



The Cud...a little something to chew on.

April 5, 2004

It's All an Act

I've been calling myself a Christian for close to 30 years, and it's about time I admit that my faith has all been an act.

This should come as no surprise. All Christians are actors. We're all playing a role. We're portraying a biblical, off-Broadway adaptation of reality. Have you ever considered the fine line between pretending and faith? Pretending involves acting like something is true when you know that it isn't; faith involves acting like something is true before you can verify that it is. Pretenders know it's a ruse; believers think it's real. But in both cases you're acting as if something is true. You're literally "making believe".

Acting like a Christian requires imagination and patience. A Christian is like a film actor performing against a blue screen in a special effects shot. The director tells the actor what images will be inserted later, the same way the Bible tells us what realities God will insert later. Hour after hour, take after take, I have to mentally impose onto the blue screen of my day, truths I cannot see or confirm.

I have to trust my divine Director when he tells me what will appear in the final edit. I have to trust that when this life is finished, and faith becomes sight, the results will literally be, out of this world. The apostle Peter understood this and reminded his readers, "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

By definition, faith implies an inescapable risk for believers. I act like God exists, like Jesus is His Son and the Bible His Holy Word; but I can't verify with certainty any of those plot points. I can't prove God's existence, I can't prove His true identity, and I can't certify the divine origin of my source material. I like to think I have strong supporting evidence, but I also have to admit the evidence is, at least for the time being, disputable.

Still, I have to act. Everyone has to act like something is true. On the most basic level, you either act like God exists or you act like He doesn't. It's faith on either side of the aisle. Even atheists are believers of a certain stripe, acting like they live in a God-free zone before they can confirm it.

Whenever I follow the directions or commands of Scripture, I'm acting as though they're authoritative *before* I can authenticate their source. If I wait for verification in order to act, I'll never act. I pray, even though I may only be talking to the air. I act like a forgiven man, even though I haven't met the Judge or heard Him pronounce my pardon. I take advantage of the Lord's "invest your treasure in heaven" program before I can be certain it isn't a celestial Ponzi scheme.

Faith always runs the risk of being a misplaced trust.

Marriage perfectly illustrates the risk of faith. A husband and a wife promise one another that they will stay together, come hell or high water, no matter what hits the fan, till the grim reaper swings his scythe - only they say it more romantically and with an organ accompaniment. They make promises neither can confirm. A husband commits to his wife (and she to him), *before* he can verify that she will never leave or forsake him. He won't know for certain that she *will* never leave him until he discovers at the end that she *hasn't* left him.

Likewise, and I know this is going to make some of you squirm, I won't be able to confirm with certainty the validity of my Christian faith until *after* I meet Jesus Christ face to face.

This is not to say that I don't have enormous confidence, in fact, unshakable confidence that the Bible and Jesus have been speaking truth all along. I just can't confirm it yet. It's much like the confidence newlyweds have in the permanence of their relationship. In that moment when two people are standing at the altar, passionately in love, they cannot conceive of breaking their vows. Yet they still have to walk by faith...and live with the inevitable, albeit unthinkable, risk of infidelity or desertion.

Likewise, I live with the possibility that I could be wrong about Jesus. It wouldn't be faith if I couldn't be wrong. Unfortunately, by nature, I'm risk adverse. I like certainty. I like guarantees. But if I don't embrace faith with all its uncertainty, I have an even bigger problem because, "without faith it's impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Return for a moment to my original description of faith: Acting like something is true before we can verify that it is. If I want a healthy relationship with my wife, I have to *act* like she will never leave me.

Regardless of my fears, regardless of my family baggage or my history on the love train, I have to act like my bride is going to keep her promises. And she must do the same for me.

Imagine the alternative. Imagine going through life looking for signs and demanding assurances that your mate won't leave you. That's not faith; it's doubt looking for proof. That kind of insecurity not only places an intolerable strain on a relationship, it's an insult to the person who made the promises.

We insult God when we insist on confirmation of His existence, proof of His love, or signs of His commitment. A faith-based relationship lives on the lofty ledge of a promise. The minimum standard for pleasing God is to act like He's telling the truth - based on His promises rather than on His feedback (cf. [Hebrews 11:16](#)).

And that brings me back to my Christian "act". I'm fully resigned to the inherent risks of my faith, but I'm still a little shaky playing the part. I still feel like a fledgling actor, even after more than 30 years on the job. I forget my lines, I miss my marks, and I don't always pay attention to the Director. And it's not that I don't care, or that I don't realize the weight and responsibility of the role - but I'm definitely not a natural on the stage. On the other hand, a lack of acting chops is not a legitimate excuse for spasms of unbelief. Peter assures me that, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" ([2 Peter 1:3](#)). God equips for what God requires.

My failures notwithstanding, I won't quit. I'm resolved. I'm determined to show up on the set tomorrow and try again. Until the Director yells "cut", for the last time, you'll find me trying to act. I'm trying to act like "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" ([Titus 2:11-13](#)).

Harrison Ford once described being an actor as an "assistant storyteller". Christians are helping tell a story too. I wonder what we're making people believe.

For that day,

David