

BEING READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER

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While the Bible explains our true origin, purpose, morality, and destiny, many Christians have not developed a working knowledge and understanding of what the Bible says about these topics. Without this, it can be very difficult at times to live out our faith. Society is becoming more deceptive and Christian persecution is on the rise. Many of us have friends or relatives that seem to be losing their faith because they begin to wonder if God really exists or if He truly cares about their lives. We find the answer to these and many other troubling questions in becoming mature in our walk with God and living life in the Spirit. Maturity in Christ and being His disciple includes all things necessary to becoming a good ambassador for Jesus. This includes developing a daily practice where we desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit, waiting on God in prayer, and renewing our minds to understand truth as the Holy Spirit instructs us through reading, listening, and meditating on God's word. We should also spend time thinking about and learning the vast amount of sound evidence which exists for our faith.

When our desperate prayers seem unanswered and the

memory of firsthand experiences with God begins to fade, we can become overwhelmed by doubt unless we have also developed our minds to understand truth. The Bible contains over 500 passages about the importance of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. In times of spiritual dryness, a solid understanding of why Christianity is evidentially true will bring you back to joy and life in the Spirit. Contemplating the evidence can cause you to seek God and surrender to Him more and more, every day.

The growing secular view goes something like this "Christian beliefs are based on myth, while intelligent folks base their views on reality." Young people can become susceptible to this deception because they want to be, and look, intelligent. Numerous studies by Christian organizations like the Southern Baptists, Assemblies of God, and Lifeway research indicate that 70 to 80% of young people raised in evangelical Christian homes abandon their faith by their early 20's. These young people are normal in that they want to live in "reality." For the untrained mind today, simply clicking on the wrong two-minute

video clip can send them down a road to confusion. This video-clip risk did not exist 20 years ago. Young people need to know why a Christian worldview is completely rational and based on sound evidence. Then they also need to know they are surrounded by a vast army of thoughtful Christian people who can clearly articulate an intelligent and logical understanding of what they believe. A believer that gains wisdom, knowledge, and understanding and also experiences the infilling of the Holy Spirit will likely never be ashamed of the Gospel but will instead, boldly declare the Gospel among family, friends, and in the public square. Let's look at what the Bible says about faith, evidence, and understanding.

What Is Faith?

One dictionary defines faith as "a firm belief in something for which there is no proof." However, Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the **evidence of things not seen**.*" There are many things we have faith in for which we don't have "proof," especially visual proof, but rather we come to believe in through indirect evidence. We can't see radio waves, but we have faith they exist based on other ways to confirm their existence, like the fact we can listen to them. We can't directly see parts of atoms like protons and electrons, but we know they exist. We benefit every day from the work of chemists who know how molecules work and how to combine them in ways to make useful chemicals. A "blind belief" would be void of substance or evidence. This scripture from Hebrews is saying we rest our belief on the **evidence** we have not personally seen.

The disciples have provided eyewitness accounts of what they saw. We were not there, and so it is evidence not seen by us. The New Testament is a large collection of evidence assembled for us by the early church as they were being led by the Spirit of God and recounted their experiences. When we search for additional evidence about God's existence, the reliability of Scripture, or even the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find that non-Christian sources are overwhelmingly in support of the historical underpinnings of Christianity. We should thank Jesus that He commanded the disciples to be "eyewitnesses" on our behalf. Most religious worldviews require adherents to believe in somebody else's private or personal vision, often the vision of just one person. Christianity, on the other hand, is based on real public events that fulfilled prophecy and that had hundreds of witnesses. The events around the life and teaching of Jesus Christ have been tested and proven reliable, time and time again. There is no person from antiquity with more historical support than Jesus, and every member of the body of Christ is welcome to embrace a wealth of additional scientific, historical, and archaeological support for what they believe. The idea that our faith is without evidence is a monumental deception. Now, let's look at how Jesus confronted doubt, while he was

still physically on earth.

