Faith Is More Than a Feeling

By Jeff Smith

When pressed by unbelievers to defend the legitimacy of their faith, many Christians abandon the objective—and really the debate—by retreating into their feelings and practically admitting that there is no logical reason to believe in God.

To those who have not the same feelings, the opposite conclusion is proven. There must be no God—at least for me—since I don’t feel it. Mormon elder boys are often guilty of this. When pressed to defend their faith in Joe Smith, they abandon their artificial books and century old tradition to contend, “We just feel it deep in our hearts. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to make you feel it, too.” If that’s the best they—or we—can come up with, we are in trouble. We carry around a book with thousands of pages of evidence and dwell upon a planet covered in divine fingerprints, but all we can do to convince others there is a God is to say it’s just a feeling. What is faith—a hunch? An inclination? A sixth sense? A guess?

God expects more of us. Peter wrote, “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” (1 Peter 3:15). We need to have a reason for hope and faith, for belief in God is more than a feeling. Much more.

When Peter confessed his faith in Christ, he did so with much confidence. On one occasion, many other shallow disciples had abandoned Jesus because he refused to feed them just to keep them. He asked the twelve if they were also going to go home, but “Peter answered, ‘Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the son of the living God’” (John 6:68-69). Yes, they believed and knew who Jesus was, for their faith was more than a feeling. It was logical, reasonable and objective.

The Hebrew writer instructs us that, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1). Some read this passage and conclude that if faith is anything more than a feeling, that it must be false. Yet, when we consider the people used to illustrate the principle throughout chapter 11, we find so many who had direct encounters with God or who witnessed obvious miracles according to the Old Testament records. God spoke to Cain after he had killed his brother, making for tangible evidence of his divine existence. He delivered boat blueprints to Noah and an eviction notice to Abraham. Sarah bore a child at the not-so-tender age of ninety. Moses spoke to God who appeared to him in a bush which burned without being consumed by the flames. All this is tangible evidence which did nothing to diminish the faith of the people, but provides us with a challenge to find out whether our faith today is just as logical and reasonable. Is it more than a feeling?

All societies in history have displayed a desire to explain the otherwise unexplainable and every one of them has had some form of religion. Pondering the universe, it becomes obvious that all that we see is not explainable as the product of human operation or cosmic accident. As surely as looking at the
Mona Lisa causes the viewer to contemplate the artist and staring up at the Empire State Building forces one to appreciate the engineer and architect, so a consideration of the heavens and earth should logically challenge us to seek out a divine intellect behind it all. It is an illogical and unreasonable leap of humanistic faith to ascribe the grandeur of the universe to dumb, evolutionary luck. That would be like attributing the Mona Lisa to the effects of paint dripping from cans onto a canvas that had fallen to the floor beneath, somehow resulting in precise beauty without planning and execution.

People would call you a fool for such a suggestion and sadly the same is true when one tries to take the achievement of the universe out of God’s hands. “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1). Why? “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). The constellations in the sky, the Grand Canyon out west, the Northern Lights, Niagara Falls—all form the fingerprints of the Almighty on his creation. Moreover, the complexity of the solar system, the minute precision of every living thing from the amoeba to the orangutan show evidence of intellectual design. Oh, but we forgot. The Empire State Building was constructed by metals evolving into steel which sprouted up from the soil of Manhattan Island over the course of billions of years until a skyscraper, complete with elevators and lavatories came to be. Right.

The evidence of God’s existence is so clear and obvious that there is just no excuse for ignoring it and choosing a life of atheism or selfishness. “For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Even the evolutionists are coming around to the certainty of design. Antony Flew, once a fierce champion of atheistic explanations, concluded shortly before his death that there is too much evidence of design in the universe to resist the reality of a super-intelligent God any longer. “Yet biologists’ investigation of DNA has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved …. It now seems to me that the findings of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design.” (1)*

So, if the universe shouts that there must be a God to explain it all, only the Bible tells us who that God is and what man’s responsibility to him should be. The Bible backs up its claims of divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 2:21) in spite of having more than forty human authors over a period of 1500 years, for it is a book without contradiction or scientific, historical or archaeological error. Prophecies uttered in the Old Testament find fulfillment in the history of Israel and the coming of Jesus Christ (Micah 5:2, Isaiah 53:1-12). Fulfilled prophecy and the reaction of Christ’s enemies becomes splendid evidence of the genuineness of the Bible and the God who inspired it (John 11:45-52, Acts 4:14-16).

Doubting Thomas wouldn’t believe in his resurrected friend until he put his finger in the wounds while others demanded signs and wonders (John 20:25). Today, men crave an experience, but the Bible says that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Its explanation of the universe and the purpose and fate of human life rings true (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The evidence becomes overwhelming and faith fills that gap between hope and fulfillment. Then you can know—and not just feel—that there is a God, a savior, a Holy Spirit and a hope of heaven.

Endnote
(1)* There is a God, leading atheist concludes. MSNBC. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6688917/ [Accessed July 14, 2010].