

God Is Not Reasonable & Neither Are His Values

Before you label me a heretic based on the title of this meditation, give me a chance to explain. Consider what I have to say. My point may be different than what you first think.

What seems reasonable tends to vary depending on your point of view. Analyzing my own family as an example, my eight-year-old nephew may think it is perfectly reasonable to eat two big handfuls of pretzels before dinner, his mother has a completely different attitude. The child's mother has wisdom and experience that makes the reason of her son unreasonable. This example shows that our sense of reason may change as we mature and experience different things in life.

Many of us would like to think that we have a value system that reflects an honorable worldview. Generally, we all want to consider ourselves reasonable people. But if we are truly honest, we might discover that what we wish we believed is quite different than what we actually believe. Our higher ideals may not always find their way into our everyday lives. How do we know? The answer lies in what we do not what we say.

A perfect example can be seen in the comparison of what people say when polled over the telephone and what they do in real life. I once heard of a telephone survey where people rated environmental protection as a top political concern even though other reliable data indicates the opposite based on real world recycling and conservation activities.

Consider the following scripture as we explore the concept of reason.

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 (NIV)

Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

The essence of the above scripture is that man's reason is foolishness to God. Thus, it makes sense that God's reason might seem unreasonable to people.

Exercise: Let's take out a piece of paper and draw a line down the center. On the left side write "Human Reason" and on the right side write "God's Reason."

List as many examples as come to mind. For example: You could write on the left side "Physical beauty" and on the right side write "Godly character." See if you can come up with a few.

Okay, now let's work through some examples to identify how God and human reason may differ.

Here are some examples...

The world says this is strong



Conan the Barbarian as played by Arnold Schwarzenegger

This is God's idea of strong



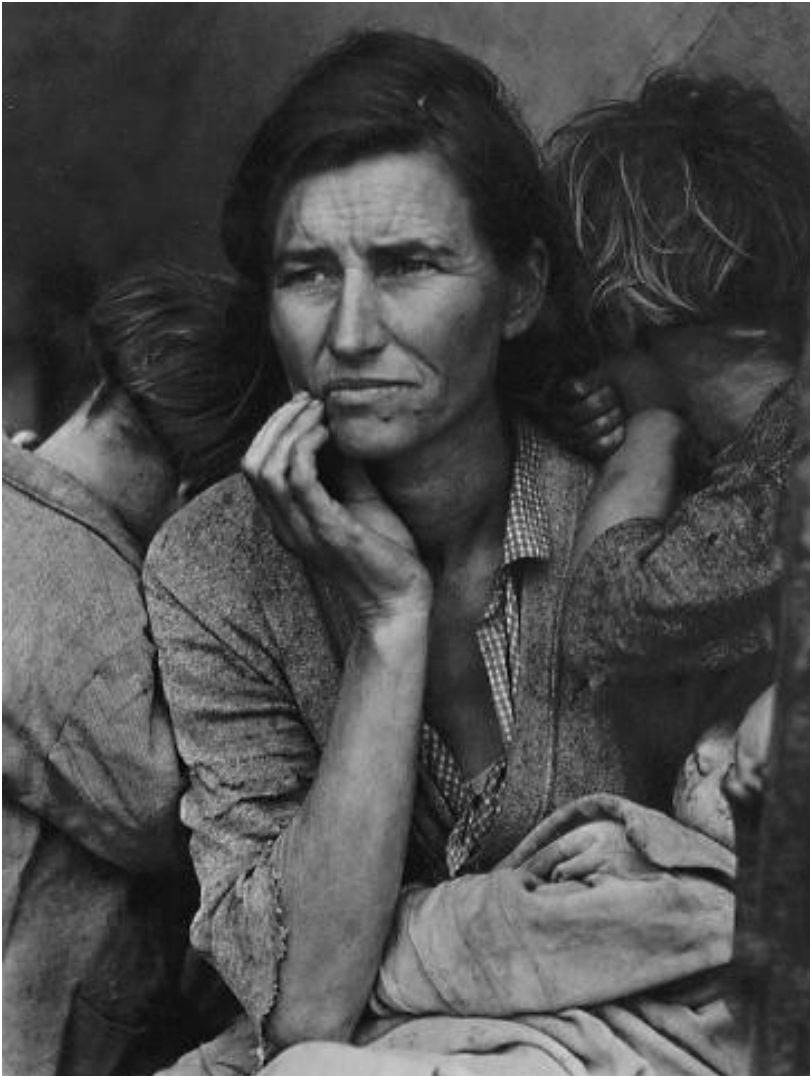
Mother Teresa serving the poor in India: Although she was small in stature, her life impacted the world. She has become a portrait of strength against despair and impossible odds. (Source: Associated Press)

This is the world's idea of beauty.



