

A READY ANSWER

Faith is Substance and Evidence

By: TY FLEMING

Hebrews 11:1 states that “...*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” It has been said that faith is hoped for and not seen, but a clear reexamination of the passage teaches in fact that faith (the kind of faith that God wants us to have) is substance and evidence. Obviously there are other types of faith...blind faith, dead faith, etc., but a properly held faith in God is built upon substance and evidence. Once we experience the other side of Jordan, it will no longer be faith...it will be eyesight knowledge, but since none of us today have ever pierced the veil of death and returned to explain it, we must rely on faith. This faith is not some unattainable ethereal concept, but simply a belief or conviction that is held based upon a preponderance of the evidence. Christianity does not require that one check out of reality to blindly follow biblical precepts. Christianity, in fact, provides substance and evidence. Carl Sagan, a noted atheist and author, once stated “*Faith is believing in something in the absence of evidence.*” Recently I came across a young atheist student who stated that “*Belief in the absence of evidence is faith, continued belief in the face of contrary evidence is delusion.*” This is a not so subtle attempt to paint Christians as unthinking, ignorant individuals that are relying on some unseen, unavailable, non-existent spiritual being and that for Christians to walk in enlightened, intelligent circles, we as Christians must adhere to an atheistic philosophy. This attempt to place Christians in a category of ignorance is an attempt to marginalize them. If one cannot handle or win an argument with ample thought and proper intellectual verbalization of the premise and conclusion, then it is easy to just call the intended adversary “stupid”. Such actions, thoughts or words do not justly analyze the position and neither proves nor disproves the argument.

The word “substance” comes from the Greek word *hupostasis* (Strong’s #5287), which means “a placing or setting under, a substructure or foundation.” This word appears in other instances in the New Testament as “confident” or “confidence” (**II Corinthians 9:4, II Cor.11:17, Hebrews 3:14.**)

The word that is translated as “evidence” comes from the Greek word *elenchos* (Strong’s #1650), and it means “a proof, or that by which a thing is proved or tested; conviction.”

What Faith IS NOT!!

- 1). Faith is not a blind acceptance of the splendid without reasonable grounds.
- 2). Faith is not mere sentimentalism (accepting things as true because they give one a comfortable feeling)
- 3). Faith is not a subconscious faculty that reaches out to grasp the Divine.

Faith is fundamentally founded in reason, substance and evidence. **Romans 10:17** states that, “***So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***” There are many types of evidence that we could discuss in this article, but I would like to mention three. 1) The evidence of nature 2) The evidence of the Prophecies and 3) The evidence of scripture.

The Evidence of Nature

Hebrews 11:1 in context is dealing with the existence of the universe. **Hebrews 11:3** states, “***through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.***” And it is not unreasonable to state that God created. Biblical faith involves careful observation and the weighing of all available evidence. For example, the atheistic, evolutionary “explanations” for the origins of the universe do not even qualify as bad science. The “explanations” are actually closer to fiction. There are only two explanations for the existence of the universe that do not include a Divine Creator: 1) The universe has always existed, or 2) the universe created itself out of nothing. Can an intelligent thinking individual accept either explanation?? Just because no man was present when God created the universe does not mean there is no evidence to support the fact that it happened. If Mr. Sagan was correct in his assessment of what constitutes faith, then it takes a lot more faith to be an atheist than to believe in God. **Romans 1:20** says, “***For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.***” An honest observation very quickly can see the effects of a loving and kind God that has created the universe. Old preachers used to talk about throwing all the pieces of a watch into the air and they fall to the earth as an operational watch. It defies logic and reason to assert that order comes from chaos. One could not explode a parts house and create a Chevy. Order does not come from chaos. Look around you...notice the orderly systems working together for us even to exist... (i.e. oxygen, carbon dioxide, water, heat, cold, plants, food, sun, etc.). From where did the order come? Logic and reason would tell us that it could not have come from chaos...then it must have come from an eternal being and I know that eternal being to be God. This is faith based on substance and evidence.

