

**NEW TESTAMENT
EVIDENCES**

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DEDICATION

To Seth Wilson
who first taught
me to love
evidences

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PREFACE

Almost 100 years ago J.W. McGarvey wrote a book entitled *Evidences of Christianity*. In that book he treated the New Testament text as to evidences for it, its genuineness, credibility and inspiration. To the adherents of the Restoration Movement, his book has played an important part in the acceptance of the Bible as the word of God in man's language. In the present writer's life, it certainly has played an important part in the faith he now holds.

However, as with all things human, time brought about the need for changes. Over the years many have thought about revising McGarvey's book to bring it up-to-date in some areas in which new facts and/or evidence have been found since McGarvey's day. At the suggestion of Don DeWelt, editor of College Press, the present writer has that responsibility.

We make no apology for saying that the heart of this book is McGarvey's book. His basic outline and presentation are contained in this book. We have not necessarily attempted to use his very words, though his thoughts are very often used. It is too difficult for this writer to write as McGarvey wrote — thus we have simply utilized his basic thought as a general rule.

We have added some material which was not available in Mr. McGarvey's day, and also rearranged some of the material which he had in the body of his text. A bibliography with some annotation is given for further study in the various areas. Other summations and material, along with charts, are found after the main text.

We believe, however, that McGarvey's basic mode of presentation was and is the best for the student who wishes to consider the evidence for the group of documents known as the New Testament. He well argued that a person should begin such a study by,

- first, establish the text from which any subsequent work is to be done or conclusions drawn,
- then, establish the fact of authorship, if such is possible,
- then, consider the credibility of the writer, in whatever facts are stated,
- then, and only then, argue about the writer's inspiration, and what that may mean.

Thus, we present his book in revised form with the hope that it will play a like part in the lives of future believers as it has in the past.

W.W. Wartick, January 1975

INTRODUCTION

The Reason for this Book

Christianity is a system of faith, a faith that is based upon the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. That equation (that Jesus is the Christ) is based upon testimony, especially written testimony. The basic written testimony about Jesus is contained in a (new) will, commonly known as the New Testament.

Christianity is, then, a religion based upon the evidence contained in a book, composed of the Old and New Testaments. There are other lines of evidence for the existence of Jesus and who He was — but the Bible, and especially the New Testament, is the principal one. The separate and combined books present the proposition that Jesus of Nazareth was deity that came to earth, took upon himself the form of man (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11) without ceasing to be God (Matt. 9:1ff; John 10:30; 14:8-10; 1 Tim. 1:12-17; 3:15-16; Heb. 1:1-4). He claims to be the Savior of each and every person who will accept His person and claims.

Hence, the importance of the book(s) that testify about Him! But, what about them? Are they believable? Trustworthy? Reliable? These questions help form the reason for a book on the evidence(s) for “the book.” The presentation will consider specifically the New Testament and only generally the Old Testament. (But see the charts at the end of Ch. 4.)

I. The Nature of Faith

Christianity is a faith system as stated above. It is a faith which produces commitment from each adherent. This commitment certainly means everything to the believer. It promises him both life here and hereafter (see John 10:10; 11:25, 26; 14:1ff). The believer is promised that his every need will be supplied here in this life, whether the need is physical, emotional or spiritual, and also in the next life (see Matt. 6:33, 34; I Cor. 10:12, 13; I Thess. 5:23; Jude v. 24-25).

Many other things the believer is promised — but these are sufficient to show that the inquiry into the evidence upon which one believes is mighty important. In fact, the believer may approach the study of the evidences with such determination that his faith will not be based upon a false foundation that he may neglect the contrary evidence, if such there be, or he may have faith in his faith.

God has provided plenty of evidence for the believer's faith. This book will attempt to present some of that evidence. However, regardless of how much evidence we have, Christianity will always be a system of faith. This simply means that we will always walk by faith, not by sight (see Rom. 8:24-25; II Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1-12:2). That is, Christianity involves risk, because faith is, pure and simple, trust. The degree of trust demanded may be greater for some things than others, but trust is the central facet in Christianity and, thus, quite necessary.

As Montgomery well states, page 73, "Absolute certainty lies only in the realm of pure logic and mathematics, where, by definition, one encounters no matters of fact at all" (*Where is History Going*.) Since Christianity does not lie in either of the realms that Montgomery mentions, the Christian will inevitably and always have to live by faith, though the faith is well substantiated by the various facts upon which the Christian system is built (see the "Faith and Facts" chart on page 115 as an example of the facts of the faith).

II. The Nature of Evidence

When we mention evidences, however, the question might well be asked, what kind of evidences? Evidences for whom? Subjective evidence? Objective evidence? Both?

A. SUBJECTIVE EVIDENCE. For some people, their philosophy would

not permit them to accept any evidence but subjective evidence. For instance, the existential philosophy, accepted, will cause a person to reject some or all of the evidences presented in this book. The evidences presented might well be used to produce an experience, but it would be the experience that was important and authenticating, not the evidence. That the existential philosophy has pervaded the thinking in the world of religion hardly needs to be said. Karl Barth's theology reflected some of this thinking (see Montgomery's, *Where Is History Going?*, chapter 5). For him, the word of God was only the word of God when it was meaningful to him, the "listener". Stated differently, the Bible contained the word of God but was not the word of God. Others have gone further than he in this direction.