Two of the hottest stars in music – Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake

This is just as pretty in God's eyes



Beautiful Scars: This famous picture shows a woman surrounded by her children during the Great Depression. Her face is not that of a beauty queen but a strong leader who has had to make the most of a horrible situation. She is beautiful because she inspires others to keep on going even when times are tough. Her resolute gaze exemplifies what it means to hold onto hope when there is no rational reason to do so.

(Source: Library of Congress, photographer - Dorothea Lange)

This is the world's idea of power

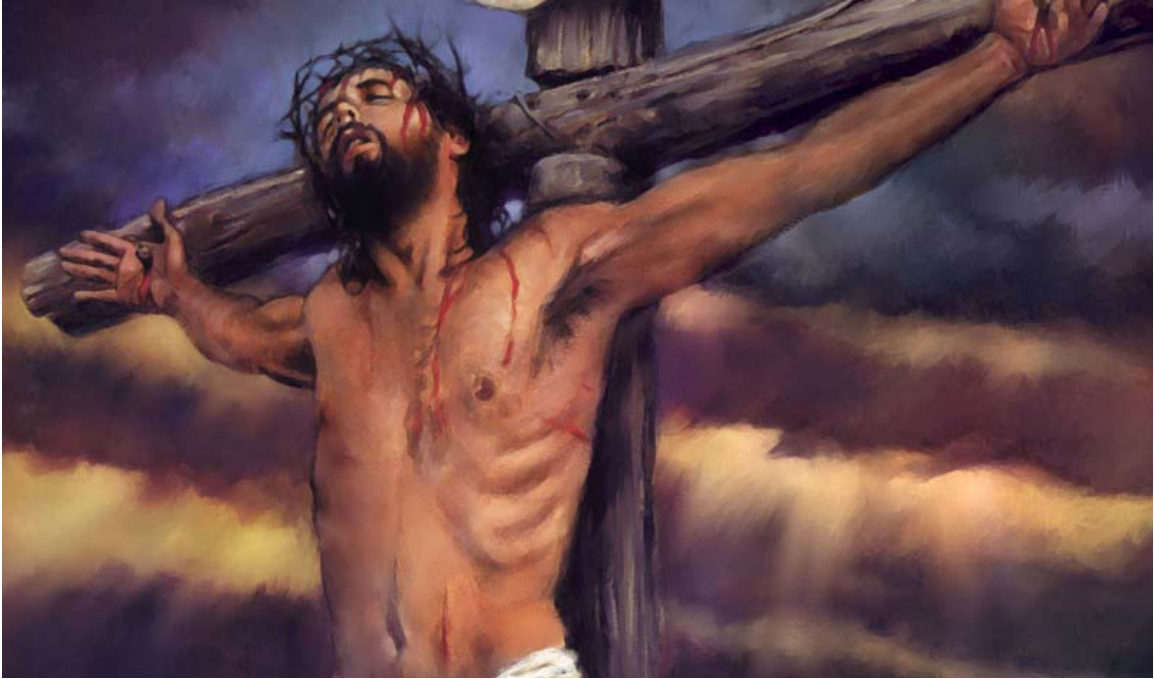


Or how about this?



