

## FAITH AND EVIDENCE

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (**Hebrews 11:1**). This is the only verse in the Bible in which the words faith and evidence appear together. However, as we will observe in this study, there is a sense in which evidence is implied every time the Scriptures refer to acceptable faith.

Faith is the substance (assurance, ASV) of things hoped for. Substance is from the Greek, *hupostasis*. It means “the whole body of documents bearing on the ownership of a person’s property, deposited in the archives, and forming the evidence of ownership . . . In all cases there is the same central idea of something that underlies visible conditions and guarantees a future possession . . . Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for.”

Faith is the evidence (conviction, ASV) of things not seen. The word evidence, is from *elenchos* (GK.) and was used to refer to the proof or evidence, used to substantiate a lawsuit in a court. It means “a proof; that by which a things is proved or tested.” The verb, *elencho*, means “to give evidence in a matter . . . supply the proofs . . . make an inquiry and state the facts.”

It would be obvious to everyone who studies these matters that it is the case that there is a conjunction between Biblical faith and evidence. In this study we will consider three areas which can help us in understanding this relationship between faith and evidence. These are (1) a law which implies the conjunction of faith and evidence, (2) a leap which denies the conjunction of faith and evidence, and (3) a lesson which applies the conjunction of faith and evidence.

### A LAW

The law of rationality says that one should draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. Another way of saying this is that we ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence. The truth of the law of rationality is seen in the fact that the moment one asks, “how can I be sure it is true” he proves its truth. He simply is asking for the sufficient evidence which proves the law is true. To put it another way, one who inquires as to the truth of the law of rationality is seeking the adequate evidence which proves that it is the case that one ought to justify his conclusions by adequate evidence! Thus, the law of

rationality is seen to be true on the very face of it. One could not even attempt to disprove it (i.e., setting forth evidence to negate it) without proving it.

To be rational simply means that one honors the law of rationality (i.e., he draws only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence). The Bible teaches (1) the law of rationality is true and (2) all men ought to honor this law. Isaiah wrote, **“‘Prepare your case,’ says the Lord. ‘Bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob.’”** (Isaiah 41:21).

Paul wrote, **“Prove all things . . .”** (1 Thessalonians 5:21). John stated, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). When Paul made his defense before Agrippa, he (Paul) was interrupted by Festus who had succeeded Felix as governor in Judea (Acts 24:27). During Paul’s speech Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” (Acts 26:24). Paul answered, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason” (Acts 26:25). The word reason here is from the Greek word *sophrosyne* which means “what is intellectually sound.”

The footnote on Acts 26:25 in the NASV states: **“Literal of truth and rationality.”** The apostle Paul affirmed that his faith in Jesus Christ was rational (i.e., Christian faith honors the law of rationality which demands that we justify our conclusions by adequate evidence).

## **A LEAP**

Although it is the case that the Bible teaches Christian faith is rational, and God does not ask us to believe anything for which He does not give us sufficient evidence, some today affirm that faith is irrational. They hold that Christian faith must involve the espousal of some inadequately supported conclusion by a “leap into the dark” beyond the available and relevant evidence. The following diagram contrasts the true view of Christian faith as set forth in the Sacred Scriptures with the false view which claims faith is some **“leap into the dark.”**

The Bible teaches that faith comes from the sufficient evidence provided by the word of God (Romans 10:17). To claim that faith is a “leap into the dark” beyond the evidence is to espouse irrationalism which implies agnosticism which implies that, for all we know, Christian faith may not be true. This is not to say

that one understands, or fully comprehends, all the details of the basic propositions of the Christian faith (i.e., God exists, the Bible is the word of God, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and to be saved one must believe in love and obey Jesus Christ). However, it is to say that God has provided sufficient revelation (evidence) for believing and knowing that Christianity is the one, true religion. There are sufficient reasons for being a Christian (**cf. 1 Peter 3:15**). As Sweet has stated:

The logical result of discrediting or depreciating human reason is agnosticism, which is a state of mind wherein the power of evidence is lost because of a fixed belief in the infirmity of the human mind as the organ of divine knowledge. The false and artificial antithesis which has often been established between reason and revelation spells ruin to the task of the apologist.

