



By

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Thoughts About Defining Faith

Many atheists are attacking the Christian worldview based on changing the definition of the word “faith.”

Some of them define faith as “belief without evidence,” “irrational belief in something despite all evidence to the contrary,” and “belief not supported by evidence or reason, but assumption alone.”

Others define it as “pretending to know things that you don’t know,” “glorified ignorance,” and “the ability to believe in something in which there is no physical evidence that even exists.”

Interesting.

I spent 30 minutes searching for current definitions online from a wide variety of **non-religious** sources. Each is the ‘first’ definition listed by each source. Take a look and see if the atheist definitions line up with the rest of the world.

- *“complete trust or confidence in someone or something” ...
OxfordDictionaries.com and MacMillanDictionary.com*
- *“a high degree of trust or confidence in something or someone”
... Cambridge Dictionaries Online*
- *“strong belief or trust in someone or something” ... Merriam-Webster.com*
- *“the assent of the mind to the truth of what*

- is declared by another, resting solely and implicitly on his authority and veracity; reliance on testimony” ... Webster’s 1913 Dictionary*
- *“confidence or trust in a person or thing” ... Dictionary.com and Random House Kernerman Webster’s College Dictionary*
 - *“complete confidence in a person or plan etc” ... Vocabulary.com*
 - *“**Faith** is defined as confidence or trust in a being, object, living organism, deity, view, or in the doctrines or teachings of a religion, as well as confidence based on some degree of warrant.” ... Wikipedia.org*
 - *“strong belief or trust in someone or something” ... LearnersDictionary.com*
 - *“Faith is defined as trust or confidence” ... YourDictionary.com*

The Word Faith in Any Other Language Would Mean:

- *The word “faith” comes to us from the Latin word fides, which means “trust, confidence.”*
- *The Greek word translated into English as “faith” is pistis, which means “trust, confidence.”*
- *One of the Hebrew words translated into English as “faith” is amanah, which means “agreement, covenant, certain portion, something fixed.”*
- *The German word translated into English as “faith” is glaube, which means “trust, credence, persuasion.”*
- *The French word translated into English as “faith” is foi, which*

- means “credence, belief.”*
- *The Spanish and Portuguese word translated into English as “faith” is fe, which means “conviction, confidence.”*
 - *The Italian word translated into English as “faith” is fede, which means “confidence, trust.”*
 - *The Russian word translated into English as “faith” is bepa, which means “trust, confidence.”*
 - *The Turkish word translated into English as “faith” is inanç, which means “conviction, confidence.”*
 - *The Chinese word translated into English as “faith” is xinyang, which means “conviction, confidence.”*
 - *The Japanese word translated into English as “faith” is shinko, which means “conviction, confidence.”*

It would seem that most of the world agrees, based on definition, that Christian **faith** is “*confidence based on evidence.*”

Thoughts About the Worth of Faith

Atheist philosopher Peter Boghossian believes that **faith is pretending to know things you don't know** (May 6, 2012 public lecture – richarddawkins.net/). As a former atheist, I find that statement both challenging and strange. Let me explain why.

We need to first understand the use of terms for the purpose of enlightened dialog. According to one English dictionary, the word **faith** means “strong belief or trust in someone or something” (Merriam-Webster). Another English dictionary defines faith as “complete trust or confidence in someone or something” (Oxford Dictionaries). From those two well-established and recognized knowledge sources for the English language we understand that faith is strong or complete trust and confidence in a person or a thing.

Those English definitions fit well with the use of the word faith in the New Testament, written in Koine Greek (Common Greek). A primary Greek word for “faith” in the New Testament is *pistis*. It is the idea of a strong confidence in the truth of someone or something that leads to trust based on that strong confidence. It comes from the root word *peitho*, which means “to be persuaded.” A person who has “faith” in the New Testament sense has been persuaded to trust by a strong confidence based on truth. Truth is defined in English as “the real facts about something, the things that are true” (Merriam-Webster) and “that which is true or in accordance with fact or reality”

(Oxford Dictionaries). The word **truth** in Koine Greek is *aletheia* and means “what is objectively true.”

Next, let’s look at the word “pretend.” It is defined in English dictionaries as “to act as if something is true when it is not true” (Merriam-Webster) and “speak and act so as to make it appear that something is the case when in fact it is not” (Oxford Dictionaries).

