

Reasoning

On the third day of God's creation of the world, He created plants. Genesis 1:11, ***"Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so."*** Plants are living, but they're not the same as living creatures, which were the animals that were created on the fifth and sixth days. Genesis 1:20-25, ***"Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.' God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind'; and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good."*** Both plants and animals can live or die. One significant difference between these two types of living things is that animals are "creatures" (1:20), which is the Hebrew word Nephesh, which means to have breath and blood. Yet another living thing would be created on earth, a third kind, superior to the plants in that it too would have breath and blood, but superior even to the creatures. This is mankind.

Genesis 1:26, ***"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" Several truths are revealed here. We see the first instance of the trinity; God speaking with Himself as the Lord says "Us" and "Our."*** Next, God decides to make man, which is the Hebrew word Adam. Man was living, like the plants, and Nephesh, like the animals, but was something greater. Man was made in the image and likeness of God; meaning semblance, representation, or as is. By image, it does not mean that man looked like God, as God does not have a body or a gender, but is a spirit. So, how are we something more than the animals and similar to God? Some difference is shown as verse 26 continues through verse 28, ***"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Men and women are made in the image and likeness of God in that they would "rule over" and "subdue" the world. These are attributes of God, as God governs and rules over everything, so man is tasked to govern and rule over the earth. Genesis 2:7 goes on to describe the creation of man in greater detail and says, "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."*** That word "being" is also the word Nephesh, which includes the reality that man has a soul. Our soul is the seat of reason. We are beings whose substance is comprised of reason, will, and character. These are the greatest distinctions of man over the other Nephesh of the earth.

One might ask, ***"Don't animals have souls?"*** No, they don't. Leviticus 4:2 says, ***"if a person sins..."*** The word person here is also the word Nephesh: breath, blood, and soul, and the activity of sinning is never attributed to animals. Only humans and angels are created in the image of God and have the ability to reason and can choose to sin. Humans have no phylogenetic relationship to any other creatures, meaning that they have no genetic ancestry to any other organisms. We are earthly beings uniquely endowed with godly faculties and traits, and there is no animal correspondence to Adam. Animals are not said to be in the image and likeness of God. Animals aren't said to hold any spiritual value or moral responsibility. Man, however has a universal acknowledgement that he is morally responsible for his own behavior. Additionally, the Bible speaks of the immortal soul of man, in Ecclesiastes 12:7, ***"then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."*** Nothing like this is ever spoken of animals. Additionally, all throughout the Bible, man is in a state of communication and relationship with God, and these experiences are not attributed to animals. Animals are never referred to as the son of God, as Adam (Luke 3:38) and other followers of God are called.

All of what I've said up to this point is meant to lay a foundation for what this essay is really about, which is that God has given us the ability to reason, and He expects us to be reasonable! Yet, that is too often what we do not do. Sometimes we act like animals. Psalm 32:9 says, ***"Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding."***

Why would I make decisions that reflect lack of reasoning? Here's a statement to learn, if you take nothing else away from this essay - *When I hold a strong opinion in the face of little evidence, it's a sign that I'm not using critical thinking skills. Conviction should follow the facts, not come before them. What I want to believe shouldn't dictate what I believe. The key to learning is valuing truth.*

Too often I see individuals that seem to embrace different faiths, one faith after another, entertaining all sorts of beliefs as if they're all the same. When this happens, an individual is not reasoning through his decisions. When someone says he's thinking of converting to a particular faith, I challenge him with two primary considerations before making that decision. First, what are the truth claims of the faith you're pursuing? Second, what evidence is there that these truth claims are valid? Before a person become a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist, etc., he should be able to answer these two questions to a reasonable degree.

