcome by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Again, think of what Jesus said: if any man's will is to do God's will then he will know whether my teaching is from God.7

Student: Remind us that ministerial witnessing is important to us and our growth. If you look at Revelation 12:10-11 – the basic part is “For they conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their own testimony.” As we witness with love, ministering, God will open ourselves up and God will be able to show us deeper into his Word. There is time for magisterial arguments to defend the position in the Earth but for witnessing and saving others you have to have love for them and that actually ministers to you. He gives you deeper insight; shows you firmer truth and what to look at next. It is important to have both. As far as everybody having properly basic – God calls everybody accountable to know what they have in their testimony, so it is up to us to witness and then the Holy Spirit is stronger than anybody else's witness. What they are testifying to is spirit beings that are inserting themselves. They are idols. That is what ...

Dr. Craig: I think you are making a good point. Don't you believe that the Holy Spirit is more powerful and can overcome the false testimony that a Muslim experiences to the truth of the Qur'an or Allah? Do you really think that God is so weak that he can't overcome that sort of psychological experience? I think he can.

Student: And if the conviction when you witness to him and you tell him that, just accept it. That is God. Don't discount it. He is telling you you've got an error in your way. That is rejecting the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Craig: The role of the Holy Spirit, remember, is “to convict those who do not believe in me of sin and righteousness and judgment.” Share your faith, trusting the Holy Spirit to secretly be at work in the person's heart.

Student: You have to do it with love and they have to see it or else they will never trust in that conviction.

Dr. Craig: That's right.

END DISCUSSION

What we will talk about next time is this now long-delayed objection about defeaters. What about the person who has the witness of the Holy Spirit in his heart but encounters objections or arguments against his faith which he cannot answer? How do we deal with the rationality and the warrant of belief in Christianity in that kind of difficult circumstance? That is the question we will take up next time.8