The word “know” means “to understand (something), to have a clear and complete idea of (something)” (Merriam-Webster) and “be aware of through observation, inquiry, or information” (Oxford Dictionaries). The primary Koine Greek word for “know” is *ginosko* and means “understand, perceive, have knowledge of.”

So, what is Professor Boghossian saying? That “faith” which is a strong or complete trust or confidence in someone or something is really just “pretending to know,” which is acting as if something is true when it is not true.” Does the professor’s use of the English language seem contradictory? (contradictory – “a proposition so related to another that if either of the two is true the other is false and if either is false the other must be true” Merriam-Webster)

Yes, I believe Dr. Boghossian, who is a teacher of philosophy (*philosophia* – friend, lover of wisdom), either misunderstands the usage of both the English and Koine Greek languages or may be purposely using contradictory terms for the purpose of misleading and misdirecting. I will assume that he lacks the understanding of the terms rather than suppose a purpose of misdirection.

I was an atheist more than four decades ago, so it may be that atheists have changed their view about people of “faith” since then. I thought religious people were ignorant and uninformed about truth, but I didn’t think they were pretending. I just thought they were putting their faith in the wrong thing. As an atheist I believed that God did not exist. That’s where I placed my “strong confidence” (faith). I trusted that what I believed was based on “truth.”

What happened to me, that has happened to many other atheists, was to investigate the truth claims of Christianity and find them true. What is a free-thinking truth-seeker to do with truth? Believe it or only pretend to believe it? To know that something is not true but pretend to believe it is true is at best unreasonable and at worst fraudulent.

I do not view my beliefs to be either unreasonable or fraudulent. I do not view the beliefs of other former atheists who now believe in God to be either unreasonable or fraudulent. We are not playing games nor are we pretending. We know what we believe and believe what we know. That is faith.

The strong confidence that I and other former atheists have in Christianity is based on evidence that we have investigated and determined to be true. If atheists investigate that same evidence and determine it to not be true, are either of us pretending? No, we have a difference of opinion about the credibility or factualness of the evidence. We both have “faith” in what we believe about the

evidence. I understand why people have differing views about evidence and accept that as part of the truth-determining process. However, for Dr. Boghossian to claim that what I and other former atheists have done is to pretend to know things that we don't know is naïve at best and dishonest at worst.

Dr. Boghossian has recently published a new book entitled *A Manual for Creating Atheists*. The book description on Amazon.com reads in part – “As an urgently needed counter to this tried-and-true tradition of religious evangelism, *A Manual for Creating Atheists* offers the first-ever guide not for talking people into faith—but for talking them out of it.” The good professor is an “evangelist” for atheism. The English word is a transliteration of the Greek word *euaggelistés*, which means “bearer of good tidings, one who brings good news.” What is that good news? The book's description continues – “Peter Boghossian draws on the tools he has developed and used for more than twenty years as a philosopher and educator to teach how to engage the faithful in conversations that will help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their religious beliefs, mistrust their faith, abandon superstition and irrationality, and ultimately embrace reason.”

So, the good news of atheism is to embrace reason. What does that mean? The word **reason** means “a statement or fact that explains why something is the way it is, why someone does, thinks, or says something, or why someone behaves a certain way, a statement offered in explanation or justification, a sufficient ground of

explanation or of logical defense” (Merriam-Webster) and “a cause, explanation, or justification for an action or event, the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgments by a process of logic” (Oxford Dictionaries).

The Greek word translated “reason” in the New Testament is *nous* and means “the mind, comprising alike the faculties of perceiving and understanding and those of feeling, judging, determining the intellectual faculty, the understanding reason in the narrower sense, as the capacity for spiritual truth.”

So, how does embracing reason as an atheist differ from embracing reason as a theist if both are using the power of their minds to think, understand, and form judgments by a process of logic during the search for causes, explanations or justifications for an action or event? Dr. Boghossian may have a low opinion of the power of a Christian’s mind to think, understand, and form judgments (I know I did when I was an atheist), but that low opinion does not logically lead to believing that Christians pretend to know what they do not know. To say that out loud is both unreasonable and embarrassing for the professor. He may have done better to emphasize his belief that faith is a “cognitive sickness” and that those who attempt to get to the truth using faith are delusional (philosophynews.com). Christians are used to being called names, so that’s fine if the professor wants to do that. However, to move from name calling to illogical and unreasonable claims about the meaning of faith seems beneath the position of an instructor in knowledge and wisdom at the college level.