Since the above is so, many authors have written concerning the nature of the New Testament (and of God's word as a whole), as to its *inerrancy* or *infallibility* (eg., Young, *Thy Word is Truth*; Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*; Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*). Both of these words relate to the idea of inspiration directly, and then to the areas of integrity, credibility and authenticity. Men have argued pro and con about these subjects. Doubtless, the discussion will go on — the reason being that what one person considers proof positive the other person does not — and this is because each person has a distinct idea of what constitutes evidence. This is not saying that every person is different from every other person, but it is saying that there are distinctly different positions held about the nature of evidence, or what is actually necessary to produce the Christian experience.

To reiterate, subjective evidence may be the criterion for the belief a person has. Yet the nature of subjective evidence is varied. What would be an authenticating experience for one person would not necessarily be so for another, though both held that the only valid criterion was subjective evidence. Some people would demand a continued or repeated verification.

In addition to these facts, there is disagreement on how one would decide which experience validated one's belief, since there is the distinct possibility of false experiences as well as true ones.

It seems to the present writer that Christianity does not stand or fall from one's experience, regardless of what that experience might be. In fact, one's conversion to Christianity does not constitute a valid

criterion for the conclusion that Christianity is true. (The conclusion a person draws about the meaning of an experience he has had may not be the correct conclusion, or at least be acceptable to anyone else. We can hardly argue that a person has or has not had an experience. However, we may well argue what this experience meant.) One of the reasons for this statement is the fact that one's faith in anything will change that person. Restated, faith invariably produces change (and commitment). Every religion in the world demands some kind of faith of its adherents — and that faith produces change (that is a part of the nature of faith: to produce change). Even those people who reject any and/or all religion do so on the basis of their belief that religion is not needed in their life, and that belief produces the change (result or effect) seen in that person's life.

We are not arguing that Christianity does not produce change — it does, and often a dramatic change, but other things will do the same (note Anderson's preface, pp. 7-11). Thus we do not consider that a subjective experience is any criterion for one to use as regarding the validation of Christianity, and especially in relationship to the New Testament books which are presently under discussion.

One of the present day problems (as pointed out by Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason*, Pinnock, chapter 2, *Set Forth Your Case*; and Montgomery, *The Suicide of Modern Theology*) is that many Americans, imbibing the existential philosophy, have gone to oriental religions, or mystic experiences in general. Christianity is not such a religion. Hence, we turn to the other kind of evidence to validate one's faith: Objective. Let it clearly be understood that the argument is not whether Christianity is a religion involving one's emotions; but rather what kind of evidence God has provided to make faith in Jesus of Nazareth possible. Neither should the reader conclude that the person who accepts (believes) that Jesus is the Christ will not have an "experience" — he will. Finally, we are not asserting that the combined experience of many Christians is not of some value — it is. But God did not, as this writer views it, make the truth or falsity of the Christian message stand or fall on subjective evidence, of whatever nature or quantity, but rather on objective evidence of a verifiable nature.

B. OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE. Objective evidence, in the sense which we are using it, is evidence that is apart from one's self. The illustration for Christianity is: an empty tomb on Sunday morning

some 2,000 years ago. The people came expecting to find the dead body of Jesus of Nazareth in a tomb. The body was not there but gone. That was a part of the objective evidence for the resurrection. A related fact to the empty tomb was, as the records show (Matt. 28, Mk. 16, Lk. 24, Jn. 20, 21, I Jn. 1:1-4, etc.) that these same people, and others like them, saw Jesus of Nazareth alive, in bodily form. That constituted objective evidence. The empty tomb and the resurrected body were not subjective experiences of any kind, but rather objective and apart from the individuals who perceived the empty tomb and the resurrected body. As a matter of fact, Christianity primarily stands or falls upon the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (consider the chart on page 115). There are other evidences for the truthfulness of Christianity, but this is a sample of objective evidence. One may accept or reject the fact of the empty tomb as he chooses. The fact of the empty tomb and the resurrected body remains the same.

This particular point of evidence that God has provided has been convincing for the present writer; convincing enough that he has believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God, what He claimed to be, and has been accepted as so. However, the reader may well ask, what is the evidence for the empty tomb and the resurrected body?—That is the issue over which people divide. The evidence that causes one to believe the tomb is empty may not be the evidence that causes another to believe that it was empty — which brings up the issue about objective evidence: What constitutes evidence that compels faith for one person does not constitute evidence that compels faith in another. Since this is so, some discussion will be pertinent regarding this point.

If this is thought strange, consider the common differences among judges in courtrooms as to what constitutes acceptable evidence. As this is being written, the courts of the land, including the Supreme Court, are considering the evidence for or against President Nixon's involvement in the Watergate affair. The House of Representatives and the Senate are considering the evidence pro and con. It hardly needs to be said that what is compelling evidence for one person is certainly not for another.