Reason becomes a blind faculty which tells us nothing about God. Revelation becomes a sphere of extrarational beliefs indistinguishable from superstition. Faith becomes an asylum for the feeble-minded. Christianity becomes a mode of interpreting the unknown, the truth of which it is impossible to establish on any recognizable rational grounds.

Where there is no revelation (evidence) from God there can be no true faith in God. No word of God equals no faith in God (**Romans 10:17**). God has spoken through two basic sources (volumes) or revelation:

(1) General revelation and (2) Special revelation.

General revelation includes evidence He has set forth in

(1) the world and (2) man.

Special revelation includes evidence set forth in

(1) the Bible and (2) the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The Bible implies the value, and adequacy, of general revelation to provide sufficient evidence to produce faith in the existence of God (**Psalms 19:1-6; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:20; Hebrews 3:4**). The Bible also implies the necessity, and adequacy, of the special revelation which is set forth in the Sacred Scriptures as sufficient evidence to produce faith in, and obedience to, Jesus Christ (**2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Cor. 2:7-14; John 20:30-31; 2 Pet. 1:16-21**).

Christian faith is not a “**leap into the dark,**” but it is a walk in the light provided by the sufficient evidence of God’s revelation (**1 John 1:1-7**).

## **A LESSON**

A lesson in **John 20:24-31** applies the conjunction of faith and evidence. Thomas was not with the other apostles when Jesus made His first appearance to them (**John 20:24**). The others reported to Thomas that they had seen the Lord, but Thomas said, “Unless I see in His hands the prints of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (**John 20:25**). We should not be inclined in the least to criticize the attitude of Thomas.

In fact, we should respect and admire the attitude of Thomas. He implied an attitude which said, “**Without evidence I will not believe. Give me the evidence, and I will believe.**” The Lord came and said to Thomas, “**Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing**” (**John 20:27**). The Lord gave Thomas the evidence. Then Thomas answered and said to Him, “**My Lord and my God!**” (**John 20:28**). When Thomas saw the evidence, he drew the conclusion warranted by the evidence.

Faith does not always mean the absence of sight. Sometimes faith and sight are contrasted (**2 Corinthians 5:7**). However, the incident with regard to Thomas implies there can be faith where there is sight. The Lord said to Thomas, “**Because you have seen Me, you have believed . . .**” (**John 20:29a**). What Thomas saw, empirically, did not preclude his believing on Jesus. However, there can also be faith where there is no sight.

Jesus also said to Thomas, “. . . **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**” (**John 20:20b**). How do those who have not seen come to faith? Jesus said those who have not seen are blessed, because they draw the conclusion warranted by the evidence. It is not that they are blessed because they believe without evidence, but because they believe without sight.

Following this statement of our Lord with regard to not seeing and yet believing, John wrote, “**And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you**

**may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31).** The very existence of the written revelation presupposes the need for evidence to produce faith.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is an essential conjunction between Biblically approved faith and evidence. The law of rationality implies this conjunction of faith and evidence. Faith is not a **“leap into the dark”** beyond adequate evidence. The lesson learned from Thomas, as he desired to see the resurrected Lord, before he believed, is that faith and evidence are essentially conjoined.

We must remind ourselves that Christianity claims to be a rational system. It makes much of belief, and strongly emphasizes the necessity of faith as an organ of spiritual vision. As we have seen, however, faith (that is, trust beyond the range of experiment) is an element in all reasoning processes. Christianity admits the unprecedented nature of the events which it alleges in the career of Christ, but maintains that the belief in these events is entirely reasonable because they are supported by many infallible proofs.

The nature of the evidence which produces Christian faith, and the nature of that faith with regard to its credibility and certainty, are well summarized in the inspired words of the sacred historian, Luke, in the marvelous preface to his gospel account:

***“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed 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 we were instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).***

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