So, what is the Christian response to the ongoing discussion between atheist and theist? For one thing, we have a serious difference of opinion about evidence. I became a Christian based on evidence, the same evidence my atheist friends deny. We can't both be right, so someone is wrong. I believe that atheism is wrong and theism is right, therefore my decision to become a Christian. However, based on the Christian belief that God created the human race and deemed people important enough to send His Son to sacrifice Himself for them so that they could know the truth and be set free, I believe it's important to have and demonstrate God's love for all who disagree. That includes Dr. Boghossian and other atheists who have as their goal turning believers from faith in God to, as they say, embrace reason.

The publication of his "Manual for Creating Atheists" strengthens our determination to reach more people than ever with the truly good news that God is alive and offers salvation to all who will have "faith."

Thoughts About What Is This Faith We Defend

First, let's look at the answer for the first part of the question – **What Is This Faith?**

- We believe in God.
- We believe in the God of the Bible.
- We believe the Bible is God's Word.
- We believe God Created the universe and everything in it.
- We believe God is actively involved in the universe and everything in it.
- We believe God is more powerful than anything He Created.
- We believe God has spoken to the people of the world through prophets and His Son.
- We believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son.
- We believe that Jesus Christ is the Brightness of His Father's Glory and the Express Image of His Father's Person.
- We believe that Jesus Christ was born miraculously to a virgin.
- We believe that Jesus Christ is the Promised Messiah of Israel.
- We believe that Jesus Christ purged our sins by dying for us on the Cross in Israel 20 centuries ago.
- We believe that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and sat down at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High.
- We believe that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords and Rules over His Body, the Church.
- We believe that Jesus Christ will return for His Body, the Church, and they will be with Him forever wherever He goes.

- We believe that Jesus Christ will destroy the armies of the world and rule on earth for a thousand years.
- We believe that the dead, small and great, will stand before God and that Jesus Christ will Judge them according to their works.
- We believe that anyone not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.
- We believe that Jesus Christ will destroy heaven and earth and Create a new heaven, a new earth and a New Jerusalem.
- We believe that God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of those who live with Him in eternity and that they will never again experience death, sorrow, crying, nor pain.
- We believe that Heaven and Eternal Life will be the most amazing experience of our life – the best part being that we will be **with God forever!**

The next part of the question is the **defense** of this Faith. Jesus defended the Faith with His **Life**. The Apostles defended the Faith with their lives. Tens of thousands of Christians of the early Church defended the Faith with their lives. Millions of Christians around the world today are defending the Faith with their lives. It is God's Will that we defend the Faith with our lives. Why? Because the Christian Faith is **worth defending**.

People defend themselves – they defend their honor – they defend their families – they defend their possessions – they defend their property – they defend the innocent – they defend the weak – they

defend their country. What is greater than any of these? The **Faith** Jesus Christ gave us through His Great Sacrifice. That is worth defending. That is why we prepare ourselves to give an answer (*apologia* – defense) for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). We prepare for so many other things in life – dinner, work, getting together with family and friends, vacations – shouldn't we prepare for something even greater than these things? That's the defense of the Christian Faith.

Does this stir something inside of you? Excellent! That means you're listening to God. He has made His Will clear to us. Everything God says to His children in His Word is that nothing is more important than defending the Faith. Listen to what He says about those who give their lives in defense of the Faith –

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” Hebrews 11:32-40.

Do you want to live a life that pleases God? Do you want your life to count for something really special? Something eternal? Then prepare to defend the Faith!

Why We Need Faith Defense

The art of **faith defense** is as old as the history of the human race. In fact, faith defense was the first art God taught the first human being.

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”
Genesis 2:15-17

God Created Adam, then placed him in the Garden of Eden and told him to “tend and keep it.” Remember that Moses, the author of Genesis, wrote everything God told him about the beginning of all things in the Hebrew language. What do the words “tend and keep it” mean in ancient Hebrew. “Tend” means to “work, labor” in the Garden. “Keep” means to “guard, protect, keep safe, preserve” the Garden. We understand that a garden needs someone working in it to plant and harvest, but why the need to protect it?