Jesus Provided Evidence To Help Understanding

Consider for a moment, John the Baptist, cousin to Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit before birth, having prepared the way and having baptized Jesus, but locked in Herod's dark prison cell. In his suffering, doubt arose in his heart, and he sent two of his followers to find out if Jesus was actually the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus answered and said to them, "*Go and tell John those things **which you hear and see**: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up...*" (Matthew 11:4-5). Notice the wisdom of Jesus. He doesn't tell John to have more faith or to rely on the memory of a former experience. Rather, He made John's disciples into actual eyewitnesses for something John could not see from his prison cell. I can just imagine John's tears of joy upon receiving this incredible news. Reinforced with this evidence he could then be emboldened with the confidence he needed to soon face his own brutal execution.

Another fitting example of evidence to dispel doubt is the account of the disciple, Thomas, who would not believe Jesus had risen from the dead unless he could touch his nail-scarred hands and put his hand into his side (where the spear had penetrated during his crucifixion). Because Thomas had missed the opportunity to see Jesus earlier with the other disciples, Jesus appeared and gave Thomas evidence personally, allowing him to witness the scars first hand.

"*Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, **because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.**' And **many other signs** truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book*" (John 20:29-30). In verse 30, Jesus is not expecting us to believe without any evidence at all. Rather, he understood we would be blessed by the eyewitness account of Thomas and others because most of us would not be able to see Jesus physically for ourselves. While it is not necessary for a Christian to physically see Christ in order to walk as a disciple, it should be noted that Christ has chosen to reveal Himself to many people over the centuries.

Thomas clearly became convinced, and he remained a faithful disciple. Later, after receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Thomas dedicated his life to preaching the kingdom of God along with the other disciples who were eyewitnesses to Christ in His resurrected body. According to church history, he carried God's message from Jerusalem, through modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to the city of Mylapore near Madras on the eastern shore of India where, according to the best record, he died by a spear from an angry pagan priest.

Because of the evidence, he knew for certain that the person

of Christ and the reality of eternal life were true. Then, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he was willing to proclaim the Gospel in unfamiliar places and eventually give his life as a martyr. This type of transformation is what happened to all the disciples.

In Acts 1, we are reminded that Jesus not only proved his claims to be deity as the Son of God by coming back to life from the dead, but he stayed to visit for 40 days, providing even more proof.

“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:” (Acts 1:3).

Jesus performed miracles to prove he was God. Consider John 14:11, *“Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”* Here, Jesus is asking people to believe based on the evidence of His miracles if they don’t believe His words alone. Jesus taught with evidence, but did the disciples do the same?

The Disciples Provided Evidence

We think the disciples were so fortunate, having met Jesus and witnessing everything he did personally. However, Jesus also personally told them to be his eyewitnesses. Their willingness to declare their eyewitness testimony eventually cost many of them their lives. In a very real sense, the disciples died for us, so that we might believe by the evidence and example they left for us.

“But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come on you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:8-9).

The first disciples personally witnessed Jesus’ miracles, teaching, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, but they still needed the Holy Spirit. The Gospel writers consistently provided their credentials when they taught, and one can scarcely find any account where the writers do not reference some other form of evidence in their effort to persuade non-believers that they should repent of their sins and follow Christ. Today, all members of the body of Christ are witnesses being asked to represent Christ while He is not physically here. We don’t just follow Him. We live in Him and He in us. We are asked to deliver the same evidence of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection under the power of the Holy Spirit as it flows into, through, and out of our innermost being.

Faith Is Much More Than Just Evidence

Faith is more than just evidence or belief in our minds. It

also includes our minds. Salvation requires repentance and faith on our part and also involves a divine act of God - a new birth as we are reborn by the Spirit of God. We cannot just argue someone into the kingdom of God, but we can and should stand ready to answer their questions and at least attempt to clear up any confusion or doubt that has been preventing them from answering the door when Jesus knocks.

Does The Need For Evidence Mean You’re A Weak Believer?

