

Newman's sermon



A summary

1. Faith presumes. Reason examines.
 2. Because we believe one thing it is easier to believe the next.
 3. Faith and Reason have different starting points.
 4. Faith has a bearing on practice.
 5. Faith is presumption rather than proof.
 6. We cannot inherit faith but must acquire it for ourselves.
 7. To have Faith is to test oneself.
 8. Religion won't convince someone who doesn't want to be convinced.
 9. What we believe is based upon our previous experience.
 10. Faith is a test of character not of intellect.
 11. Reason is opposed to Faith, but so is unbelief.
 12. Faith doesn't depend upon intellectual ability.
 13. There seems to be no rule about what to believe and what not.
- A safe guard is there needed. Many think this should be education.
Faith is then an act of reason.
- Not so. Faith's safeguard is a right state of heart.
- 18 and 19. Personal faith is the way to eternal life.
20. Because we love we can recognise the love of the Saviour.

21. We believe because we love.

22, 23, 24. Examples from scripture.

25. Holiness and love will keep us safe and on track.

26. Faith is an act of reason and based upon a presumption prompted by love

27. Faith turns us away from evil towards good.

28. Lack of faith leads to disobedience.

29. For the Christian faith supercedes sacrifice because of the atonement.

30. For many Christians their faith is tinged with superstition.

31. We should act on faith and so not be misled as to what is God's will.

32. Gospel truths cannot be contradicted by modern ideas.

33. Paul said the gospel was the fulfilment of the law.

34. Judaizers first believed, but clung to law.

35. The Gospel completes the faith of the Jews.

36. It builds on what is revealed by nature

37. True faith is moving from the unknown to the known, from darkness to light.

38. That is all we need.

Love, the safeguard of faith against superstition

" The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." John 10 v. 4, 5.

1. Looked at logically Faith has this characteristic – it presumes, it trusts, rather than looking at evidence, rather than by measuring and examining. This is what distinguishes it from Knowledge as we use that word in our everyday lives. We say we know something when we have found it out by natural methods. We can be said to know a mathematical fact when we can demonstrate it to be true. We know that things are present because we sense them.

We know about events that take place by using our moral judgement and so judge them to be good or bad. We know about the past and things we will never see by the evidence that we find . When for instance we hear testimony of a miracle occurring from honest men who are neither being deceived or out to deceive us we may be said to know what they testify to as fact. We know about the nature of the case because of the Evidence and when we believe in a miracle because of such Evidence we can be said to believe because of reason.

2. By using our reason we look at the evidence and we believe, and because we believe one thing we can go forward and believe something else. In the general sense Faith is this kind of knowledge – a presumption based on evidence. But as in earlier discourses Reason can be contrasted with Faith as

meaning what can be inferred from evidence and which therefore leads to knowledge.

3. Faith is based on presumption and Reason on factual knowledge. Reason makes the fact that is to be ascertained the most important point [1]. It then looks at the evidence available. It doesn't exclude what has gone before [2], but doesn't begin with that. Faith has a different starting point. It begins on a basis of previous knowledge and opinions which, though they may not lead to exactly the same conclusion tend towards it. To take a step of faith is to act before absolute certainty. It could be said to be against Reason or even to triumph over Reason, to take hold of what Reason sees as beyond its reach. Faith is beyond argument, and so is not capable of being argued against and cannot defend itself by using logic i. e. it seems illogical.

4. So why are we bothering with it. Because I believe that Faith has a bearing on practice. Our text was 'The sheep follow him because they know his voice.' Their faith leads them to follow.

5. As things turn out day by day we see that Faith is a judgement made by reaching out towards facts, a presumption in their proof, rather than a search for proof. There is no doubt that for the vast majority of sincerely religious who stake their happiness upon Faith, do so not from examination of the facts, but from a spontaneous move of the heart. They reach out to meet with God despite the fact that they can't see him. They discern his presence in symbols that are provided [3].

They may perhaps later examine more closely the evidence on which their faith is founded and see whether or not they are justified in believing, but

their faith did not begin with the evidence, nor is it affected by the strength of their knowledge,[4] although it may be strengthened by such knowledge. They believe because of something within themselves, not basing their faith only on what Religion teaches.

6. Many Christians can be said to have merely inherited the Faith. They need a faith of their own.

7. Everyone needs to test his own Faith rather than merely accept what he is told.

8. Not that such evidence is deficient, but whether of true religion or a false one the evidence for or against religion is not of the kind that will convince someone against his will. I don't mean that the evidence has no value one way or another, for or against Christianity, but that few people, in the bustle of their daily lives, have time to consider all the evidence before making decisions. Most of us, most of the time, make judgements by stepping out and meeting the evidence to a greater or lesser degree.[5]

9. This is the way in which we make judgements, because we cannot do it any other way. We act upon only part of the evidence. We make judgements based on the way we feel, how credulous we are, and what seems feasible and safe often based on our previous experience. It is the same with religious experiences. When we apparently experience the supernatural we judge it according to how much we want to believe it. Such judgements are based upon such things as our views of life and our knowledge of the miraculous. We decide whether or not something is true according to how the alleged miracle fits into our existing religious life and knowledge.

10. These religious judgements are not exactly like those we make in our ordinary lives. Evidence about worldly matters is all around us and our minds are not necessarily capable of discrimination between truth and falsehood. Religious facts are fewer in number and of a different kind and the powers we use to judge them are correspondingly stronger. Even the wisest person can make worldly judgements that are wrong, and go against the evidence available, but this does not necessarily mean that even the most ordinary intellect need be wrong in making judgements about the more important kingdom of heaven.

