

TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

by

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps you have seen the statistics. Even by conservative estimates, we are losing between 60% and 90% of our young people after their graduation from high school. “Little Johnny” grows up, is sent to college, vocational school, work, etc., and suddenly finds himself with more freedom than he ever has experienced. There is no mom around to make him clean up his room; there is no dad around to force him to mow the lawn. And suddenly it dawns on Johnny that there is no one to make him attend worship. Johnny is “free!”

But in his rush to put to use his newly found freedom, Johnny forgets that with freedom always comes responsibility—to his parents, to himself, and especially to the God Who created him. Little by little, worldly pressures and pleasures push spiritual values from Johnny’s life. And although Johnny may espouse verbally a “belief” in God and the Bible, he long since has given up any practical, day-to-day, life-influencing commitment to those values he once held dear. For all practical purposes, Johnny is gone.

WHY DID JOHNNY FALL AWAY?

Why did Johnny fall away? What caused him to leave the Lord and His church and instead turn his attention to worldly matters? Likely, of course, there are many possible answers. However, I would like to concentrate on only one. **Something undermined Johnny’s commitment and caused him to give up the ideals he once held dear.** What persuaded this youngster to abandon his faith in God, his trust in Jesus, and his reliance upon the Bible? Perhaps Johnny lost his faith because he never knew the evidence upon which his faith should have rested in the first place. In other words, Johnny “believed” but he did not know **why** he believed. He was living an “inherited” religion. Having, therefore, no good reason to keep on believing, when He was faced with the temptation to be free, Johnny fell headlong into the trap set for him by the “roaring lion”—our adversary, the Devil (1 Peter 5:8). **Satan was successful in his**

task because we failed in ours. We did not train Johnny “in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6) because we did not show him the evidence upon which his faith should have been based.

THE NEED TO TRAIN CHILDREN IN CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Many in the church today are not acquainted with the field of Christian evidences and the great good that can be accomplished through the proper use of this marvelous tool. Some preachers, teachers, and parents wonder whether there is a proper place for instruction in Christian evidences within the teaching framework of the local congregation or family unit. Some, not knowing how valuable training in this area can be, have assumed it is of interest only to the “intellectually elite.” Yet nothing could be farther from the truth.

A study in Christian evidences concentrates on an examination of the massive amount of evidence upon which Christianity is based. This entails a study of God’s existence, the deity and Sonship of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the truthfulness of the creation account in Genesis 1, etc. It helps ground our faith in fact by providing logical, sound, defensible answers to questions that so often arise—especially in the minds of young people.

TEACHING CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES—WHY?

Why, exactly, should we engage in the study of Christian evidences? First, we should study Christian evidences because biblical authority demands it. Peter stated that we should be “ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). We are commanded to “contend earnestly for the faith, once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). With an increasing number of people doubting God’s existence, Jesus’ deity, and the inspiration of the Bible, the Christian will find an increased demand upon him to be able to defend these things. Paul stressed that we should “prove all things,” and then having done so, “hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It was Paul’s custom to teach the Gospel by presenting the evidence that documented the truthfulness of Christianity (see Acts 17:2-3; 19:8). That is, in fact, how Peter preached the first Gospel sermon—by presenting the evidence in a defense of Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2).

Second, we should study Christian evidences because doing so will strengthen our faith. Through a study of the evidence upon which Christianity is based, Christians will come to see that Christianity is not a “pie in the sky” or an “I-hope-so-by-and-by” kind of religion. On the contrary, Christianity is grounded in historical fact. Its roots are deep and its precepts are provable. Through a study of Christian evidences, we can show young people that they can: (a) **know** God exists, (b) **know** Jesus is God’s Son; and (c) **know** the Bible is God’s inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word. In so doing, we can give young people a clear view of their God, His Son, and their future home of heaven.

