

Philosophobia

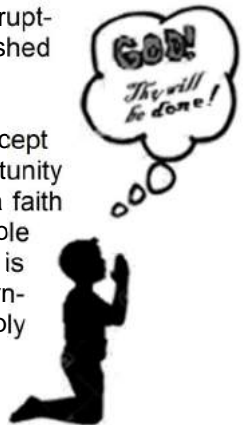
Do you have a fear of philosophy or philosophers?

How many of you have a phobia of one kind or another – from Ablutophobia (fear of washing) to Zoophobia (fear of animals)? The list of phobias is quite long from A to Z. Let me venture a suggestion that a good number of Christians have a type of fear called Philosophobia¹. They fear that people who take an interest in philosophy would be inclined to swell their heads with arguments against the existence of God, making it more difficult to engage them with the Gospel.

A dictionary definition of Philosophy is “the use of reason in understanding such things as the nature of the existence, the use and limits of knowledge, and the principles of moral judgment.”

People who are called or nicknamed “philosophers” are not unlike ordinary folks who use reason to contemplate truths, except that the “philosophers” involve themselves more energetically with their thought from many angles and therefore tend to appear as difficult to satisfy or be convinced by the Christian worldview. There is nothing intrinsically wrong to engage in a critical inquiry into the basic questions of life. In fact, the deeper the penetration into Philosophy, the deeper may the despondency build upon the serious searcher of truth as he discovers the hopelessness of reason alone to answer questions of life. The validation of faith (borne out of a bankruptcy of reason to grasp the divine truth) may become established with deeper roots.

In some religions, people may be habitually coerced to accept the status of being a follower. They are not given the opportunity to use their reason to make an intentional choice. To me, a faith that is professed out of “no choice” or compulsion by people around does not carry meaningfulness because the faith is neither true from the heart nor a decision based on a discernment of truth. The people professing such a “faith” is simply going along with the pressure that prevails on them.



¹ Don't confuse this with Philophobia, which is a fear of falling in love or being in love. ☺

We should be thankful to God for the gift of reason. With this gift of reason, we use it to explore the realms of His visible creation and the realms of the truths that eyes cannot see. The reason that man possesses is like a sharp knife that can cut both ways. God bestows on man the gift of reason packaged with the free will of choice. **Whatever the decision by man for or against the Christian faith, it is the outcome of applying the reason and the free will that:**

- **One may say to God “Thy will be done,”**

or

- **wait for God to say to him “Thy will be done.”**



In meetings with pre-believers, we cannot always avoid situations when philosophical views about God, religion or the Christian faith are brought out. At times it is to the consternation of the Christians who are put on the defensive but unprepared to provide a robust response. In such a situation, it may not be uncommon for some Christians to wish under their breath that the unsettling experience would get over quickly and hope for no

more encounters of this sort. Actually, the gift of reason being from God, every circumstance is in God's sight and within His control.

In the Bible, the word “philosophy” appears only once (1 Cor. 2:8)²:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” – NIV

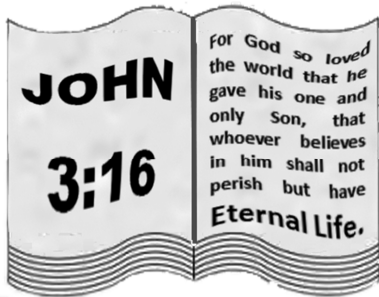
“Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.” - NLT

Christians, with spiritual armour secure³, will not to be deceived and led by the grandiloquent but hollow arguments of falsehood. However, this is not the same as saying that we should frown on, and have fear of, the philosophers and their philosophies. Meetings can actually be for us to render pre-believers

² However, two specific types of philosophers are mentioned in Acts 17:18.

³ See Eph. 6:11-18

a measured space to vent their views (even if misguided the views are) whereby, with correct cognizance of their reasoning, we may share with them pertinently some germinal seeds of truth in Christ in the spirit of an amicable exchange of views sans aggression.



