

THE EVIDENCE FOR FAITH

There are three dimensions to developing confidence in something or someone: Reason, experience and choice. To develop a robust, healthy faith in the Biblical view of God we must be convinced that intellectually it's most reasonable understanding of reality, and be able to connect that understanding with our experience of life and the world. However, this can only happen if we're willing to seriously and sympathetically explore whether the Bible is a reliable source of information about God. Our will decides what we think about and allow ourselves to experience. If we're willing, the following is a series of ways to explore those questions.

RATIONAL EVIDENCE

Philosophical Arguments: This is the most general level of evidence, philosophers have been wrestling with these questions for thousands of years. Areas that can be considered include the existence of the world, the reason for moral awareness and the basis for moral judgement, the meaning and significance of culture and the existence of belief in God.

Worldview Arguments: This approach is more specific and explores which of the major worldviews most plausibly explains life as we experience it. What best accounts for the wonder and brokenness we experience in the world? What's the most convincing way to explain who we are and why we're here? What's the best pattern for human interaction? Which worldview gives the most convincing answers?

Reliability of the Bible: Focussing specifically on the Bible we can investigate the coherence of its message and the reliability of its prophecy. When it comes to the accounts of Jesus' life we can examine the distance between the events and them being recorded, we can check whether what we have now is what was originally written and we can ask if the authors are reliable witnesses.

Credibility of Jesus: Jesus was a carpenter who lived 2000 years ago in an obscure backwater of the Middle East, had a three year public ministry within a 30 mile radius, never advocated violence and was executed aged around 33. Given the accounts of his life and his teaching, we can ask: what is the most reasonable way to explain his character, life, power, insight and impact on world history?

Case for the Resurrection: This has always been the most central claim of the Christian message; the historical event of Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead. If this is untrue, then the Bible agrees that Jesus is a deception. The case for the resurrection is very strong and it's notoriously difficult to create a historically plausible alternative to account for the emergence and survival of the church.

EXPERIENTIAL EVIDENCE

Historical Impact: Jesus has shaped Western Culture for over 1500 years. As the West increasingly moves towards a relativistic, secular worldview, the influence of Jesus is growing in the East and the South. Jesus remains the most influential person in history.

Personal Impact: Jesus affects nations through transforming individuals and through the influence of those individuals. Over a billion people claim allegiance to Jesus today. We can read the accounts of those in history who claimed to encounter him, and we can talk to those people alive today who have experienced his reality and power in their lives.

Christian Community: One of the authenticating marks of Christian community (that is, those who claim to have been transformed by Jesus, not simply those who claim affiliation to a religious organisation) is that their relationships are marked by love. We can see if this rings true.

Prayer and the Bible: The Bible claims that God is not impersonal and distant, but near and knowable. The Bible helps us to understand what God is like and through prayer, we can interact with him. We can experiment with reading the Bible and praying.

Worship: Many people experience the reality, presence and power of God through corporate acts of worship, where those who love and serve God come together to celebrate, enjoy and interact with God. This is another way to open ourselves to the possibility of experiencing God in our lives.

CONCLUSION

None of these things in themselves prove the Bible is true. A worldview can never be 'proved' in that sense. However, they give 10 ways to explore the credibility of Jesus and the Bible relative to any other worldview. In reality we all have a set of beliefs which underpins how we live and make choices. If our desire is to live in the way that most truly reflects reality as it really is, they give us the way to make a considered response to Jesus and his claims in the Bible.

INVESTIGATING JESUS