Third, we should study Christian evidences to demonstrate the validity of the Christian system. Truth does not shrink from exhaustive examination, for it has nothing to fear. Rather, truth welcomes the searchlight of the severest scrutiny, unfailingly confident that it cannot be disproved. A religion that discourages logical examination of its claims is tacitly admitting the doubtfulness of its position. Christianity has no fear of submitting its beliefs to the critical examination of skeptics. Nor does Christianity fear to have its proponent(s) study the claims of other religions (or no religion at all). Truth will not bend or break beneath the onslaught. A faith that cannot withstand a terse, critical examination is a faith not worth having in the first place. As young people are shown the massive amount of evidence that proves God’s existence, Jesus’ Sonship, and the Bible’s inspiration—and as they examine other claims (atheism, agnosticism, denominationalism, etc.) under the dissecting microscope of God’s Word—eventually they will come to accept, and be able to defend, the one true religion of the one true God.

Fourth, we should study Christian evidences so that we can properly defend Christianity against the attacks made upon it by its enemies. From the philosopher who claims it is impossible to know anything at all to the scientist who claims that we are little more than “naked apes,” attacks upon Christianity never cease. The atheist says he **knows** God doesn’t exist; the agnostic says neither he nor anyone else **can know** God exists; the skeptic says he **doubts** that God exists; the infidel says that **if** God exists, it is **not** the God of the Bible; and so on. Various forms of these false philosophies have crept into the church in some places and have caused the untaught and the unstable to fall away. Children are especially vulnerable to such false teachings because they often are required to study under teachers or professors who

openly are antagonistic to Christianity. A young person's plastic, impressionable mind is a prime target for the Devil's ungodly schemes. It is our responsibility to fill the minds of our children with truth (and the evidence supporting that truth) so they will be able to withstand the "fiery darts of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). A study of the evidence that attends Christianity is a fine step in the right direction toward protecting both our children and the church.

Fifth, we should study Christian evidences because by doing so we can save not only our own souls and the souls of our children, but the souls of others as well. One thing is certain: we cannot teach what we do not know (Hebrews 5:12). Our goal is heaven (Hebrews 11:13-16). Our mission is not only to get there ourselves, but to take as many others as possible with us as well (Matthew 28:18-20). It is our task to learn God's Word (Psalm 119:11) and then to convey that Word to others for their ultimate salvation (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:16). Our society today is a questioning one—and rightly so. Religion cannot and must not rest on presumptive grounds or traditional heritage. People must investigate the claims of Christianity and then see for themselves that those claims are legitimate, factual, and above all, true.

TEACHING CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES—HOW?

Some years back, Guy N. Woods, the late, lamented editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, carried out an extensive survey among churches of Christ nationwide. The results were not very flattering. According to the survey: 40% of those surveyed admitted that they attended only one worship service a week; 50% indicated that they did not know why churches of Christ do not use instrumental music in worship; 10% believed that one church is as good as another; 90% did not subscribe to a religious publication; 75% could not find the plan of salvation in the Bible.

These kinds of statistics speak volumes. They indicate a lack of Bible study, an attitude of indifference, and a failure to comprehend both basic Bible doctrines and the nature of the church. Little wonder we are losing 60-90% of our young people after high school graduation. They merely are rushing to fit into the mold that so many parents and other church members have set for them. It is, quite simply, a matter of: "What you **do** speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you **say**."

Needless to say, this is not the way God intended for things to be. Nor has it always been this way. The early Christians searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11) and “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). These faithful followers of Jesus **knew** what they believed, **were not ashamed** of what they believed, and above all **taught** what they believed. Men such as Moses Lard, Alexander Campbell, Raccoon John Smith, and others like them who sought to restore New Testament Christianity realized that the Scriptures did not teach denominationalism or anything akin to it, but instead a singular, true church. They had to be able to **prove** such convictions, else their departure from the man-made institutions of which they formerly were members would have seemed both foolish and fickle. Nothing has changed. As Christians, we today must believe strongly in the Word of God, and be able both to proclaim and defend it at all times and to all classes of people (Jude 3). Above all, we must impress upon our children that our beliefs are not our own and are not of our own design; rather, they are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Romans 10:17). As such, they are truth (John 8:32) and must be taken to a lost and dying world (Matthew 1:21).

