

Lesson 1: The Importance and Nature of Evidence

I. Evidence versus proof

- A) Evidence (Random House Dictionary): *noun* 1. Ground for belief; that which tends to prove or disprove; proof. 2. Something that makes evident; an indication or a sign.
- B) Proof (Random House Dictionary): *noun* 1. Evidence sufficient to establish a thing as true or believable.
- C) Proof is *synonymous* with evidence. It is false to assume that our faith in God or in the Bible is not based upon evidence—a common argument from the world. The evidence in the Bible and in nature is proof of God's existence—IF that evidence is conclusive. We'll show that it is indeed conclusive.

II. Who or what is an apologetic?

- A) Apologetics (Random House Dictionary): *noun* 1. The branch of theology concerned with the defense or proof of Christianity
- B) Apologia (Random House Dictionary): *noun, literature* 1. a work written as an explanation or justification of one's convictions, motives, or acts. Direct transliteration of the Greek word *apologia*. Also means a verbal defense.
- C) In short, apologetics is a technical term for the study of evidence. In your personal search for the truth, you have studied biblical evidence and found that the preponderance of evidence proves that God exists, that Christ exists and that the plan of salvation is the only road to walk. By definition, we all are apologetics.
 - 1. 1 Peter 3:15 uses the word *apologia* where we are told that we are to always be ready to give a defense (answer, *apologia*) for the reason of the hope within us.
 - 2. Philippians 1:16-17 also uses it where Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel.
 - 3. Jude 3 tells us we must contend earnestly for the faith.
- D) People will pervert, mock, abuse and denigrate those who have the faith we share. We must be ready to contend and apologetics is a method to learn *how* to contend earnestly.
- E) This class is necessarily introductory
 - 1. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence (proof) so we cannot hope to study it all. We'll hit some of the highlights and go in depth some places, but the real hope is that it will whet your appetite for in-depth personal study.

III. The study of evidence does not imply a lack of faith. God does not fear man's wondering. Rather, He has given us sufficient proof (evidence) to believe that He Is and that His Word is true. Whether we believe is up to us.

- A) Blind faith—that is, belief in something without knowing why one believes it—is clearly a bad thing.
- B) Biblical faith is not blind—if it were, why would God provide the evidence he has? God provides evidence (proof) so that we avoid that dangerous trap.
- C) We will become familiar with common attacks against the faith and will learn how to defend against them. We will be better able to offer that defense Peter commands.

IV. Christ also recognized the importance of proof

- A) He told John the Baptist's disciples to go and tell John what they saw and heard—in other words, evidence—when they were sent to inquire whether Christ was the One for whom they looked.
- B) Christ consistently pointed to the evidence He had shown throughout His ministry—see

John 10:31-38, for example.

C) Of course, Hebrews 2:1-4 and Mark 16:20 state that the miracles and signs enabled by the Holy Spirit were meant, in part, to confirm the words being spoken/taught.

V. There are generally two kinds of evidence: scientific and historical (or legal). There are key differences between these types.

A) Scientific evidence: this is evidence that can be independently tested and observed, whether in a laboratory or in a natural setting.

1. Science can be defined as systematized knowledge derived from observation and experiment carried out in order to determine the principles underlying what is being studied.

2. The “scientific method” connotes a carefully-run experiment where the scientist “fiddles” with one or more “knobs” to see how the thing being studied responds to different stimuli. It begins with a hypothesis and the experimentation is meant to support or refute that hypothesis.

3. The main point is that science deals in the natural realm, and more specifically, with what can be observed or tested. That's often why psychology, psychiatry, and the like are called “soft sciences”—they deal with the natural realm, but *direct* observation of most or all responses cannot be observed or measured directly. These sciences must necessarily infer things based upon indirect observation (How do you “measure” how you “feel” about something?)

4. Science has at least five limitations in the study of Biblical evidence:

a) It is limited to what can be observed with the five senses.

b) It is limited to the present—science cannot test the validity of past events.

c) It is limited to *how* something works (i.e., cause and effect) but it cannot tell us *why* (what *is* the purpose of the appendix, anyway?)

d) It is limited to amoral (non-moral) questions. It is incapable of making value judgments, something more atheist scientists should remember.

e) It is limited to those natural things that are dependable and repeatable at will. Thus, it cannot deal with such things as miracles—or an unobserved, one-time “primordial soup” from which all life is purported to have sprung, something else more atheist scientists should remember.

5. We cannot scientifically “prove” the Bible—nor should we try. The facts of science are in harmony with the Bible, but we cannot run an experiment to show that God parted the Red Sea to allow Israel to cross on dry land, nor can we observe multiple, independent tests of miracles at will.

B) Historical and legal evidence: this kind of proof is used in courts of law and is just as powerful as scientific evidence. If an accused killer's DNA is found on a weapon, but the accused was in jail at the time of the murder, what is the outcome? Though scientists may not like to admit it, we often give equal weight to historical/legal evidence as we do scientific evidence.

1. Historical evidence involves such things as eyewitnesses, written documents and records, and archaeological finds. In-depth research and investigation is needed before a conclusion can be drawn.

2. Its importance cannot be understated—Jesus was an historical figure. If one cannot trust historical truths, one cannot trust the Bible. Thus, we must believe that the Bible as history is truthful.

a) “Christianity is a historical religion and a Christianity wholly unrelated to historical occurrences is just no Christianity at all. Christianity, then, stands or falls with the

historical facts which, we do not say merely accompanied its advent into the world, but have given it its specific form as a religion. These historical facts constitute its substance and to be indifferent to them is to be indifferent to the substance of Christianity.”

3. Of significant importance is the testimony of eyewitnesses. An eyewitness is one who has seen something first hand—an extremely powerful form of proof. Of course, the scriptures are confirmed by eyewitnesses:
 - a) Luke 1:1-4.
 - b) Acts 1:3
 - c) John 21:24
 - d) 1 John 1:1
 - e) 2 Peter 1:16
4. The truthfulness of the claims of the Jesus, the miracles, and all other biblical events can be historically researched and verified—none should be ruled out without examination. They must be examined as historical events that can only be verified through historical investigation.