God had a powerful enemy – not as powerful as God, but still powerful. That meant what God Created for Himself had an enemy. That included the earth and the human race. That’s why God taught the first human the importance of **faith defense** at the very beginning of his life on earth. God Created Adam and Eve to rule and reign on earth with Him. Part of ruling with God meant guarding the earth from

the enemy. How would Adam do that? By obeying every command of God. What was God's first command to Adam? "... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." That's how faith defense began.

God requires faith defense from all His people. Read through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and you'll see thousands of people God has told to defend the faith. The Faith is God's Word and faith in it. God's Word has been under attack for thousands of years and the Lord is still calling on His people to defend it. In the weeks and months to come, we will learn together about defending the faith.

Thoughts About Defending the Faith in Your Community – Every Day

Ask a Christian to “defend the faith” and you get a variety of reactions. “Why does the ‘faith’ need defending? God can take care of Himself.” “How do I do that?” “I don’t want to do that!” “Are you serious? I wouldn’t know how.” “Isn’t that for professionals?” “Me? I’m not one of those ‘apologists.’ I’m just a Christian.”

Whatever your reaction, the fact is that every Christian can and should “defend the faith” in their community “every day.” Here’s an example from something you may have experienced.

When the officer in charge calls a group of soldiers to attention, then to a ready position, the officer expects everyone to move at the command. The command to attention and ready is not just for captains or majors or colonels or generals. It is for everyone preparing for the field of battle – from the new recruit to the oldest soldier.

When a martial arts instructor calls the class to attention, then to a ready position, it is not just for the Black Belts to obey the command. It is for everyone from the new White Belt student to the highest ranking Black Belt. Being ready for battle or self defense is for everyone.

We have a saying in martial arts that you can be attacked “anywhere, anytime, by anyone.” That’s why the first lessons in martial arts deal with the importance of being ready to defend.

Here’s how that applies to **defending the faith in your community**.

Defining Terms

“**defend**” – guard and protect with words and actions; stand up for what you believe; help other people understand what you believe, why you believe it, and why they should believe it through informed answers based on reason

“**the faith**” – vital beliefs based on truth

“**in your community**” – your sphere of influence ... family, friends, neighbors, school and work mates, people who serve you in the community, fellow Christians

“**every day**” – every 24-hour day you are alive

The Apostle Peter wrote to a group of Jewish believers who had gone through some hard times for believing that Jesus was Israel’s promised Messiah. They were moms and dads, boys and girls, grandparents, working people, regular folks – “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” (1 Peter 1:1-2) To this group of “pilgrims,” Peter

told them “defend the faith.”

“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” 1 Peter 3:13-17

The words “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” in the Greek are *hetoimoi aei pros apologian panti to aitounti humas logon peri tes en humin elpidos*.

“be ready” – *hetoimoi* means to be prepared. In a Christian martial arts class, after bowing to God and demonstrating respect to each other in class, we move to a “ready” position call *yoi* (Japanese) or *joon bee* (Korean). The idea in the original languages is being ready, focused, and engaged at all times. Being “ready” is the way a true martial artist lives. It’s not something we do just for class or when the teacher is watching. We are to always “be ready” to defend ourselves or others who may need our help. The same is true for Christians. We are to be “ready” at all times. It is not something we do just for Bible study class or worship time with other believers. We are to be

hetoimoi at all times.

“to give a defense” – *aei pros apologian* means to give an answer. The Greek legal system included a person who brought a charge against another person and the people who acted as jurors and would vote for or against the one charged. The person who brought the charge or accusation came ready to give a *kategoria*. That was the list of charges or accusations. The person who answered the charges against him came ready to give an *apologia*. That was the spoken defense the accused would give to the list of charges or accusations.

“to everyone” – *panti to* means every person. Someone trained in self defense is not selective about who they defend themselves against. We are ready to defend against “everyone” who would try to harm us or others. The same is true for Christians. We are ready to give a defense against every person who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us.

“a reason for the hope that is in you” – *logon* or *logos* is translated here as “reason.” It also translates as “word.” The ancient Greek idea of *logos* was that it was a plea, opinion, reason, word, expectation, account. The ancient philosopher Heraclitus used *logos* for a principle of knowledge and order. Jesus Christ is called the eternal *Logos* (see John 1:1-18). The word “hope” is *elpidos*. It is “a confident expectation based on what is certain.” The hope of a Christian is based on the certainty of what God has declared in His Holy Word.

