

# Foundations of Faith - Part 1

by  
**Randy C. Finch**  
(July 13, 1988)

I have always believed in God.

I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky with parents that respected the Bible and believed in God. Although my father rarely went to church and my mother went in spurts, I too gained a belief in God. I attended church when my mother did and even went some with a friend in high school. I knew there was a God.

In my college days, I rejected the God of the Bible, but I clung to my belief in God. As I was finishing up my degree (M.S. in Chemical Engineering), I had some free time on my hands. I would stay up until about 5 a.m. reading. Typically, I would read magazines; however, after devouring the magazines, I would read the Bible (The Living Bible). I read it not to learn God's Word, but rather to indulge my curiosity. I read Genesis through II Kings before it was time to head for Alabama to begin my career as an engineer.

Upon arriving in Alabama, my Bible reading stopped. That is, it stopped for about one year. A friend who was a cooperative student from Auburn began talking to me about the Bible and got my curiosity up again. He recommended that I purchase a New American Standard Bible; I did so. Later a Mormon friend set up a meeting with some Mormon missionaries. I studied with them several times before breaking off the studies. Another friend with whom I car-pooled was a member of the Church of Christ. She and her friend invited me to attend worship services. My first inclination was to refuse, but then I thought "why not?". I had attended the Mormon church, why not try the Church of Christ? I attended and enjoyed it very much. One weekend, when my friends were out of town, I was rather upset. "I can't go to church this weekend," I thought. Then I realized I could attend by myself. After services, I was invited to lunch at one of the member's home. I accepted. During lunch and the fellowship afterwards, I made friends that have lasted to this day.

I began discussing the Bible with a teacher at a local Bible college after Sunday evening worship. I also made many Christian friends with whom I discussed the Bible. On July 13, 1980 I was baptized into Christ and began my walk as a Christian. I was very excited and was participating in many church activities. I attended all services, did some door-knocking, and even taught some classes. I was also studying the Bible, the New Testament in particular; this time to learn God's Word.

As I studied the Bible, I began to see that it did not support all of the mainstream teachings of the Church of Christ. For instance, I did not see where we were commanded to take the Lord's supper every first day of the week. I also did not see how an approved example applied. First, there were many approved examples of activities carried out by the early church that are not followed

today. Second, there were only two approved examples of the Lord's Supper that actually stated the time at which it was administered. One time was the day before the crucifixion (supposedly Thursday evening) and the other on the first day of the week. Which one is correct? There are other discrepancies, but I will not discuss them at this time.

Near the end of 1981, I began dating my wife. She had become a Christian in college and was attending an Independent Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. We had attended high school together and graduated together but never dated at that time. During our dating and engagement period, we discussed the Bible often. Although we disagreed on some things, we basically agreed with each other's interpretation of the Bible. In July, 1982, Kathy and I were married. We have had an excellent marriage and we love each other very much.

During the early part of our marriage, Kathy and I studied the Bible together, starting with Genesis. This turned out to be a rather traumatic experience for me. I read of God doing things that did not fit the image I had of God. I began questioning some of the stories in the Bible and some of God's actions. I had many questions for which Kathy just did not have the answers. I realized later that other Christians did not have the answers I sought either. My initial reaction was depression. However, I soon learned that this attitude accomplished nothing. I had to pull myself up by my bootstraps and continue life without the answers I sought. I later quit reading and studying the Bible altogether. Looking back, I believe there were two reasons for this: I did not want to see my faith deteriorate, and I believed that by questioning God's actions I was blaspheming God. I turned my attention to other matters.

This past year I have been reading books dealing with the philosophy of science and math. Usually, these books discuss the existence and nature of God. After reading about the great complexity of the universe and how little we know about it, my belief in God was reinforced. Also, the critical thinking of the authors prompted me to be more of a critical thinker. However, I was still not prompted to begin studying the Bible again.

Please note that I have not become apostate. I attend church regularly. I work in the sound booth during services. Kathy and I have been and are currently fellowship leaders for our brothers' keepers program. I enjoy our services and the thoughtful discussions in our classes as well as the fellowship and good friends.

