

Faith Seeking Understanding

A few centuries ago a pastor/theologian named Anselm coined the phrase "*fides quaerens intellectum*" translated "faith seeking understanding." Anselm believed facts about Scripture, the Father, the Spirit, Jesus, Christianity and the Christian life that he had yet to fully understand. For him, belief preceded understanding. He believed that which he did not fully understand, but continued to seek an understanding. This understanding though was not intended to validate his beliefs. Anselm retained a decided faith, even when he did not fully understand.

Before Anselm came Augustine who uttered the prayer, "Let me seek Thee, Lord...My faith Lord cries to Thee, the faith that Thou hast given me." Augustine, like Anselm, invested his life in seeking to understand the Lord he worshipped. Like Anselm, he applied a highly intellectual approach to the practice of Christian faith. Interestingly though, Augustine did not identify his understanding as the root of his faith. Augustine was convinced his faith came directly from the Lord. If we were to ask Augustine why he believed in God, he would answer, "The Lord I worship causes me to believe." Did he blindly believe? No. Augustine also said, "But I do desire to understand your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves." Notice, Augustine believes and loves that which he does not fully understand.

Remember, neither of these men were dummies. Both are studied today, even by atheists, for the beauty of their writing, and the intellectual truth both brought to academic life. Both believed in divine truth that neither fully understood.

What happened, why did the greatest thinkers of centuries ago approach faith so differently than those of today? The Enlightenment and Renaissance humanism happened. Before you click on, we are not about to dive into college level philosophy. Just know this. The Enlightenment sparked a belief that man is the center of the universe and thought, and that only facts which can be understood and proven with physical evidence can be true. Therefore, the supernatural, if unproven, cannot be true. As a result, for many, the Christian faith can only be embraced if it is understood. Vastly different than Augustine and Anselm, who embraced faith, and sought understanding to deepen that already practiced faith.

We embark on a sermon series centering on subjects which still baffle the most complicated of understandings. Why does a good God allow bad things to happen? How can the death of one man save the entire believing universe? Is the Bible really true, just a book, and how can we be sure of either? How can God be in total control of the universe, but I still get to make my own decisions (or do I)?

I am not proposing that you lay aside any capacity to understand. Seek to understand, with all your heart and intellectual prowess!! But at least open your mind to the fact that faith can exist, even if understanding is absent. It did for two of the greatest thinkers of all time. Both unwaveringly believed, and invested life in seeking to understand that belief they loved, and God they worshipped.