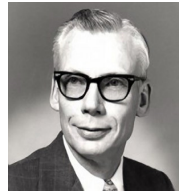


## Introduction

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This is lecture 1 of the course entitled Christian Evidences. There will be twelve lectures in this course. This first lecture will be an introduction to the course and to the subject in general of Christian evidences. Then there will be three lectures on the nature of biblical Christianity. Following that, lectures 5 and 6 will consider the verification of biblical Christianity. Then there will be six lectures on the evidence for biblical Christianity. So, we have three main divisions to this course: the nature of biblical Christianity, the verification of biblical Christianity, and the evidence for biblical Christianity.

Allow me to recommend two books that will be of great help to you. The first one is entitled *Know Why You Believe*, by Paul E. Little, which was published by Scripture Press [now published by InterVarsity Press (Downers Grove, IL, 2008)]. The second book is titled *Protestant Christian Evidences*, by Bernard Ramm, and this book is put out by Moody Press [Chicago, IL, 1972]. I would also like to recommend that as you listen to these lectures, you follow along with me in the Bible when I use the Word of God; that you keep a notebook handy; and that you follow the main outline that I will attempt to give in each one of the lectures. In this introductory lecture there are four main points that I would like to talk about rather briefly. First is the purpose in studying Christian evidences.

### The Purpose in Studying Christian Evidences

Primarily, the purpose in Christian evidences is to seek to understand the meaning of biblical Christianity. When we use the term “Christianity,” we need to ask the questions, What do we mean by that term? What does it designate? It’s important that we understand what we are standing for and what we are trying to defend in Christian evidences. Secondly, we want to inquire into the nature of and the factuality of the evidences of Christianity. Or, in other words, to answer the questions, Are there evidences

of divine revelation, and/or are there evidences for a supernatural intervention of God into human affairs? We must have reasons for why we believe what we do. It's not enough just to be convinced on the matter of our feelings. We must have good historical reasons for our faith. And that in general, then, is the purpose for studying Christian evidences.

## The Definition of Christian Evidences

The second main point has to do with the definition of Christian evidences. Christian evidences is a subdivision of what we would think of as Christian apologetics. The word *apologetics* is derived from the Greek term *apologia*. This word, we understand, has come down to us through history as the defendant's personal reply to the speech by the prosecution. For example, back in the early days of Greek history, if a man were to be caught in a crime and brought into the law court, then he would be accused by the prosecution. But there would come a time in the trial when this man could stand and vindicate himself. In other words, he would give a personal reply as a defendant to the prosecution. His reply was called an *apologia*. Many times these speeches became quite famous. Often times they were written down and embellished and then passed into literature. For example, we have the speech of Socrates when he was accused before the court. And Plato has written this up in what is called Plato's "Apology." It was only natural that the Christian church, when pressured by persecution and heresy, would also produce apologies. For example, much of the material in that very fine ten-volume set called the Ante-Nicene Fathers, that is, the fathers of the church who lived before the council of Nicea, which was in 325. In this very fine set of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, much of the material, particularly in the first few volumes, can be classified as early apologetic literature. [The reference is to *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, edited by James Donaldson and Alexander Roberts (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).]

The early church was persecuted, and the early church attempted to state the reason why they believed in Christianity, and this was an apologetic task. They gave evidences for their faith. In general, then, it may be said that the purpose of apologetics and Christian evidences is to defend and vindicate Christianity. It is to refute various systems that oppose Christianity, and then to comfort and assure the church, the people of God, of the factual and historical foundation of genuine Christianity.

When we think of a definition, a broad definition, of Christian evidences, perhaps the statement of Bernard Ramm in *Protestant Christian Evidences* could be utilized here. He states on page 16 of that volume, “We interpret the scope of Christian evidences to be that of demonstrating that Christianity is the religion which pertains to reality by reason of its factuality.” Here Bernard Ramm has pointed out a very important thing, and that is that Christianity is based upon facts; that is, it is based upon events in history.

This is the basis of Christianity: that God has revealed Himself to us, He has come to us, and we have evidences for Christianity throughout history. This is the glory of Christianity. No other religion can point to the type of factual historical evidence that the Christian can point to. And so, when we talk about Christianity and when we talk about Christian evidences, we are attempting to show, by Christian evidences, that Christianity is the religion that pertains to reality—that it is true by reason of its historical factuality.

