

What Do You Know?
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Picture this: A Great River with roaring current, white caps foaming intersecting with a much smaller, placid Lesser Stream. Imagine that this Great River represents all-that-is-true and on the other hand that the Lesser Stream is one's beliefs. Imagine also how overwhelmed the stream's mouth might be by the powerful course of the Great River: Even to the point of eroding the intersection into a body of water; a basin or perhaps what would even have the appearance of a lake or pond. This basin is comparable to knowledge. Depending on the impact of the Great River upon the Lesser Stream, the basin formed may hold more or less water than the remaining length of the stream. Likewise, our beliefs certainly agree with truth at points, but the degree to which the two converge to form one's body of knowledge varies. The Wise may draw so temperately from their basin that the rest of us are prone to think they have no stream at all, but draw directly from the Great River. Vice versa, the Foolish. Appearances notwithstanding, neither the Foolish nor the Wise have it all wrong or all right.

Looked at another way, the river and stream also illustrate our difficulty drawing firm lines where the truth and belief begin and end. The basin, which they share, is obvious to everyone, as are their respective channels. Nevertheless, the exact point at which they separate is unclear. So it is with the thoughts of man. It is obvious that we have beliefs that are true (known) well inside the basin. Equally so, it is generally obvious that we have beliefs that are not true (in our respective streams) and that there are truths we do not believe (waters of the Great River unmixed with our stream) - and that these two remain unknown to us regarding their specific content. It stands to reason that the very moment we regard something as false (not true), we disbelieve. So also, the moment we regard something as true we are believing. 'False belief' is consequently only a worthwhile utterance to a third party i.e., "Sally believes in the Tooth Fairy- but I know better!" or in the past-tense for one who has abandoned his belief saying, "I used to believe in Santa Claus... 'til I caught my dad eating the milk and cookies!"

The closest we can get to deliberately holding a false belief is in doubt. Doubt is not a static, neutral place of mind, but a matter of preference. It is the act of according credible status to something new without being certain, yet allowing it to displace a formerly held belief, thus to place the latter in limbo without apology. It is a term used in nearly all cases to avoid a full answer for what convictions are displacing others, and why. In petty matters, for instance a report of a man leaping over the Empire State Building, we say, "I doubt it," assuming the obvious, "How silly! Men cannot leap tall buildings in a single bound." Our reason for incredulity is so apparent that it does need to be stated. However, concerning far weightier matters, such as the bearing of God's righteousness on every sphere of our creaturely existence- men 'doubt' because they lack the courage to give an answer for the fear that is in them. Perhaps they will make much conversation about perceived inaccuracies in the Biblical record- yet never explain what gives their new perspective preferred credence or -more importantly- how it annuls their culpability. A peculiar condition of our reflection on belief and truth is thus the intrusion of God Himself into the conversation.

Let us consider Adam's vocation in Genesis 2. The Lord placed Adam in the garden to work and cultivate it, then out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the

field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.¹

Bear in mind the truly intimate relationship God was pleased to have with His son, Adam. As redeemed Image-bearers, we should be mindful of God's intimate involvement in our own lives, striving to see more clearly His Hand in all situations. This event in Adam's life is a key to a richer and simpler approach to our current inquiry; It shifts our context from the supposed autonomy of 'beliefs' and 'truths' in abstraction to an integrated creation made by God for His own good pleasure (and ours).

God brought the beasts to Adam to see what Adam would call them. God knows everything -hence this passage is not about His enrollment in Taxonomy 101 at the Eden School of Man with Professor Adam ben Elohim. Yet, we are not allowed to ignore the fact that God went to see Adam: That the Eternal Sovereign genuinely communed with His Image-bearer. He did not gift Adam with intrinsic hocus-pocus enabling him to call a great and mighty Ox a 'Chihuahua' thereby affecting a change in its God-given nature. Nor was he given a so-called perfect Platonic knowledge of all beasts so that the Names given corresponded to autonomous Forms in the Heavens. Rather, Adam was made after God's own Image and the Lord loved Him as a father loves a son; thus the gift the Lord gave Adam was Himself. Being without sin, they were not in disagreement. Instead, this name-calling business was where Adam's creaturely dominion and God's creational sovereignty displayed symphonic, familial love and communion. Therefore, whatever the man called a living creature, the Lord saw, loved, and agreed; that was its name.

This perspective seems to imply that by being in right relationship with God, we will always be right. Yet, how often do men, even men who display great wisdom and faith, get the facts wrong! Many of our older, wiser brethren attest nonetheless that, "God was working, even then!" You see- truth is not ultimate, but Him Who is Truth- and Him alone. The Lord may see fit to keep you from the truth when knowledge thereof would cause you harm; the New Testament does not give us every agonizing detail regarding the Passion of Christ, and I am prone to think it is for the best- for who could bear it? This has application from the most inane situations to the insane; from a wrong-turn-which-turns-out-to-be-a-shortcut to David and Bathsheba. Who woulda thunk that their offspring would be the direct line of the Messiah?

Our thoughts -like maps with interconnected Highways, Parkways, and local streets- are easiest to follow given the most direct route. We would find it absurd if someone were to give us directions from Brooklyn to Manhattan passing through Des Moines, Iowa! Yet, even such a strange route can easily be understood given appropriate warrant. Perhaps a Victorian art case, Steinway Grand Piano from 1873 worth \$200,000 is being donated to your church on the condition that you drive out to hand-deliver it, personally, within 48 hours. Let the race begin! Yet, while this instance is a no-brainer, not all warrant is so clear.

You have heard it before; Eve found three reasons to eat from the Tree and was given only one to refrain. With very few exceptions, most sins begin with simple, not-sinful-in-themselves concessions.

"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest."-

¹ Genesis 2:19 (reference mine)

And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man.²

An all too common scenario would be the Adulterer. He begins married, assumedly to one woman and one of his own choosing, at that! Like any reasonable husband, he begins taking note of beauty everywhere, especially 'girly things' like sundresses and earrings, shoes and eye-shadow. Naturally enough, he compliments a female co-worker on a lovely dress, and while not saying as much, can't help but innocently notice that the dress complements her figure. All too soon, he finds himself yielding that his wife is not terribly interested in him anymore and he is at the office more than home, anyway... While his thoughts meander this way and that, the path leads straight to hell. 2 Samuel 11:1 makes it clear that 'when the Spring came, when kings go out to battle...David stayed in Jerusalem.' He sent Joab, "Close enough," or so he thought. Resting on his laurels after defeating the Philistines, receiving the Davidic Covenant, and defeating the Arameans, he deserved a vacation. We could trace David's concessions from why he stayed behind that Spring to why he thought Bathsheba was his for the taking (along with Uriah's life), in a way that -albeit not by the most direct route- could be persuasive. It persuaded David...

However, the Biblical witness is clear- David wimped out. And it takes courage to do what is right. In fact, in a fallen world, it's all about courage. The courage to look like a fool to the wise of the age. Who has appeared more foolish than the ruddy and handsome boy, unable to stand under the weight of a Saul's armor yet boldly defying Goliath with only a sling and smooth stones? A man after God's own heart: By the Lord's favor, David fell the Giant with a single stone and took his head with the Philistine's own sword. How about the courage to love your brother when his sin is most obvious? (Think Nathan) The courage to press on despite God's righteous judgment. (Think David, again) The implication is clear: what matters is not whether we have the appearance of credibility or not. Rather- what counts is that God is pleased to be glorified in and through our lives, made in His Image. To whom is it, after all, that we are to give an account? Let God be true and every man a liar- including you or me, Adam or David!

² Proverbs 6:10f