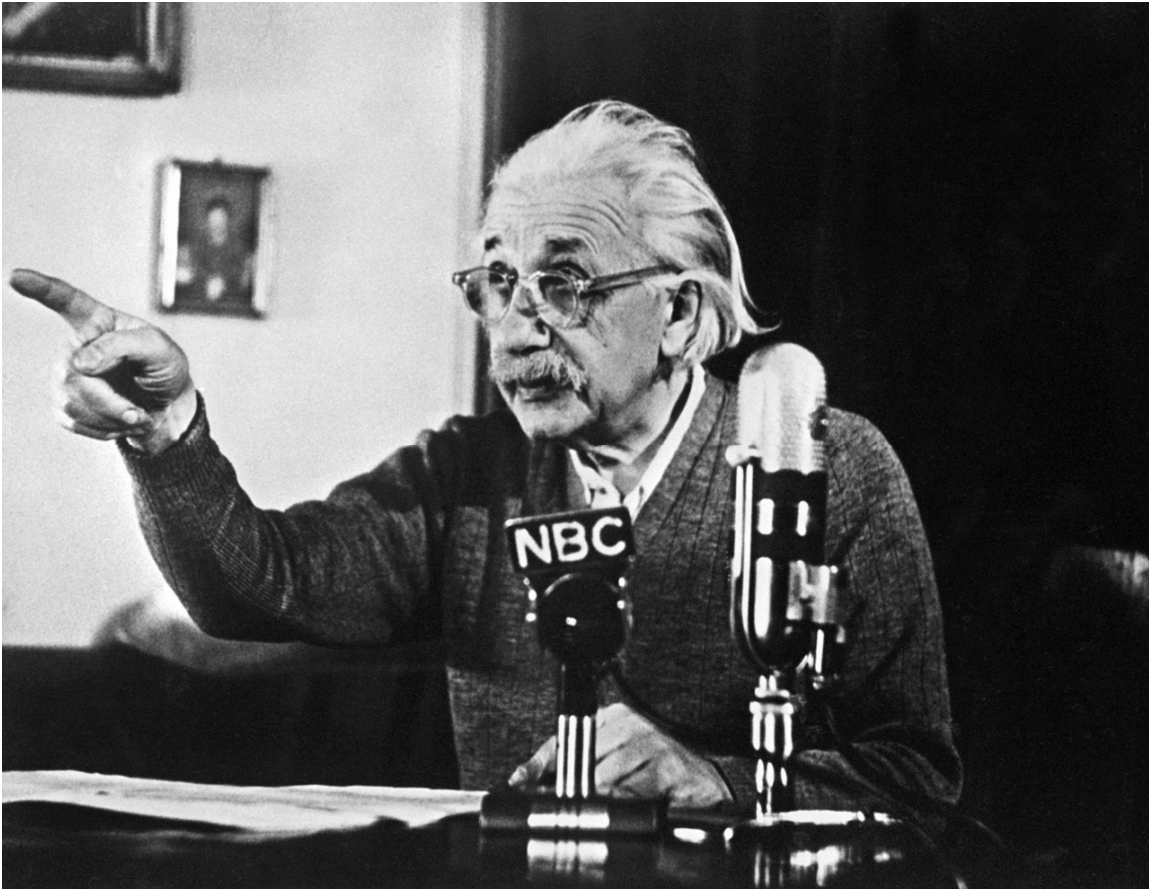
(Source for both pictures on this page: U.S. Department of Defense)

This is how God shows His power!



Violent Grace: No explanation needed just read John 3:16-17 from the Bible.

This is the world's idea of a smart guy



Smarter Than You or Me: Albert Einstein is considered one of the leading thinkers and scientific minds of his day. He is the poster boy for geniuses everywhere.

God thinks up what others can only hope to explain



Beyond Imagination: The heavens do truly reveal the glory of God. This nebula as captured by NASA is one of many amazing things that scientists are just now discovering about the night's sky. (*Source: NASA*)

This is man's idea of really rich \$\$\$



Everything a Boy Could Want: Daniel Radcliffe, aka Harry Potter, is one of the most famous and wealthiest teenagers in the world. His presence on the big screen has catapulted him from relative obscurity to riches and fame.

Some of the incredible people that I have met in Africa have more.



Rich in life, poor in earthly possessions: I have been to Africa twice. Both times I was amazed by some of the people who had very little in terms of wealth yet lived with happiness and contentment that few in the West could ever comprehend. Their wealth is measured in terms of experiences, relationships, simple blessings not ones and zeros.
(Source: Claudia Johnson)

Consider the following scripture about human wisdom and reason:

1 Corinthians 1:18-21 (NIV)

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Scripture is clear that some will get the Gospel. Others will reject it. The message is the same even though we may respond differently to it. No matter how smart we think that we are, God is greater. Isaiah indicates that God's ways are higher than man's ways. His thoughts far exceed our ability to understand them.

The beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord. It starts with recognizing that we are not the be-all, end-all of intelligence, morality or reason. This means we may have to swallow our pride and admit that some things that seem foolish to humanity make complete sense when understood from God's perspective. People tend to look at the world from a humanistic perspective. This is true even for most who are Christians. Do you disagree?

Consider some simple statements that Jesus made while preaching to his disciples about the values of God's Kingdom. In Matthew 5, Jesus made a case for a reality beyond what people saw in the physical world around them. His statements might have appeared crazy. Jesus' words may have also inspired the crowds that faced a difficult life under Roman rule.

What do you think?

Matthew 5 (NLT)

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.
God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Some of the above statements may seem preposterous even by today's standards and culture. Imagine how it must have seemed to the Jews who were ruled by the Romans, a vicious regime known for its brutality and high taxation. The rich had all the gold and made all the rules. They were blessed and tended to help themselves to more at the expense of the poor.

For years, the Jews had mourned and waited for the Messiah to return. Numerous false Messiahs had produced no lasting comfort or change. It was just a process of one foreign ruler after another. The Romans were anything but humble, yet they ruled most of the known world at the time.

While Roman rule did bring some degree of peace, that peace came at the expense of freedom and independence. Justice was still tainted by greed, money and power. How could Jesus say that those who hunger and thirst for justice will be satisfied when the pagans ruled over God's people?

Romans had crucified thousands of Jews for acts of revolt. How was this mercy? Where was God when the Romans handed out death sentences by the thousands? What about divine mercy and justice?

Despite the rebuilding of the Temple and the continual sacrifices by the priests, the people remained in darkness. They tried to follow the law and be pure in heart. Nothing seemed good enough to please God. The people thought they wanted to see God, but they rejected Him when He showed up in a different form than they had expected.

Then Jesus switched from blessing to talk of suffering as a way to inherit the Kingdom of God. How could heaven and suffering be even thought of in the same breath? None of this made sense to their understanding? Does it really make much sense to us today? Despite the complete revelation that we have in the Bible, we still tend to hold to first century thinking.

God calls His people to think with a new set of values. We should exchange human reason for divine reason. Here's what that may look like...

Rethinking Our Values

- Weak or meek is the new strong
- Surrender to God is security and freedom
- Faith trusts in spite of reasons to doubt
- Obedience is better than sacrifice
- Spirit is just as real as the physical
- You can't be born again unless you first die to what you think is self
- Action ignites feeling not the other way around

The danger is that we can all be easily deceived. The apostle Paul warned the early Church about this danger. Christians are to watch, be ready, pray and allow God to guard our hearts and minds. We are to set our focus on good things not thoughts that lead to pride, jealousy, lust or other sin.

2 Corinthians 11:3

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Philippians 4:6-8 (NIV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

1 Peter 1:13 (NIV)

[Be Holy] Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Getting back to the title of this meditation, God may not appear reasonable to human reason because He has a higher vantage point. God looks down through time; we live in one small part of it. The values of the Kingdom of God tend to be at odds with the values of most earthly powers. That is because even the best person is tainted by sin and its influences. If God seemed reasonable to us all the time, it would make us wonder if God was really perfect and holy considering the fact that no mere human can claim those things on his own.

The title also underscores one of the key problems with the majority of human attempt to understand God. We look at divine questions with a humanistic perspective where man is the focus and not God. While we may not try to do this on purpose, the humanistic perspective tends to be the default position unless we discipline our minds and bring them under subjection to God.

In reality, God is the focal point of all creation. He is the one who decides what is reasonable and what is not. Since God is the highest intellect, the most holy, the best good, and the greatest truth, He should be the measuring stick not human “wisdom” or “intellect.” The natural response of the Christian spirit to the title of this meditation is to reject it outright because we know that God cannot be unreasonable. The fault must lie with mankind. But is that really the worldview we hold most of our lives? Or do we value our limited reason over what God has to say?

The meditation is designed to illustrate that what we know to be true is not always what guides how we live our everyday lives. So instead of God being unreasonable, maybe we first should look in the mirror. If we are honest, we will admit that trusting anyone other than God is the most unreasonable choice we could make.