## The Biblical Rationale for Christian Evidences

By way of the third main point, I would like to talk with you about the biblical rationale for Christian evidences. First, in the Bible, we realize that the rationale for Christian evidences is the fact that God has revealed Himself to us. Here I would like to turn to a familiar passage in the Word of God. It's in Hebrews 1:1–2, and reading from the King James Version, it states, “God, who at sundry [various] times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” Here is the first biblical rationale for Christian evidences. The basis for all of the thinking about evidence is the fact that God has revealed Himself to us. God has come to us. He has entered into our type of history. He has entered into our space in time. He has made Himself known. God has revealed Himself to us.

It's interesting that this great theme follows all through the book of Hebrews. While it is not a part of these lectures, one of the most interesting ways of studying the book of Hebrews is to recognize, as you leaf through the book, the many ways whereby the revelation of God is described, and the responsibility and obligation that come to us because of the revelation of God. That's the first point under the biblical rationale of Christian evidences. God has revealed Himself.

The second point is that God has attested His revelation with evidence. It's interesting that when the apostle John was led of the Holy Spirit to write the gospel, he stated in the twentieth chapter of the gospel of John the purpose for writing. In John 20:30–31 the apostle said, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: [that is, the gospel of John] But these are written, [and by "these" he is referring to the seven great miracles found in the gospel of John] that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Notice the apologetic, or Christian evidence, perspective behind the writing of the gospel of John.

The apostle John sought to describe the signs, the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ. He felt and believed that if a person could understand and would consider and investigate these seven great miracles, that person would be led to believe that Jesus (that is, the earthly man, the Lord Jesus Christ) was the Christ (the Old Testament Messiah) and that he was the Son of God. In other words, the apostle John believed that these seven great miracles attested the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Old Testament Messiah. Then he concludes that thirty-first verse by saying, "and that believing ye might have life through his name." God has attested His revelation with evidence—the seven miracles of John.

It's interesting also in Acts 1:3 [New King James Version] that Luke the physician, when he was writing the book of Acts, stated in the third verse, "to whom He [that is, Lord Jesus] also showed Himself alive after His suffering [that is, after his death, in his resurrection] by many infallible proofs." This term "infallible proof" is an important one. This is an important concept chosen by a man who had a good education: Luke the physician. He knew about words. He made the choice about the right word here. He called it infallible and he called it proof. The Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection had given infallible proofs.

This is true also in Acts 17. In that great passage, we have the apostle Paul preaching at Athens. He's preaching to philosophers, to Epicureans and to Stoics. These were not believers in biblical Christianity. It's interesting in Acts 17:31 that the apostle Paul made the statement, "Because he [God] hath appointed a day [that is, the day of judgment] in the which he will judge the world in righteousness [that's the standard—righteousness] by that man [that is, the Lord Jesus Christ] whom he has ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from

the dead.” Here the apostle Paul emphasizes that the resurrection is an evidence, not only of the existence of God, not only of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also of the coming judgement. That God was going to judge the world in righteousness through the Lord Jesus Christ, and as an evidence for the reality of God’s existence, and the reality of His revelation, and the reality of our coming judgment, Paul points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is what we are referring to as Christian evidences.

In Romans 1:4, the apostle Paul stated about the Lord Jesus Christ that He “was declared [proven or manifested to be] the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” When we look at verses like this, we realize that we have a basis for Christian evidences. God has attested His revelation with evidence, and we can see the evidence within history. We can read it here within the Word of God.

Another passage that is important along this line is a commentary on what may be thought of as the activity of the apostles, as described in the book of Acts. The writer of Hebrews makes a statement: “God also bearing them witness [that is, the leaders and preachers in the early church] both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy [Spirit], according to his own will” (Hebrews 2:4). The verse says that in the days of the early church, God bore witness to their ministry. This is the basis for Christian evidences, that God has attested His revelation with evidence. He not only revealed Himself to us but also has revealed Himself in such a way that there is evidence that He is there—the true and living God—and that His revelation is true.