I believe that a merciful God are so ordered things that faith, based on presumption, will lead to the same conclusions as if, as the minority do, we carefully examine the evidence. I am not speaking of the trustworthiness of Faith, but of its nature. Faith is a test of moral character. This is the essence of religious faith as opposed to Reason, which by its nature excludes prejudice or what we want to happen in favour of carefully examining the facts. We make multiple decisions on the way when using reason, before we come to a fixed conclusion. This means that there is little merit in getting the right answer in, for example, a mathematical problem or indeed little guilt involved in making a wrong decision because of a faulty memory.

11. So we see Faith as being opposed to Reason, but we must not forget that Unbelief is also opposed to Reason. Unbelief considers itself to be totally logical, but when it comes to questions of religion Unbelief criticizes the evidence not in a logical way, but because it doesn't suit. It makes presumptions in a similar way to that which Faith does, but in a negative

rather than a positive way. It is the opposite of Faith. It considers religion to be so impossible that it fails to see the evidence.

Unbelievers consider themselves rational beings, but they do not decide by evidence. They just make decisions and stick with them. Hume,[6] in the case of alleged miracles, said ' What have we to oppose..... but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events....' Hume sees improbability as sufficient reason for denying the evidence, but presumptions made on either the side of Faith or Unbelief cannot, by their nature, be proved. Hume went on to say of Faith, ' Mere Reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity.

12. Faith is an exercise of presumptive reasoning which is open to all and does not depend upon intellectual ability. If the majority believe, not because of careful examination of the evidence, but because they are ' ordained to eternal life' then this must be the way that God wants it. There may be difficulties with our Faith, but let us face up to them and so overcome them.

13. Such a view of Faith may be made an excuse for all kinds of bigotry and lead to superstition. There seems to be no rule for what is to be believed and what not. If we are to accept the miracles and Revelations of Christianity why not those of other faiths?

14. So a safeguard is needed if Faith is not to become superstition. The consensus seems to be that if you educate people about their Faith and encourage them to reflect you will avoid fanaticism and superstition.

15. If this is so then Faith is an act of Reason.

16. Yet I deny that any intellectual act is necessary for right Faith, that it needs to be more than a presumption or that it necessarily needs to be fortified by education.

The safeguard of Faith is a right state of heart. It is holiness and love which is the principles behind true faith.

17. 18. 19. Christ is the way into the kingdom of God. Knowing him in a personal way and following him in Faith is the way to eternal life.

20. The Jews didn't love Christ and so were unable to see him as Saviour. Just as a child trusts his parents because of the affection he receives so we believe because we love .

21. Just as sheep do not follow a stranger so we won't be misled if we know and follow Christ. We believe because we love.

22. This doctrine is expounded in several places such as 1st Corinthians 2 which teaches us the worthlessness of natural Reason.

23. 24. Other examples from scripture.

25. Holiness and love are what keep us on track and prevent us getting caught out by things that are wrong.

26. Right Faith is the Faith of a right mind. It is an intellectual act, an act of reasoning based upon presumption and stirred into action by a spirit of love and purity. We will recognise true Revelation because it not be in opposition to the nature of God.

27. Superstition is the worship of evil spirits. Faith is an instinct of Love towards both God and man. It will cause us to turn from what is evil and towards what is good.

28. Lack of faith leads to disobeying God's laws.

29. However what is superstition for a Jew or Christian is not necessarily so for a heathen who is not bound by the rules of his Faith. Blood sacrifices for a heathen are not necessarily superstitious, but for the Christian they have been superseded by the blood of Christ in the Atonement.

30. Take the example of the viper which bit St Paul on Malta. The people might have been mistaken in believing him to be a god, but at least they were aware of the possibility of heavenly intervention in human life. They weren't Christians but they recognised the presence of God with Paul.

31. The woman with an issue of blood. Was that superstition? Her action did not fit with what she knew. She recognised in Jesus someone who could save her, yet she stayed on the edge. She didn't want to bother him. Yet Christ commended her faith. In her faith tinged with superstition and humility we see many believers through the ages, who impair their true vision of God by concentrating on outward emblems.

32. In I Kings 13 we have the story of prophet of Judah who was credulous enough to be misled by the lying prophet. Not a well known story, but an important one as it reminds us that even God's people can be led astray.

33 It is not Faith but superstition that leads to stories of omens, charms and so on. We have found Christ already. If the doctrine of today contradicts that

which has already been revealed we must disregard it or face the consequences.

34. That was what the Judaizers did. They received the Spirit but went back to the Law. Paul fought against such ideas and proclaimed that the Gospel was the true fulfilment of the Law.

35. In the case of the heathen he paid respect to their beliefs, but tried to show how the Gospel was the completion of Faith.[7], a fulfilment of what had already been revealed to them by nature.

This is real Faith, a moving forward, closer to God. A move from the known to the unknown. It is made perfect not by intellect but by obedience, the act of a pure, obedient and devout mind.

37. This is sufficient.

[1] As when a scientist states the hypothesis which his experiment will prove

[2] As when Newton said ' I stand on the shoulders of giants.'

[3] Such as the bread and wine of communion.

[4] And so is not affected by their intellectual capacity – a child may have faith and so may a university don.

[5] As when we meet someone for the first time and make judgements about his character based on only a brief acquaintance.

[6] David Hume, Philosopher, ' An enquiry concerning human understanding'.

[7] Acts 17 v 16 ff.