As a chaplain at a jail in Pennsylvania, I remember one particular young man in my Bible study. He was immature in his understanding, but he was participating and learning. After a while he was released. I hadn't seen him until he returned to the jail again about eight months later. He asked to speak with me and shared that he had converted to Islam when he was out. I believe reasoning is critical, so I asked what his reason was for making that decision. He said, *"I'm embarrassed to say."* I encouraged him that his reason mattered. He shared, *"To be honest, I like what they have to say about sex. I like that I can have multiple wives, and I like the idea that heaven will be full of sex with my many virgin women of my own."* I replied, *"I can understand why a man would find that compelling. However, does it matter if it's true?"* He paused and looked at me, and finally said, *"What do you mean?"* I continued, *"Does truth matter? Shouldn't you believe something because it's true? What if you die and realize that there's no heavenly sex, no virgins? Does it matter if Islam is true or not?"* He didn't know what to say. He hadn't reasoned in his mind as to whether the claims of Islam were valid, nor had he done any due diligence to explore the evidence of the teachings of the Quran.

One summer, years ago, I chose to be an Uber driver. I remember picking up a lady and before long I had turned the conversation toward faith. She shared how she'd recently begun to embrace a faith that she'd discovered on YouTube. As she described the leader and his teachings, it sounded quite odd, and very new-age; meaning that everything is spiritual and the aim is to unify everything in some sort of spiritual oneness. I asked her, *"Has this faith leader provided any videos that demonstrate evidence for what he's saying?"* As I expected, she replied, *"No, I haven't seen any of those."* To which I replied, *"What then is your reasoning for believing what he's saying?"* She said, *"Well, sometimes you just know, you know? Sometimes you just feel it."* There's an obvious danger in making faith choices the way this woman made her faith choices.

One time, at my chaplain's desk, I got a call from a mom whose daughter had just been arrested and was now in our jail. She said, *"Can you go down and see my daughter and encourage her?"* I said that the female chaplain would be happy to pay a visit to her daughter. I then asked, *"Is your daughter a person of faith? What does she believe?"* The mom replied, *"Oh, I don't know, but whatever she believes, just encourage her in that. It doesn't matter what it is."* This response puzzled me. It prompted me to ask the mom, *"Can I ask what you believe?"* With a bit of a laugh she said, *"Oh, I'm a scientist. I don't believe in religious stuff."* It was odd to me that she believed that science was somehow incompatible with faith. But, that's a discussion for another time. Anyway, I continued to talk with the mom and I said to her, *"Ma'am, let me give you a hypothetical scenario. Let's say that I go visit your daughter and I tell her that there's been a big mistake and that she was wrongly arrested and this evening at 6pm she'll be released with an apology. Would that encourage your daughter?"* The mom quickly replied, *"Wait, is that true?"* I said, *"No, ma'am. Again, this is a hypothetical situation. I'm simply asking you if I were to tell your daughter this, would it encourage her?"* She said, *"I don't follow you."* I replied, *"The point I'm making is that I could tell her that she's being released at 6pm, and she'd be*

greatly encouraged. However, when 6pm rolls around, and she realizes I wasn't telling the truth, she'll be left devastated and worse off than she was before. So, when you suggest that we should encourage your daughter in whatever faith she believes in, my question is, shouldn't that faith be true?" The mom replied, "Well, with religion, it's all the same. It doesn't really matter which one she believes in." Confused by this statement, I replied, "So, if I say Jesus is God, and your daughter says that she herself is God, and you say that God doesn't exist, are we all correct?" Without missing a beat, the mom replied, "Yes!" I was stunned, and there was a long pause on the phone. Eventually, the mom said, "Okay, I guess I see your point."

The bottom line is that truth matters! It's a silly statement to suggest that all faiths are equally valid. They're either all false, or only one of them can be right. To say that two or more faiths can be true is logically impossible, since no two faiths teach the same thing.

In conclusion, you have been given a mind capable of reasoning. You have the ability to reason things through and do the mental gymnastics necessary to make a logical choice, BASED ON EVIDENCE, not based on whims, peer pressure, or feelings. If you chose to follow a particular god, or a particular faith, simply because you are attracted to a certain aspect of it, or only because those around you are practitioners of that faith and you want a place to belong, then be cautioned. Instead, make decisions based on reasoning through the evidence. Eternity is real and you can't avoid hell once you're in it.