

“Prove it, and I’ll believe!”

Terms to know

Atheist – Someone who claims that God doesn’t exist.

Agnostic – Unsure about the reality of God, but open minded. Or, maybe accepts the reality of a god, but has no idea if God is a personal being, or if there’s one or many gods, etc.

Proof – The validation of an claim where all doubt has been objectively removed.

Evidence - A thing, or the means (ex: oral testimony, documents, physical objects, or logic) that are helpful in forming a conclusion.

You’ve no doubt heard people make statements like, *“If Jesus is God, why doesn’t He just reveal Himself today, in person, and prove Himself?”* Or, *“If God would do (blank), then I’d believe!”* This demand of a sign/miracle is as common today as it was in Jesus’ day. In fact, it was very characteristic of the Jews, despite their regularly watching Jesus perform miracles. They continued to ask for one more. In John chapter six, Jesus miraculously feeds over five-thousand people by supernaturally multiplying a small amount of bread and fish. This wowed the people and caused them to say to themselves, ***“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world,”*** John 6:14. Excited that Jesus might be the Savior that the Old Testament spoke of, they tried to make Jesus their king, hoping He would free them from their current Roman oppressors. Jesus tried to redirect their passion heavenward by proceeding to tell them that if they believed in Him that they would have eternal freedom. They immediately said, ***“What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You?”***, John 6:30. This of course was the same people that just earlier enjoyed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, now asking for one more sign. Jesus went on to tell them (verse 36), ***“But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.”***

The Pharisees, who were the religious leaders in Jerusalem in Jesus’ day, also witnessed Jesus perform many signs and wonders, as well as hearing His radical teaching, and yet demanded ***“a sign from heaven”*** in order to validate His authority. No doubt the Pharisees had some miracle in mind of their own choosing, but Jesus rejected their vain demands. In a conversation recorded in Matthew 12 and Mark 8, it says, ***“The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Jesus, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, “Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”*** Now, Jesus had already displayed many signs, but not on demand signs that he knew came from a passive request. Jesus continued to say, ***“But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*** Many people saw Jesus get crucified. Thousands saw Him post-resurrection, even as many as 500 at one time. Despite countless miracles that Jesus performed, even rising from the dead, many continue to ask for another miracle.

Another Biblical example of bearing witness to a miracle but still not being satisfied, comes from Luke 1:5-25. In summary, Zacharias, a believer and significant priest in Jerusalem, was in the temple giving a burnt offering. The angel Gabriel appeared before him. This was a remarkable miracle! Can you imagine if an angel appeared to you? Gabriel told Zacharias that his wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son and that he was to name the boy John, and John would be set apart for the Lord’s service. Zacharias and Elizabeth were old and beyond child bearing years and Zacharias didn’t believe Gabriel’s message, and said, ***“How will I know this for certain?”*** In other words, he said, ***“Why should I trust you? Prove it!”*** Imagine God sending an angel to you and yet that not being enough to believe the message! Well, Gabriel gave him a sign all right. Gabriel said, ***“You shall be***

silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words." So, Zacharias was mute until John's birth.

In the same chapter, Gabriel is sent to Mary, the future mother of Jesus. Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her, ***"You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus."*** Mary in her confusion asks Gabriel, ***"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*** Can you notice the difference in Zacharias' question compared to Mary's question? Mary believes the angel, but asks for clarification as she's naturally confused how a virgin can become pregnant. Zacharias' question however calls into account the trustworthiness of the message. Gabriel was happy to provide additional information to Mary and told her, ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."***

What compels you to hold to the beliefs that you have? Consider this statement - When I hold a strong opinion in the face of little evidence it's a sign that I'm not using critical thinking skills. Conviction should follow the facts, not come before them. What I want to believe shouldn't dictate what I believe. The key to learning is valuing truth.

Sometimes people will simply refuse to let the evidence direct their thinking and their belief.

In another instance in the Bible, Jesus had taught and healed in His hometown of Nazareth, and in Mark 6:6, it states that Jesus ***"marveled at their unbelief"***. Today, some people are no different. Some people refuse to let evidence guide their thinking. This is what the Bible calls hardness or stubbornness of heart. In short, when it comes to considering the evidence that Jesus is God, some people apply a standard of decision making to Jesus that they would never apply to any other decision in their life.