1 Thessalonians 5:21 says *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”* One of the best ways to prove something is to look for evidence. Paul is saying that **we should not** just blindly believe things. Paul also invited the church in Corinth to investigate the news about the resurrection when in 1 Corinthians 15:14 he says, *“And if Christ is not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”* When we begin to worship God with our minds, we gain understanding and we learn that God’s plan is true based on solid evidence and reason as well as our supernatural experience, making our faith immensely stronger. Belief is a matter of degree. When we combine understanding with the work of the Holy Spirit, we can begin to believe with a depth comparable to the disciples who witnessed everything first hand. When that happens, the Holy Spirit generates a confidence and conviction in us, where we, too, could give up our lives for Him. Even if we don’t need more evidence to strengthen our own personal faith, that evidence can help others, who are also our responsibility.

Believing with our minds was so important that Jesus expanded on a famous Jewish verse found in Deuteronomy 6:5, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”* Jesus added the word “mind” and called it the first commandment. *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment”* (Mark 12:30). Jesus knew that our battle was not just physical, but primarily spiritual. Since we primarily live in our minds, the main spiritual battle involves our minds.

Did The Early Church Use Evidence To Help People Understand?

Peter lays out a series of seven qualities we should add to the faith we already hold in our hearts after we accept Christ. There is even a specific order to the list, *“giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge”* (2 Peter 1:5). After we have virtue (good character), the second item on the list of things to add is knowledge. We are warned in 1 Corinthians 8:1 that knowledge can puff us up, so we need good character first. More sound and godly knowledge will help our young people stay the course and help us all understand how to properly address some of the


difficult issues we face in society today. One early characteristic shared by the disciples and the early church is confident knowledge that the events in the life of Christ were actually true. The early church carried facts and evidence around in their hearts and minds like we carry mobile phones. Peter taught the early believers to prepare so they could provide a well-reasoned and convincing explanation for their hope. Because their belief and understanding were based on reasons and eyewitness testimony, they would not be ashamed of their faith and they could stand up before the skeptics and mockers that were persecuting them at that time. *“But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared to make a defense** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet **do it with gentleness and respect**”* (1 Peter 3:14,15).

Be Ready To Give An Answer

Do you ever feel awkward describing your faith to friends, coworkers, or even your own grown children, or explaining why you are a Christian? One conclusive answer at times like this is “because it’s very reasonable and evidently true. It’s also a wonderful gift from God. Would you like me to tell you about it?” If evangelism isn’t your strong point, how about helping your friends or the young people in your local assembly by giving them reasons for the hope that is in you. With a little training and homework, you can learn to answer their most puzzling questions and increase their understanding. The key here is that you must do this work before the questions are asked, which explains why Peter said we should be “prepared.” You should tell them about your experience too, because your personal experience with God provides compelling evidence and it can be easier to explain than talking about complex biblical and life concepts. Let your children freely ask the deep and most puzzling questions, because clear and coherent answers exist for their questions and the Christian answers provide a superior level of understanding than what they will typically find in the world. Though some questions relate to the mysterious ways of God (Romans 11:33-34), Christians have answers to all of the important questions of life including our true origin, purpose, morality, and destiny.

Never Argue About The Things Of God

It’s not about winning an argument. It’s about winning hearts for the kingdom of God. In the Imitation of Christ, Thomas à Kempis wrote “Differences of opinions and beliefs too often give rise to quarrels among friends and neighbours, and even between religious and devout people. Old habits are hard to break, and no one is easily weaned from his own opinions; but if you rely on your own reasoning and ability rather than on the virtue of submission to Jesus Christ, you will but seldom and slowly attain wisdom. For God wills that we become obedient to Himself, and that we transcend mere reason on the wings of a burning love for Him.”

That burning love for God translates into a burning love for other people. Therefore, above all else, when you’re trying to convey your understanding to someone else, always make sure your words and attitude are expressing a sincere love for them and be ready to hear their point of view, too. After all, your understanding may not be fully correct. If you pray about difficult discussions, God provides plenty of time to convey an understanding. Maybe all you need to do is put a pebble in their shoe. We all become ambassadors for Christ the moment we accept Jesus into our hearts. The question is, how good ambassadors are we going to be? 

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