Such is the case with the evidence for the New Testament being what it claims and for Jesus being the Christ, which is the central proposition of the New Testament. The life of Jesus has illustrations

along these general lines, as does the rest of the Bible. Consider the following incidents in the Bible.

1. In the days of Noah, the only apparent believers in the evidence Noah presented for a destructive flood, to destroy the earth as it then was (see II Peter 3), were his wife, three sons and their wives.

2. In the days of Abraham, when the two angels came to Lot in Sodom and instructed Lot and his family to leave the city, the evidence presented was not enough to convince anyone but Lot, his wife and two daughters. Even his wife looked back, to her ultimate destruction (see Luke 17:32).

3. Again, during Abraham's lifetime, all the things that God did for him still did not keep him from doubting God and attempting to have a son through Hagar.

4. Joseph, sold into Egypt, was there because his brothers did not believe that his dreams were of a revelatory nature. They were not necessarily unbelieving men, but they did not accept the evidence that Joseph accepted. He drew the conclusion that God was in it though his brothers had not thought they were acting in behalf of God (Gen. 45:1-8).

5. In spite of all the obvious miracles which were done in Egypt and in spite of the fact that his own magicians drew the conclusion that God was greater than they (Ex. 8:19), Pharaoh did not so believe.

6. At Kadesh-Barnea (Nu. 13, 14) the majority of the Israelites rebelled against all the evidence they had seen as they had done at Mt. Sinai, Ex. 32, and rejected all the evidence they had received from God. Only Joshua and Caleb believed the evidence.

The story is the same many times throughout the Old Testament. It is not materially different when we come to the New Testament.

7. Nicodemus could see that the things which Jesus did were ample evidence for the presence of God in His life, Jn. 3:1ff, but many others did not draw that conclusion (see Jn. 5:1-47).

8. In spite of all the miracles which Jesus had done, most of the people who were fed did not believe that Jesus was greater than Moses or that He could give them eternal life (see John 6).

9. The blind man had plenty of evidence for his faith, John 9:1ff, but it did not convince some Jewish leaders.

10. A dead man walking out of a tomb did not convince some people though it did others, as Jn. 11:1ff shows.

11. There was ample evidence to convince a Roman Centurion

that Jesus was righteous and the Son of God (Matt. 27:54; Lk. 23:47), but many others were not so convinced.

These are samples of what we have had in mind by the preceding comments. Obviously, the position or state of mind of some people was such that no evidence would convince them, but for others, different kinds of evidence to display the probabilities of the truthfulness of the evidence were required. Illustrative of this fact is the reaction of the disciples at the resurrection of Jesus. The two men on the way to Emmaus did not believe the woman's story but had to be shown (Lk. 24). The ten disciples were no different than Thomas: They all had to see to believe (and sometimes the "seeing" did not at first become a validating experience as is shown by Lk. 24:36).

So it is yet today. A person 1) needs to carefully consider the evidence presented, pro and con, for the proposition that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God, but that person 2) must as carefully consider his presuppositions about the nature of the evidence he requires, etc. The *one* is certainly as important as the *other*.

We then consider this idea: How did God make us (as seen in the Bible record) to think or consider? That is, what does He expect of us as His creatures?

In consideration of the Bible and its description of God's dealings with man, God never asked anyone to believe in Him without evidence sufficient to produce such a faith. Review the cases cited above from either the Old or New Testaments: Faith was not expected in anyone without sufficient warning and/or reason to believe. Adam and Eve had been told . . . , Noah preached . . . , Abraham heard personally . . . , the Jews had been told . . . , etc. As Jesus said in John 15:22, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned, but now (that I have come and spoken to them) they have no excuse for their sin." Paul points out in Rom. 1:18ff. the men had no reasons, only excuses, for rejecting God. He notes in Heb. 3:4 that "every house is built by someone (thus man reasons 'cause and effect') but the builder of all things is God (and thus man has no good reason not to conclude *God is the cause of the 'effects' he sees in the world about him*)."

To reason any other way (that God requires faith without evidence, or punishes unjustly) is to make God worse than men, who judge on the basis of one's accountability. Such is exactly one of the points Paul makes in Rom. 3:1-8.

We then conclude that God does not expect anyone to believe in a vacuum, but rather that He has so created us that we come to faith by hearing, Rom. 10:17. We resist squarely those who teach that man cannot come to faith until he is born again (see for example, *How Dependable is the Bible*, pg. 182). This is exactly in antithesis to the whole Bible teaching. It is also a false doctrine made somewhat notable by Augustine, refined and taught by John Calvin and his spiritual heirs. If such were actually the case, there would be no point in writing books about evidences (to produce faith), and certainly no need to preach for conviction, since God alone decides and does the convicting (with faith as the automatic effect)!

We do not so agree. Hence, we present the following pages on the basis that anyone so desirous can consider the evidence and come to faith. Christianity is an historical religion, depending upon facts adequate to cause faith. The honest person can hardly do other than consider them. The willing person can do aught but accept them, as C.S. Lewis so well states in *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 177-178. May those who read further in the present work be so inclined and persuaded!

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