Why would people ask a Christian about the “hope” that is in them? In the case of the “pilgrims” Peter wrote to centuries ago, they were undergoing intense persecution – the kind of persecution that would lead people of lesser faith in their “faith” to give in and say and do whatever the persecutors wanted. Peter, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, called on these persecuted believers to be ready at all times to answer the charges brought against them – charges that were based on “the hope” that was in them.

If you are reading this today and are under intense persecution for the hope of Christ in you, you know what Peter is talking about. However, the majority of you reading this today are not under intense persecution. You and I live, at least for now, under little if any real persecution for our faith in Christ. So, does this mean we don’t need to give anyone an answer until we are under intense persecution? No, we should not wait. We should take advantage of the freedom we have in our world to share reasonable answers for everyone who has questions about Jesus Christ.

Take a piece of paper and make three columns:

Person

Question

Answer

Write the name of all the people you have contact with on any regular basis. Then, write the questions they have asked about the hope that is in you. Then, pray about the answer(s) you will share with them. This is an important part of your ministry strategy.

It is helpful to see the names of the people God has brought into your life. It may be parents, grandparents, children, friends, neighbors, people at work or school, or people you talk with regularly during the week (e.g. postal workers, store clerks, service people). Having the names of people in your lives written on a piece of paper helps from their getting lost in the busy-ness of our lives.

It is also helpful to write their questions next to their names because it reminds us of their spiritual need. How we think about people every day is how we'll treat them every day. If we think about their spiritual needs, we'll address their spiritual needs every time we talk with them. Remember that every person is a "spiritual" being. They are more than physical beings with physical needs only. They are also spiritual with spiritual needs. They have questions, we have answers.

If you see someone with a physical need, what do you do? You help them. If you see someone with a spiritual need, what do you do? You help them. People need answers to spiritual questions even as they need answers to physical questions.

Something to keep in mind is that we are not the only people with answers to spiritual questions. If we don't have good answers to the spiritual questions of people in our lives, someone else may answer their questions with wrong answers. We need to be ready with the right answer to every question that every person asks every day. Sound like a big task? It is.

What should you do if you want to learn how to defend yourself against bullies or armed attackers? Find a good teacher who can train you in **self defense**. What should you do if you want to learn how to give an answer for the hope that is in you? Find a good teacher who can train you in **faith defense**.

Just like trained martial arts instructors, trained apologists stand ready to help you through their books, articles, blogs, podcasts, videos, and speaking. Find some good teachers and get some good answers. Be ready!

Thoughts About Leaving the Faith

What's up with so many people 'leaving the faith'? Why are they doing it?

First, we need to define two terms:

What does it mean to 'leave' something or someone?

What does it mean to leave 'the faith'?

I understand walking away from a weak belief in something, but 'leaving the faith?' That's hard to fathom for several reasons.

Leaving

Primary definitions for the word 'leave' include: 'go away from; to go out of or away from, as a place; to depart from permanently; quit.'

In each of these primary definitions we see the idea of leaving a place *where we had been*. If someone told you that they had 'left' Philadelphia this morning, you would understand them to mean that they had been *in* Philadelphia for some period of time before leaving the city to travel to another place. By definition, a person who 'leaves' something or somewhere has to have physically had something or been present somewhere before they would be able 'leave' that

something or somewhere.

What people are claiming to be leaving in our context is both a *something* and a *Someone*. By definition they would be claiming to leave something they had been present in for some time and Someone they had known personally.

The Faith

Primary definitions for 'the faith' include:

'complete trust or confidence in someone or something; belief in God or in a set of religious doctrines.'

The 'faith' that many people are claiming to 'leave' is known as the 'Christian faith.' That's the complete trust or confidence in Jesus Christ and the claims He has made about Himself.

People who follow the 'Christian faith' are known as 'disciples' or 'followers' of Jesus Christ. Claiming to have been a member of the Christian 'faith' would imply they had joined according to membership guidelines determined by the Founder.

First, let's learn something about the Founder of the Christian 'faith.'

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light

of men ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-3, 14

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-11

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in

all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” Colossians 1:13-20

Based on who the Founder is, let's hear what He said about people becoming His followers:

*“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’”
Mark 8:34-38*

The Founder of the Christian ‘faith’ personally called more than a dozen men to become leaders of ‘the faith’ and to teach people how to follow the Founder and what guidelines would be necessary to following Him. Here are a few of the guidelines for becoming a ‘follower’ of Jesus Christ.