Intellectual Dishonesty

Despite rational evidence, when someone says they won't trust Jesus without proof, they're now applying a rule to their life that they never apply anywhere else. They're pretending that they don't make trust decisions unless they have absolute certainty. This is intellectual dishonesty. For example, if one needed proof before they could trust someone, they'd never date or get married, because what proof do you have that the person will be faithful? Or, if someone wanted proof before trusting an object, they could never drive in a car, because what proof do you have that the roads will be safe, or what certainty is there that the car will be reliable? Basically, we make trusting decisions every day based on evidence, not on proof. This begs the question, how certain does one have to be to have faith?

How Important is Certainty?

A person's certainty doesn't provide evidence of truth, and likewise having doubt, or uncertainty, isn't an indication of error. People are often absolutely certain about something, only to later find out that they were wrong all along. For example, I could be certain that I have a doctor's appointment on Friday, only to show up and realize that it was on Thursday. Ultimately, certainty is just a psychological property. It renders a person confident or convinced, but doesn't guarantee truth. Certainty is not essential for Christianity. Consider the following example.

Suppose four friends walk along the shore and come to a cliff overlooking the ocean. One says, *"I swim here a lot. The water feels great. Go ahead and jump in."* His friend says, *"Great!"* and dives in head first with no

hesitation. Another says, *"Okay, but I'm jumping in feet first just in case"* and he jumps. The last one says, *"I don't know,"* and slowly climbs down the cliff until he's about ten feet from the water and then jumps in. Which one exhibited faith? They all did. They demonstrate varying degrees of certainty, but all demonstrate faith. Jesus said that faith is demonstrated even when there is very minimal certainty; it only takes a little faith, a "mustard seed" portion of faith, which is enough. In Mark 9 and Matthew 17, Jesus cast a demon out of a person that the disciples were unable to cast out. ***"Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not drive it out?' And He said to them, 'Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.'"***

The Escape Hatch

When it comes to Jesus, if someone says, *"Prove it, and then I'll believe,"* it's their way of giving themselves an escape hatch to avoid the accountability of conceding to the evidence of Jesus. I'll cite two examples of this.

First, famed "scientist" Bill Nye *"the Science Guy"* made a career on television and boasts that there is no God. In a debate, which can be found on YouTube, he debated a Christian named Ken Ham. Near the end of the debate Bill Nye is asked, *"What would it take for you to believe in God?"* Bill replied, *"I'd just need one piece of evidence."* This after Ken had just provided a multitude of evidence, but none of it was compelling to Bill Nye, because Bill entered the debate already determined to refute any claims that the Bible could be true. Bill wouldn't go on to explain what that one piece of evidence would need to look like, but his response is a classic escape hatch tactic that atheists use. I'll elaborate in the second example.

Second, I have a friend named Steve who is a school teacher and self-proclaimed atheist. He and I have had many interesting discussions as to the realities of the Bible and whether or not Jesus is God. Steve is a very politically conservative man (which doesn't matter one way or another regarding his religious beliefs, but his political views are important as you'll see in a moment). While having lunch after the last presidential election, Steve was upset that his favorite candidate (Trump) didn't win. Steve said, *"If Jesus will fix this election and put Trump in office, then I'll believe!"* To his statement, I replied, *"No, you won't."*

Steve said, *"What do you mean? Why wouldn't you think I'd believe then?"* I said, *"You're not one piece of evidence away from trusting in Jesus. You're offering God this wild bargain as a way to avoid your own responsibility of faith. By asking God to do something for you that you know He's not going to do, you're giving yourself a reason to dismiss entrusting yourself to Him."*

In summary, when a doubter like Steve says, *"If God would only do (blank), then I'd believe,"* then he's putting up a barrier that pretends that the responsibility of his belief is now on God, and if God wants Steve's heart, then God will do what Steve has asked. And, if God doesn't do it, well then that's God's fault. After all, Steve told God what He could do to prove Himself.