Recently, a friend at church gave me a set of 8 cassette tapes to listen to. They contained a debate between Alan Highers and Gibbons Blakely on the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. At first I was hesitant to listen to the tapes because I had discussed this topic many times with many people and had concluded that instrumental music in worship was neither commanded nor forbidden and was therefore up to the individual. I decided to listen to the tapes anyway. I was glad I did. Blakely made some very intriguing statements about the interconnection of the old and new covenants. Some of his views were in agreement with views I already held. Other views were new to my ears (and mind). The debate prompted me to read Romans, Galatians, and parts of other Pauline letters. The conflicts I had avoided for a time began to flood back into my brain. However, this time, prompted by my decision to think critically about my beliefs, I decided to tear down my shabby house of faith and rebuild from the foundation up. This is where I stand at this moment.

I started with my very basic belief, my belief in God. I contend that intelligence can only proceed from intelligence. Since we are intelligent beings (not always smart) and since there is much intelligent design in the universe, I believe that a higher intelligence exists that is responsible for the very universe itself. I cannot know that God exists in a scientific sense. When trying to verify a theory in science, one must be able to devise an experiment such that, if the experiment fails, the theory is disproved, and if the experiment succeeds, the theory is supported. Note that no number of successful experiments can *prove* the theory but the failure of but one experiment *crushes* the theory. Many successful experiments can, however, give one *confidence* that the theory is correct. I cannot think of an experiment that can disprove the existence of God. Therefore, I conclude that the existence of God is a matter that must be dealt with outside the realm of science. The existence of God is something one believes but cannot know (apart from direct revelation). Please note that I am not taking the position of a full-fledged agnostic that says we cannot know anything. I know I exist. I know I am married to a wonderful wife. I know I am writing this essay. To argue that we cannot know anything seems fruitless in light of our everyday reality. I can even know that God exists if he reveals himself to me as an everyday reality, just as real as my job, my wife, or my computer. However, apart from this revelation, I can only *believe* that God exists. This in no way negates the evidence of God's existence. As far as I know, no one has ever observed life springing from non-life or intelligence proceeding from non-intelligence. As much as evolutionists contend for this scenario, their case will remain a boondoggle until some modern-day experiment is devised that can show that this is even possible. And again, even if such an experiment is devised, it does not prove evolution occurred, only that more confidence can be placed in the theory. Many other scientific items could be mentioned such as the complexity of the human body, the great expanse and order of the universe, the mind-brain connection, and the complex behavior of simple dynamic systems. One such example appears in Paul Davies book God and the New Physics. Mr. Davies says that the reason for the existence of the narrow range of star types between blue giants and red dwarfs is a remarkable numerical coincidence between the fundamental constants of nature. If the strengths of the gravitational force were altered by just one part in  $10^{40}$ , the numerical coincidence would no longer exist and all stars would be either blue giants or red dwarfs. Stars like our sun could not exist. Mr. Davies concludes the chapter "Black holes and cosmic chaos" with this paragraph:

Alternatively the numerical coincidences could be regarded as evidence of design. The delicate fine-tuning in the values of the constants, so felicitously, might be attributed to God. It is hard to resist the impression that the present structure of the universe, apparently so sensitive to minor alterations in the numbers, has been rather carefully thought out. Such a conclusion can, of course, only be subjective. In the end it boils down to a question of belief. Is it easier to believe in a cosmic designer than the multiplicity of universes necessary for the weak anthropic principle to work? It is hard to see how either hypothesis could ever be tested in the strict scientific sense. As remarked in the previous chapter, if we cannot visit the other universes or experience them directly, their possible existence must remain just as much a matter of faith as belief in God. Perhaps future developments in science will lead to more direct evidence for other universes, but until then, the seemingly miraculous concurrence of numerical values that nature has assigned to

her fundamental constants must remain the most compelling evidence to an element of cosmic design. (p. 189)

So, where do I go from here? I feel comfortable with my belief in God. But did God reveal himself to man? If so, in what way? Was it only to certain individuals who then left no record of their revelations? Did He inspire men to write of their revelations or did God write His words down Himself and give it to man? If God did reveal Himself in written words, how do we determine which words they are? What criteria do we use to make a decision about the validity and inspiration of any given set of words claiming to be inspired by God? Does God reveal himself directly to man today?