1. Agreeing with God about who we are without Christ.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Ephesians 2:1-3

2. Understanding that our spiritual salvation is totally dependent on God’s love, grace, mercy and kindness.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:4-9

3. Repenting before God judges the world.

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone,

something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:29-31

4. Trusting in Christ alone knowing your life depends on it.

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.' Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having

believed in God with all his household.” Acts 16:25-34

Being a ‘follower’ of Jesus Christ brings about a radical change in the life of a human being.

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:40-47

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26:19-20

“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:20-24

Really?

Given all that the New Testament teaches about what it means to be a true ‘follower’ of Jesus Christ, I need to ask a question: REALLY? True followers of Jesus Christ are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have bowed their knee to the Lord Jesus Christ in true humility and repentance are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have known the depth of God’s love and mercy for their soul and had full confidence in the truth of God’s Word are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have seen the life-changing power of the Gospel in their own lives are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have been involved in sharing the love of Jesus Christ with others and have seen the Holy Spirit change lives through the power of the Gospel of Christ are ‘leaving the faith?’ **Really?**

A Personal Story

I was once accused of ‘leaving the faith.’ I went forward during a church service at the age of ten and said I wanted to ‘join the church.’ That meant attending several classes, praying a prayer and being baptized. I did those things and become a young member of our church. I was allowed to attend ‘church meetings’ at the age of 12. That’s where I started learning about the underbelly of the church and I didn’t like what I saw.

Something else I did at the age of 12 was begin studying yoga and martial arts. In addition to learning about stretching and self defense, I also learned about world views other than Christianity. I went on to study Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. I especially liked Buddhism and Taoism because they were related to my martial arts training. I also loved to read and spent a lot of time at the library. I came upon the writings of David Hume and Bertrand Russell and read everything by them that I could find. I identified with what they wrote about religion.

Interestingly, at the same time I was finding great agreement with ancient Eastern mysticism and with agnosticism and atheism, I was still very involved at my church. I often won contests about Bible knowledge, sang in the choir and was a leader in the youth group. You might imagine what people thought and some said when I became an atheist in my late teens. Some accused me of ‘leaving the

faith.'

Question: was I ever 'in' the faith so that I could 'leave' the faith? I know I wasn't because of what I learned it meant to be a Christ follower. I became a Christian after investigating the claims of the Bible and determining that the evidence for the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ outweighed the arguments against it – arguments that I had strongly presented as an atheist radio talk show host. I learned what it means to have a 'personal relationship' with God after I repented of my sins and asked His forgiveness and His Holy Spirit cleansed me from all unrighteousness. Everything changed on the day I was 'saved' and 'sealed' for God's service.

"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

Conclusion

I seriously question how many of the people claiming to ‘leave the faith’ today were actually ‘in the faith.’ Most of the ‘former Christians’ I’ve talked to and those whose stories I’ve read, talk about Christianity in an ‘experiential’ way. I’ve heard stories about how they began attending churches or youth groups or campus groups because of friendships with people in those groups or because they were attracted to someone in a group. When relationships changed or when they were challenged about what they believed, they ‘left.’ Even more young people ‘leaving’ the faith grew up in churches and, like me, stop attending church during or after high school. Many, like me, were never really ‘in’ the faith, so their leaving the church doesn’t seem to apply to the meaning atheists and other non-Christians are giving to people leaving churches. Leaving a church or youth group is NOT the same thing as ‘leaving the faith.’

So, what do we do about this? I suggest we do everything we can to help people who claim to have ‘left’ the faith. Love them and offer to discuss their reasons for leaving with ‘truth and reason’ (Acts 26:25) and “always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

We also need to do a better job of preparing children and teens in our churches to face the challenges from unbelievers they will meet

during their lifetime. If a child trained in a martial arts class for 18 years, I would expect them to have a Black Belt and be able to defend themselves and others against personal attack. If they couldn't, I would seriously question the teaching abilities of the instructors in that class. If a child trained in a church for 18 years, I would expect them to be a strong follower of Jesus Christ and be able to defend themselves and others against spiritual attack. If they couldn't, I would seriously question the teaching abilities of the instructors in that church. Does that sound reasonable?

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