

What About... D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones On Defining Believing As Thinking

A quote from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones with comments by Dave DeWitt



David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was a Welsh Protestant minister and medical doctor who was influential in the Calvinist wing of the British evangelical movement in the 20th century. For almost 30 years, he was the minister of Westminster Chapel in London. Here is D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on faith:

“Faith, according to our Lord’s teaching in this paragraph [he is talking about the sermon on the Mount], is primarily thinking; and the whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he does not think. He allows circumstances to bludgeon him.... Our Lord, here, is urging us to think, and to think in a Christian manner. That is the very essence of faith. Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: It is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down in an intellectual sense.” [Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 2:129–30]

I wanted to record this quote because it is rare to find such well thought-out conclusions about faith. I would also like to make some comments about some of his statements. [I have copied his comments in bold].

“Faith...is primarily thinking.” Lloyd-Jones is focused on the faith of a Bible-believing Christian. In my opinion, what Lloyd-Jones calls a definition of faith is actually the mechanism or means of faith. Faith is always and inevitably trusting what we understand to be true. Whatever we understand to be true, we inevitably believe. What we do not understand to be true, we cannot possibly believe. But Lloyd-Jones tells us how Bible-believing Christians arrive at that understanding, and it is not through mysticism or blind choice, but through “thinking.” He has, therefore, contributed to my definition of faith. I suggest, faith is not thinking. Faith is understanding. But, in the Bible, understanding comes through thinking.

“The whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he does not think.” Of course, he means the man of little faith does not think much. Here, Lloyd-Jones makes the insightful observation that little faith is a result of little thinking. This is uniquely true of biblical faith, because biblical faith is always in the truth. Secular faith, which is secular understanding, might be based on things like mysticism, emotion, blind choice, or some satanic deception. In which case, one can have strong faith without thinking. But biblical faith is always understanding the truth. So, biblical faith comes from thinking and little faith comes from little thinking. In Christianity, if you are in a group that wants

to keep everything simple and does not want you to do a lot of thinking, then you are in a group that does not cultivate strong faith.

“The Bible is full of logic, and we must never think of faith as something purely mystical.”

That is true and significant. But I think He should not have added the word “purely” because it opens the door to mystical faith, which is not biblical. Lloyd-Jones is clearly saying biblical faith is “logic” derived from “observation and deduction.” In that case, faith requires knowledge (some information to be logical about), plus an application of reason (the laws of logic) to that information. Actually, no one needs to teach us to think with reason. The mind is not a blank sheet. We are born applying reason to information. For example, consider the question, “Can a person in a culture which has never heard of Jesus, have Christian faith?” No, they cannot. Christian faith is an understanding that comes through thinking, and thinking requires the application of logic to information. Isolated societies have reason, but not information. That is why Paul asks, “How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14).

Conclusion

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has contributed significantly to the subject of faith by pointing out that (biblically) faith comes from thinking, and little faith come from little thinking. As a definition, understanding is a better synonym for faith. But biblical faith, unlike secular faith, is in the truth, and understanding the truth always comes from thinking about information.