A great many questions with too few answers. One great barricade to the answers is that, if in fact God has left us a written record of his thoughts and dealings with man, this record cannot be used to determine the validity of the record itself. To do so would result in circular reasoning. In essence, one would be saying "The Bible is God's Word because the Bible says it is God's Word." One must be convinced that the Bible is God's Word before it can be used as a God-inspired reference. This is very difficult to do apart from a direct revelation from God because it requires man to determine a criteria for evaluating writings that are supposedly God-inspired. How does one determine this criteria? Wouldn't it be different for each person? Is there a set of guidelines that would be acceptable to all of mankind? This seems highly unlikely. Even so, with a little logic (or maybe a lot), we may be able to reason our way to some guidelines.

Accepting that God exists and that He is responsible for the creation of the universe, perhaps we can glean some information about the nature of God from His creation. Also, we may be able to use this information to build a set of guidelines for evaluating writings that claim to be from God or that people believe to be from God. There are probably many items that could be listed. I will list a few that I have thought of.

### **1. God is truthful.**

The universe contains truth. Mathematics comes to mind when I think of truth. Why is it that mathematics, even though it is basically a conceptual entity, is accepted by all people regardless of race, creed, color, or religion? How is it that one man can conceive a mathematical theory, go about proving it, and then convince the world of its accuracy? It seems to me that only one explanation suffices: absolute truth exists. If it did not exist, could man universally agree on anything? If we accept that God created everything, then it follows that God must have created truth. How then do we explain the disagreement among men in the area of politics, morals, and law? It seems logical that these entities were created by man. This does not imply that God has no law pertaining to these matters, only that He does not choose to enforce these laws on man as He does the laws of mathematics and of nature. Man can easily change a moral code, but let him try to make the circumference of a circle equal to four times its diameter or the force of gravity twice its present strength. Impossible seems to be an appropriate word for this action. Thus it appears that God is the author of truth in the universe; would He be any different in His revelation to man?

## **2. God is consistent.**

Look at any physical system in the universe and what do you see? Consistency! Many men over many years have devoted themselves to finding a consistent description of how the universe operates. Many mathematical relationships have been developed by observing our world. Always there is consistency. Once a description of a system is in place, it can be used to predict how another like system will behave. Why is this so? Because the system is consistent. It does not obey one relationship this minute and then another the next minute. If it did, it would be practically impossible for man to accomplish anything. We would be held captive by the very world we live in, if in fact we could live at all. Once it seemed that many systems were random. This is changing. The new field of complex dynamics has been making startling discoveries indicating that systems described by very simple formulas can produce extremely complex behavior. Although this field is relatively young, it appears that seemingly random systems are actually deterministic and that there is order in chaos. One might argue that quantum mechanics is probabilistic rather than deterministic. This indeed seems to be true but this does not imply it is inconsistent. Quantum particles may follow different laws than does the matter they make up, but they are still laws and predictions can be made. Consistency wins again. Would an inconsistent God create a consistent universe?

## **3. God is powerful.**

Is it possible for someone to create something more powerful than himself? At first thought, the answer might be yes. Does not man build computers that can calculate much faster than himself? Does not man build machinery capable of lifting much more weight? Yes, he does. But one important fact is being neglected: the comparison is only being applied to one category. It is better to view each entity as a whole. Which entity has control over the other entity? Man ultimately has control over his creations. Thus, man is more powerful than the objects of his creation. Is this also true of God? If so, then God must be more powerful than the entire universe.

## **4. God is intelligent.**

I touched on this earlier. It has never been man's experience that intelligence proceeds from non-intelligence. We perceive mankind as intelligent. One could make an argument about what intelligence is but this is not the point. Whatever our definition of intelligence, the creator of man must be at least as intelligent as man. And since there is much in the universe that God created that man does not understand, it follows He is more intelligent than man. Conceivably, man could become as intelligent as God at some point in the future, but then this would pertain to mankind as a whole and not to any one individual man. Even with the amount of knowledge at man's disposal today, no single man can learn it all. God must know everything for He created everything.