How Do We Teach Our Children Christian Evidences?

First and foremost, **we must begin in the home**. We must encourage parents and children alike to become daily Bible readers. It may be difficult, busy schedules being what they are, but it is not impossible—and it is important! Begin by choosing short passages or single chapters. Choose passages that emphasize the use of evidence by biblical writers in their discussions with first-century people (e.g., Acts 2; Acts 17; Romans 1; etc.). Choose also passages that emphasize God’s commands in this regard (Jude 3; 1 Peter 3:15; etc.). Reinforce two points: (a) God has commanded us to be ready to defend the faith; and (b) the inspired writers did exactly that in their writings and teachings.

Second, request a specific Sunday morning or Wednesday evening class devoted to the study of Christian evidences. Secure teachers and co-teachers who either already are familiar with Christian evidences or who have adequate time to prepare properly. Use only the **very best** teachers who recognize the sacrifices they will have to make to do their job well.

Third, choose good, sound material for use in the classroom so that the students not only have at their disposal additional information (besides what will be covered in class), but also have a ready, reliable source to which they can turn in later years for answers to questions that may arise as they mature and grow older. Give the students diagrams, charts, reprints from journals and magazines, tracts and pamphlets, synopses of major arguments—anything that will provide a “mini-library” they can use in further study. I cannot overemphasize the need to select biblically sound, scientifically accurate materials. After all, the souls of our young people are at stake!

A Word of Caution

A word of caution is in order at this point. First, the tendency exists for some to think that the use of evidences is an **end within itself**. We must not fall into this trap. The use of Christian evidences is a **tool**; it is a **means** to an end—not the end itself. The judicious use of Christian evidences can help people see that Christianity is a religion based on historical, verifiable fact. People, however, must possess a seeking attitude (Proverbs 8:17). Without such, little may be accomplished. Be forewarned, therefore, that the use of Christian evidences does have limitations.

Second, unfortunately there are those working in the field of Christian evidences whose teachings are filled with error. They produce books, tapes, films, etc. that are unsound and unscriptural. They speak about the “probability of God’s existence,” the “leap of faith,” the fact that one “cannot **know** God exists,” the fact that “evolution and the Bible show almost complete agreement,” and the like. When souls are at stake, **there is no room for errors such as these**. We must exercise caution in choosing the materials and/or speakers to which our young people are exposed.

TEACHING CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES—WHAT?

In his book, *Set Forth Your Case*, Clark Pinnock provided remarkable insight into the use of Christian evidences when he wrote:

The aim of apologetics is not to trick a person into becoming a Christian against his will. It strives rather at laying the evidence for the Christian gospel before men in an intelligent fashion so that they can make a meaningful commitment...The heart cannot delight in what the mind rejects as false. Apologetics presents compelling reasons to the mind for receiving Christ as Savior into the total man. Faith is based upon credible evidence which people can recognize as trustworthy in accord with proper criteria for truth (1971. p. 11).

An essential function of Christian evidences is to show that Christianity is the one true religion of the one true God and as such is based on truth claims that the unbeliever can study and accept. Another essential function of Christian evidences is to provide the believer with a firm foundation for his own belief so that his faith may be grounded and rooted in the knowledge of God's truth. The Christian system is not now, nor was it ever intended to be, based on fiction or myth. Instead, it is anchored in the most credible of realities.

What Do We Teach Our Children About Evidences?

First, the proof for God's existence is an important part of any study in Christian evidences. God's existence is both **provable** and **knowable**. Man can know God exists, and he can know that he knows it. This is a crucial point. If man cannot know God exists, then he cannot know (i.e.: with certainty) that the Bible is God's Word. If he cannot **know** the Bible is God's Word, then he cannot **know** that Jesus is the Son of God. If he cannot **know** that Jesus is the Son of God, then he cannot **know** that he is saved. Yet this is in direct conflict with 1 John 5:13 ("These things have I written unto you, that you may **know** that ye have eternal life"). If the Christian cannot know that God exists, what, then, distinguishes him from the agnostic? Christians are not agnostics.

