

# The Essentiality of Evidence in Christianity

by Eric Lyons, M.Min.

Though “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” is mind-boggling, and though “His judgments and His ways” are “unsearchable” and “past finding out” (Romans 11:33; Deuteronomy 29:29), and even though finite man will never fully be able to wrap his mind around a holy, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient Creator, nevertheless, God has consistently dealt with mankind in rational ways providing the evidence needed for a reasonable faith. Consider, for example, how God has always ensured that enough evidence was available for honest, truth-seekers to know that He exists (cf. Proverbs 8:17; Matthew 7:7-8). Paul wrote: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20, emp. added). Since the time of Adam and Eve, mankind has been able to clearly see how “the things that are made” testify on behalf of a powerful, invisible Creator. As the psalmist proclaimed: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth. And their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). The reason why “the **fool** has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1, emp. added), is because God has always given man adequate evidence for His existence. Sadly, the foolish person dismisses the evidence.



When the prophet Samuel addressed the nation of Israel at Saul’s coronation, he did not merely deliver an emotionally based speech. He commanded them, saying, “[S]tand still, that I may **reason** with you before the Lord” (1 Samuel 12:7, emp. added). Similarly, Isaiah wrote: “‘Come now, and let us **reason** together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’” (Isaiah 1:18, emp. added). Consider also the stark contrast between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In hopes of getting the attention of the bogus god Baal, these emotionally charged, pretend prophets “leaped about the altar,” “cried aloud,” and “cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them” (1 Kings 18:26,28)—all for naught. Elijah, on the other hand, had a rational faith that was grounded in the Word of God. He said to God, “I have done all these things **at Your Word**” (1 Kings 18:36, emp. added). His personal faith, as well as the message of faith that He preached, were rooted and grounded in the Heavenly revealed, rational Word of Almighty God. Biblical faith, after all, “comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

This same kind of rational, evidence-based faith and preaching can be found in the New Testament. Consider the actions and teachings of Jesus. He could have merely **announced** to the world that He was the Messiah. He could have only **told** people that He was the Son of God. He could have expected everyone simply to believe His **claims** that He was Heaven-sent, and never given His contemporaries any proof for His deity. However, even though there were occasions when Jesus chose not to offer additional proof of His deity (because of the hard-heartedness of many of His hearers; e.g., Mark 8:11-12), Jesus understood the essentiality of evidence. During His earthly ministry, He repeatedly gave ample proof of His deity. He noted how **John the Baptizer** bore witness on His behalf (John 5:33). He said, “[T]he **Father** Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me” (John 5:36, emp. added; cf. John 1:32-33; Matthew 3:16-17). He spoke of how “the **Scriptures**...testify of Me” (John 5:39, emp. added), and specifically noted how “**Moses**...wrote about Me” (John 5:46, emp. added). He also noted how His **miraculous works** bore witness to His deity (John 5:36). Jesus performed many miracles that demonstrated His power over nature, disease, demons, and death. He understood that His own verbal testimony alone would not convince anyone in a court of law (John 5:31; cf. Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Thus, at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem He told the unbelieving Jews, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, **believe the works, that you may know and believe** that the Father is in Me, and I in Him” (John 10:37-38, emp. added). Sadly, His foolish, stubborn enemies repeatedly rejected the irrefutable evidence that Jesus presented on His behalf.

Perhaps the greatest evidence that Jesus presented for His divinity was His miraculous resurrection. He could have risen from the dead and never appeared to anyone on Earth. He could have departed from the tomb and allowed speculation to run wild. Christianity could have begun on the back of uncertainty and mysticism. Instead, Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God...by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). He appeared alive to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the apostles, to James, and to over 500 disciples at once, most of whom were still living and could be questioned several years later when Paul, who also witnessed the risen Savior, wrote 1 Corinthians (15:5-8). Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by **many infallible proofs**” (Acts 1:3, emp. added), because He is the Head of a **reasonable** religion. The excitement, energy, and courage that early disciples manifested was grounded in the rock-solid **proofs** of Jesus’ resurrection

(among other things, e.g., fulfilled prophecies). The emotional, energetic, evangelistic faith of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians must likewise be rooted firm and deep in **evidence**.

Jesus was not the only New Testament figure who demonstrated the necessity of a knowledge-based faith. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John packed their gospel accounts with confirmation of Jesus being the Christ. Consider just the beginnings of these four books. Matthew began his account of the Gospel by genealogically proving that Jesus was the promised seed of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1-17). He then noted how Jesus was born of a virgin, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:18-25). Mark began "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1) by quoting Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Mark proved prophetically that John the Baptizer was "the voice of the one crying in the wilderness," and Jesus was "the LORD" (1:3). Luke also opened his account of the Good News with an appeal to evidence, knowledge, and understanding.

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (1:1-4).

Then there is John's gospel account, which, from beginning to end, is packed with proof that Jesus is the miracle-working Son of God (1:3; 2:1-11; 20:30-31; 21:25). In fact, the stated purpose of his record of the various miracles of Christ (and there were many others John did not mention) was so that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:30-31). If biblical faith is merely "a firm belief in something for which there is no proof," which is one definition *Merriam-Webster* (on-line) gives for the word "faith" (2011), then why did John and the synoptic writers spend so much time offering **proof** for Who Jesus is? Answer: Because the truthful, reasonable facts of God, His Word, and His Son are the foundation of **real** faith (John 8:31-32; 17:17; Romans 10:17).

When the apostle Paul stood before Festus and King Agrippa, he spoke of those things "which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23-24). However, as Paul "made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!'" (26:24). How did Paul respond? Did he answer with a mere emotional appeal? Did he welcome the idea of an unreasonable, unverifiable Gospel? Not at all. Paul humbly, but confidently, replied: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason" (Acts 26:25).

## CONCLUSION

Sadly, most accountable people in the world will never accept the mountain of evidence for Christianity and become Christians (Matthew 7:13-14). But, those of us who choose to put our faith in God, Jesus, and His Word, can do so because "the truth" can be known (John 8:32), rightly obeyed (Romans 6:17; 10:12-13), and logically defended (1 Peter 3:15).

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