These are a few qualities of God that seem obvious to me. More could be listed. However, I think my intent is clear. The nature of God, at least to some extent, can be reasoned from the observation of nature. Some people might disagree with my reasoning. I can offer no proof for my reasoning; I can only present it for the consideration of others and then let them determine if it sounds reasonable to them also.

How can we know the nature of God in areas such as love and faith? Of this I am unclear. Basically it seems inconsistent for God to be truthful and yet unloving and faithless. However, I am unable to think of any logical reason for this assertion. I can conceive of a God that always speaks truthfully yet hates the one He speaks to. He could be consistently hateful, also. Could he both hate and love and be consistent? Yes, as long as He does not both hate and love the same thing.

What can we say then? Must we base the acceptance of a particular writing with claims of inspiration from God on our conception of God or is there an absolute standard for judgment? It appears that the former is true. The only place from whence an absolute standard can come is God himself. This would have to come by direct revelation or through His Word. In the absence of direct revelation, His Word would have to suffice. But how do we know what His Word is? We're back to the circular reasoning again. It thus seems necessary for us to somehow reason what the nature of God is, compare the God presented in writings with this nature, and reject any writings that present God in a manner contrary to this nature. Before being overly critical of me, consider this. If you were confronted with a writing having claims of inspiration that was historically accurate, internally consistent, and scientifically correct, yet presented an evil God who made light of His creation, and who lied and killed and maimed, would you accept this writing as inspired of God and an accurate representation of God? I believe the idea would be as repulsive as the worship of Satan. Also, how many people, when confronted with seemingly inconsistent passages in the Bible, will opt to try to conform passage A to passage B where passage B is the one they believe is correct? Why not the other way around? Is it not because passage B is the one that represents their view of God more accurately than does passage A? If there is any way out of this dilemma of comparing "inspired" writings with our conception of the nature of God, I would certainly like to know.

Some say that we have to accept the Bible (or some other book) by faith. God is higher than we are and we cannot always understand His ways. Therefore, we must accept the Bible even though we cannot always understand God's actions. I do not accept this. This attitude would lead one to just accept the writings that have been traditionally held to be God's Word. If you are raised Islamic, accept the Koran on faith regardless of what it says. If you are raised Buddhist, accept the sayings of Buddha without question. If you are Jewish, accept only the Old Testament. Christian? Accept the Old and New Testament. All these would be accepting their respective writings by faith only. I believe our faith must be based on evidence. Unfortunately, it appears that the evidence itself must be based on a subjective evaluation of the nature of God. Although the evaluation can be based on reason, it is still by its very nature subjective.

Well, I have gone on overly long. I do believe, however, that what I have said is very important because what one believes about these matters will determine the very foundation of his belief in God and His revelation to man. One must not rule out the possibility that God has not revealed Himself to man in any way other than the universe itself. Thus, we are not just looking for writings that God inspired but we are also trying to determine if any God-inspired writings even exist. This necessitates our building a foundation upon which to make a critical study of the writings put before us. Also, we must determine how closely a writing must conform to our

foundation for it to be accepted as God-inspired. Must it conform totally or will we accept that God may have allowed a few errors to creep in? If a writing has a 99.8% conformity rating, do we accept it and end our search? Or do we continue searching; accepting the possibility that another writing has a 100% conformity rating? Or perhaps God has revealed Himself in more than one writing. There are so many possibilities. How does any one man have enough time to delve into these matters in one lifetime?

I have dealt with some very difficult concepts in this essay, and I stand to be corrected if my terminology does not conform with my ideology. I humbly submit this essay for your consideration. Please feel free to criticize anything I have said as you feel necessary. The ultimate purpose of this essay is to help each of us to arrive at the truth, whatever it may be, not to outdo one another with vain philosophy. God bless you.