Christians see themselves as sinners, and therefore they need Christ. Non-believers who criticise Christians over the latter's sins are missing the point. The Bible says that all have sinned. (Rom. 3:23) The more we (including the criticisers) recognise our sinfulness the more we ought to cherish the grace that is available to all who believe in Christ. This does not mean that we are released from our responsibility to lead a holy life; rather, the more we receive the unmerited

love and grace from God, the more we build up strength in our sense of righteousness imbued by the Holy Spirit in us to make unceasing effort in the right direction consistent with salvation's purpose. God's sanctification is progressive, not stopping at salvation but continuing throughout life.

(An illustration: If a child keeps receiving pardon after pardon from his father for his mistakes, the ceaseless love of his father should be cherished and be the motivator for him to reciprocate with effort to change to good behaviour and not to hurt his father further, even though the child may still succumb to mistakes from time to time. The ceaseless love of the father is not licence for the child to continue in wrongdoing with abandon.)

Rom. 6:1-14 is a sort of philosophical approach by Apostle Paul in refuting any notion that Christians should continue sinning so that God's grace might increase.

If you ever come across anyone who does not see himself/herself as a sinner, but as saint above all others, that person is perhaps someone who would not accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ because a non-sinner has no need for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. (The important question is: Is there any non-sinner in the world?)

My name is John which means “God is gracious” and, indeed, I can thank God for his gift of reason packaged with the free will of choice plus more – His amazing grace:

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretched like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see ...”

This famous hymn is my favourite. I wrote quite a bit with atheistic flavour in my pre-believing days. The hour I believed, I moved swiftly to writing for Christ. I started writing for Christ before I joined JCC.

I see writing, in part, as an exercise of immersing thought into the topics that one contemplates to write about. The use of reason is to be expected. Yet, it was by the very use of reason in the course of probing issues such as the nature of existence, the use and limits of knowledge and the principles of moral judgment that God revealed to me the truth that the power of human reason has its limits. Reason cannot stand alone. As a purposeful gift from God, it is also not for us to cast into the dustbin out of fear. **Both reason and faith work together**, as St. Augustine said.

It is good that atheists are free to enjoy their own adventure of philosophical inquiry. Given the freedom to contemplate the truth about faith and finally make a decision that can withstand hard knocks is certainly much better than being compelled to profess a faith that may become regarded as blind. When facing atheists, it is fine by me to let them continue with their reason in-

Amazing Grace

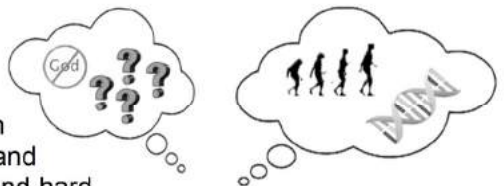
John Newton

1. A - maz - ing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears re - lieved;
3. Through man - y dan - ger - ous nights, and soars I have al - read - y come;
4. When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shin - ing as the sun.

I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.
How pre - cious did that grace ap - pear The hour I first be - liev - ed!
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.
We've no more days to sing God's praises Than when we first be - gan. A - men.

God does not expect us to submit our faith to him without reason, but the very limits of our reason make faith a necessity.

ST. AUGUSTINE



stead of fighting with them until the cows come home. Prayerfully, if they are willing to explore beyond the scope of what reason can avail, God will make His entrance into their consciousness. Hopefully, they explore with an open mind and a receptive heart too – not a mind closed to views outside their comfort zone or a heart sealed by prejudice. **God has given them free will.**

In interactions with people who have a rich mind for philosophical thought, it is not necessary for us to be always possessing of a ready answer to every question. **Who says that we are omniscient like God?** Who says that we must be all-knowing by our human faculty in order for us to embrace the Gospel? Faith is never to be founded on 100% knowledge. There were philosophers in history who came to know Jesus Christ not because robust answers to their queries were ready-made for them, but it was through their strenuous personal search for the truth that revelation came upon them through their faith. Consequently, they became defenders of the faith. The usefulness of philosophy is well-expressed in the following quotation:

Philosophy can be an effective tool if properly used as a means of understanding pre-theological questions, but not as a method of supplanting the revelation already made available by faith through God's Scriptures. The limitations of human reason, especially in light of the moral degeneracy in humans, requires God's help in resolving philosophical questions.

WALTER A. ELWELL (EVANGELICAL DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY)

Philosophy is not to be feared. Let's discard philosophobia and seek God's help for philosophers and all to grow their faith in Christ Jesus. †

John Lee