God isn't persuaded by this sort of coercion. If Jesus wanted to, He could have the stars in the night sky spell out, *"Jesus is Lord."* But Jesus doesn't offer these kinds of silly "proofs." He has provided such sufficient evidence for His existence and claims that nothing more need to be said or done on His part to make Himself more credible. Our responsibility is to open-mindedly examine the evidence.

Atheism claims that faith is trusting something without evidence. This is what is called having blind faith. This however is not how the Bible defines faith. Faith is trusting something because of the evidence; having *a reason* to put your hope in something. A Christian certainly doesn't have blind faith, but rather faith based on reason, logic, and evidence.

The Marvel of Unbelief

Unbelief is not logic. In Mark 6:6, where it is stated that Jesus marveled because of their unbelief, the reference is to the citizens of Nazareth who rejected Jesus because He had lived in their village. The reputation of Nazareth in Jesus' day was that it was a run down and abandoned little town that only low-quality people lived in. This reputation was so prevalent that when Nathaniel heard that Jesus was from Nazareth it caused him to ask, "***Can anything good come out of Nazareth?***" (John 1:46). Here in Mark 6, when the Nazarites rejected the evidence of Jesus as God, this summarizes their logic – "*Because we ourselves are mere Nazarites, and we're considered unremarkable and unworthy, and since Jesus came from one of our families, therefore Jesus is unworthy.*" That is like saying, "*I hear this great and wonderful music, but since I'm a shameful person, the music I hear cannot possibly be beautiful or true!*" This is the "logic" that supports unbelief.

Unbelief is contrary to man's nature. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put the reality of eternity into the hearts of all mankind. Romans 1:18-32 says that all men know God, and all men know God's ordinances (moral laws). It states that all men know God because God has revealed Himself to everyone sufficiently. These verses go on to describe unbelievers by saying that though they know God, they suppress the truth in order to pursue their wicked desires. In short, no one can say, "*I didn't know. If only God would have shown me one thing, one piece of evidence.*"

Extra-Biblical Evidence

Extra-Biblical means looking at resources outside of the Bible. There are many great authors, people like C.S. Lewis, who use logic and reason to offer evidence for the claims of the Bible. Perhaps you've heard of a man named Lee Strobel. Lee was an atheist who lived in Chicago and worked as an editor and an investigative journalist/reporter. He was highly skilled in fact finding. Eventually, his wife became a Christian and this frustrated Lee very much. He believed the Bible was a fairy tale and that all who held to the belief that God was real were weak and used God as a crutch to lean upon instead of addressing life's problems head on. He told his wife that he was going to do what someone should have done long-ago, which is to examine the evidence and write a book proving that God is a myth and that the Bible isn't credible. So, Lee purposed in his heart to do just that, to use his expertise in investigative journalism and write the book to shut up all believers. However, as he began to study the evidence for the life and ministry of Jesus, Lee became a believer himself in 1981. Lee has written many books demonstrating the evidence for the validity of the Bible and the evidence for the claims of Jesus. He uses science, archeology, writings from secular historians, reason, and logic. Some of Lee's work is uploaded on the tablet, with hopefully more to come. Lee's written famed books like,

The Case for Christ – Investigating the evidence for Jesus.

The Case for Heaven – Is there evidence for life after death?

The Case for Miracles - Do miracles really exist?

The Case for Grace – Investigating the evidence of transformed lives.

The Case for Hope – Looking ahead with confidence and courage.

The Case for Faith – Investigating the toughest objections to Christianity.

The Case for a Creator – Investigating scientific evidence that points to a Creator.

In Defense of Jesus – Investigating attacks on the identity of Jesus.

The Case for Easter – Investigating evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

The Case for Christmas – Investigating evidence for the virgin birth of Jesus.

Conclusion

People like Lee Strobel are willing to objectively examine the evidence, despite having doubts or even strong hatred toward God. I've found that as I've built relationships with self-proclaimed atheists and agnostics, that what's really under the surface isn't an unbelief in God, but more so an anger at God due to something that happened in their past; some trauma that needs to be sorted through and healed from. Hebrews 3:12-13, ***"Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."***