(Continued on pg. 2)

The Evidence of the Prophecies

It would probably be more accurate to describe this evidence more specifically as the "Prophecies of Christ". There are literally hundreds of references in scripture regarding the coming Messiah. There are approximately 60 major prophetic references to Christ. For just a moment I would like you to consider a society before cell phones, computers and the internet, where different writers wrote hundreds of years and miles apart from one another with amazing accuracy about the chosen one...the Messiah...the Christ. From his birthplace in Micah 5:2, his family lineage in Isaiah 11:1-5, his betrayal in Psalms 41:9, the price paid for his betrayal in Zechariah 11:12, his crucifixion in Isaiah 53:12 and Psalms 22 and his burial in Isaiah 53:9 and then fulfilled amazingly by one man...Jesus Christ. Then consider the odds of someone not being the Messiah and fulfilling just a percentage of these prophecies (all of which are not stated in this article). Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, Peter Stoner, has calculated the probability of one man fulfilling the major prophecies made concerning the Messiah. The estimates were worked out by twelve different classes, representing some 600 college students. The students carefully weighed all the factors, discussed each prophecy at length, and examined the various circumstances that might indicate that men had conspired together to fulfill a particular prophecy. They made their estimates conservative enough so that there was finally unanimous agreement even among the most skeptical students. However, then Dr. Stoner took their estimates and made them even more conservative. He also encouraged other skeptics or scientists to make their own estimates to see if his conclusions were more than fair. Finally, he submitted his figures for review to a Committee of the American Scientific Affiliation. Upon examination, they verified that his calculations were dependable and accurate in regard to the scientific material presented. (Peter Stoner, Science speaks, Chicago: Moody Press, 1969, 4). In one of his conclusions, Dr. Stoner provided statistical analysis stating the possibility of someone fulfilling just 8 of the prophecies of Christ and they not be the Son of God. He placed the statistical odds at 1 in 1,700,000,000,000,000,000.

The Evidence of Scripture

While the prophecies are certainly scripture, one must first have faith in the authority of the scriptural text before one will believe in the authority of the prophecies. It is interesting to note that the book of Isaiah was written hundreds of years before a copy of the text was discovered in a cave and became part of what today is known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls". When scientists discovered the text, the examination found that the Dead Sea Scrolls contained nearly the entire text of Isaiah...**ACCURATELY**. The Bible is an amazing book. Its accuracy has been preserved through generations. It provides us with eyewitness accounts of circumstances and events to which we were not present. In any intellectual exercise, one must make a decision as to the truth of a particular fact or event. We either must witness the event ourselves, or we must rely on the eye-witness account. Reflect for a moment on the method whereby people as a rule acquire scientific, geographical, historical, or philosophical knowledge and one will readily admit individuals must rely heavily on other's testimony. Few of us have actually investigated every inch of the world's surface and yet rely on the testimony of others as to its traits and characteristics. Who would say that such faith and willingness to accept testimony is unscientific or unworthy of a rational being? When we analyze the process of gathering this information, there are two things that must be clear in our minds about the witness - 1) That the witness had ample opportunity to learn and know the facts and 2) that he is telling the truth. In other words, that he is not deceived himself, nor wants to deceive you. Historical facts of Hitler, geographical facts of the Antarctic or scientific facts about Jupiter's satellites are all believed based on information provided by eye-witnesses or individuals who have knowledge of the subject. I cannot investigate the murder of Julius Caesar except that I depend on the eyewitnesses. God's word is an eyewitness account of the life of Christ, the history of the Jews, etc. This is evidence just as if we were listening to it in a court of law.

Don't disengage reason, substance and evidence when discussing God's word. There is a lifetime of evidence to examine, but I challenge you to not get discouraged when your faith is challenged. This is simply an opportunity for you to examine the facts...the substance...the evidence.

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