Amazingly, some today claim that God's existence is neither knowable nor provable. Instead, they suggest, it merely is **more probable** that God exists than that He does not. Why cannot those who advocate this idea see the logical results of such a concept? If it merely is **more probable** that God exists than that He does not, there nevertheless remains a **probability** (however small) **that God does not exist!** This notion is false. God's existence is not a matter of probability. Certainly, God's existence cannot be proved **scientifically** (i.e.: like one would prove that a sack of potatoes weighs five pounds), but direct, empirical, scientific proof is not the only kind of proof available. We must not yield to the false concept that God's existence is unknowable.

Second, the proof of the deity and Sonship of Jesus Christ forms an important part of the study of Christian evidences. In Acts 8:35 when the text records that Philip, in speaking to the Ethiopian eunuch, "preached unto him Jesus," and no more, it is because **there is no more**. Christianity without Christ is no

Christianity at all. If the deity of Jesus somehow is negated, all of Christianity falls with it. We must impress upon youngsters that Jesus was exactly Who He claimed to be—and that the evidence supporting His claim is irrefutable!

Any study of Jesus' deity and Sonship, then, would include an in-depth examination of His virgin birth, His life, His teachings, His miracles, His bodily resurrection from the dead, etc. The historical, philosophical, and biblical evidence supporting Jesus' deity is overwhelming and is quite capable of documenting that Jesus is Who He claimed to be. Young people need to be protected from false doctrines that assert Jesus was simply a "good teacher" or a "wonderful prophet." Those are not options that Christ left open to us. Either He is Who He claimed to be—the Son of God—or He is worse than the Devil of hell, for He is both a liar and a hypocrite since He told men to trust their eternal salvation to Him. Young people need to know that **Jesus is their risen Lord.**

Third, the proof of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible forms an important part of the study of Christian evidences. Convince a young person that the Bible is not fully inspired and he quickly will realize that: (a) God makes mistakes, and therefore is not to be trusted; and (b) if the Bible is not what it claims to be, then in actuality there is no objective moral standard to be followed in this life. There is no need to dwell on the fruits of this kind of thinking. Evil trees produce evil fruits (Matthew 7:17). With no perfect, pure, trustworthy God—and therefore no objective standard of right and wrong—each man does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6). As the prophet Jeremiah correctly observed "it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

Fourth, the proof of creation at the hand of an Almighty God forms an important part of the study of Christian evidences. We must not allow our children to become convinced that they owe their ultimate origin to the blind, chance, naturalistic processes of organic evolution that allegedly provided them with an ancestry rooted in ape-like creatures millions of years ago. Instead, we must ground them in the truth contained within Genesis 1 (and hundreds of other passages) that speaks of the lofty creation of man by God. We must help them see that there is a big difference in having evolved by accident from the primordial slime on some primeval seashore and having been created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26-27).

If we give our children a false concept of their origin, inevitably they will end up with false concept of their purpose and destiny!

CONCLUSION

The study of Christian evidences is an excellent way to provide the “strength of faith” our young people need so desperately need in this day and age. It is an important asset in preparing them for assaults that likely to be made on their faith. It is an excellent tool to for their use in evangelism. And it forms a part of the repertoire or knowledge needed by the Christian to convert the lost and to keep his own soul from apostasy. As the Christian strives to show himself “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” (2 Timothy 2:15), he will find studies in the area of Christian evidences a valuable part of that process. The knowledge gained from such a study will help each person “rightly divide the word of truth”—something that is absolutely essential to salvation. Let us, like Paul, never be ashamed of the Gospel, recognizing that it is the “power of God unto that salvation” (Romans 1:16). Let us study it diligently to learn it well, and then, in turn, teach it to our children from the time we arise in the morning until the time that we lie down to sleep at night (Deuteronomy 11:18-21).

REFERENCES

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