The third point under the biblical rationale for Christian evidences is that the Bible itself speaks of an apology or a defense of the faith. There are a number of verses in the New Testament where the word *apologia* is found. I want to refer only to the one that is the most important. This is found in 1 Peter 3:15. Here, in the Greek language, the original language in which the New Testament was written, we have *apologia* used. Peter, writing to saints in what we would call Turkey today, writing to saints under persecution, stated, “but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer.” That word *answer* in our King James Version is the translation of the word *apologia*. Be ready always to give an answer, *an apologia*, or evidence, “to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” This is the responsibility of the Christian. It’s not enough to believe in Christ

Jesus our Savior. It's not enough to live a godly life for Him. He asks us now to be a witness for Him day by day. Oh, I grant that we are merely a witness in the kind of person we are and how we live the Christian life. Oh, I grant that. That's absolutely necessary. That's always number one. But the Bible also emphasizes that we must be ready to give an answer, that is, a reason for our faith. An *apologia* to explain the kind of person we are and why we believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and why we believe that He is the Son of God. Why we believe in the basic doctrines of Christianity. And so the Bible reads, so the apostle Peter under inspiration states, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

Now we have the Bible itself speaking of a defense of the faith. And this is what we mean by Christian evidences. When we stop and think about the third main point in this introductory lecture, a biblical rationale of Christian evidences, we realize that Christianity is unique. It stands alone. Among all of the other religions of the world, it stands alone as the only true religion. It is the only true religion because it has historical evidence; God has revealed Himself. This is the basis for biblical Christianity. We have, for example, the incarnation of Jesus Christ into our human race. We have His historical deed of the crucifixion, the historical deed of the resurrection, of the ascension, and sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. God has given evidence that He is there and that He has made a divine provision for us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Important Christian Evidences

The fourth main point of this introductory lecture in Christian evidences has to do simply with the listing of the more important Christian evidence. For example, when we look into biblical Christianity and ask the questions, How do we know that God is there? That He exists? How do we know that He revealed Himself to us and that He has spoken to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? What reasons do we have for the faith? If a person would ask us to give an answer concerning our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, what can we say by way of the apologetic or Christian evidences? Let me give a list here, and perhaps some of these we can take up a little later in this lecture series. One of the most important evidences is the origin of Israel's religion.

God first of all revealed Himself to the Jewish people. He called Abraham, and through Abraham He called the Jewish people into existence as a theocratic nation. When we ask about the origin of Israel's religion (and I will talk about this more completely later) we recognize that they were very different in their religion from the nations round about them. What made them so different? We believe that it is the revelation of God to them. And this has been one of the evidences for the genuineness of biblical Christianity.

Another evidence that we have already referred to in this lecture is the miracles of the Bible. This is not a very popular subject in our day—our day of science and scientism. But God has miraculously revealed Himself (and again, I will talk about that later in this lecture series). What a wonderful thing to realize that God, in revealing biblical Christianity, made Himself known in such a way that He drew attention to His activity by performing supernatural deeds. And this is what we mean by a miracle.

Third, in the list of the more important Christian evidences, we think of the reality of prophecy, that God has entered into literature, so to speak, and has made Himself known by inspiring men and women in days gone by to make prophecies concerning the future. They made statements that are recorded within the Word of God, statements that we recognize to be verified within history itself. So, prophecy can well be called one of the more important Christian evidences.

Another important Christian evidence would be the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Oh, how wonderful that God has revealed Himself to us through Jesus Christ by sending His only begotten Son into the world. The person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the kind of person He was, what He said and what He did, is an evidence to us that God is there, and an evidence of the genuineness of Christianity. Surely, as we have already seen in the book of Acts and in the book of Romans, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is an evidence of the truthfulness of Christianity.

Here within the providence and the plan of God, in God's great wisdom, He allowed the Lord Jesus Christ (within the will of God) to die under the judgment of mankind. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the penalty of our broken law. The Lord Jesus Christ died in our place upon the cross. The Son of God shed His blood for us. And then God brought Him forth from the grave as an attestation to the reality of His deity, as we've read in Romans 1:4. He showed that He was the Son of God, giving evidence for that and for the



truthfulness of His teaching by the resurrection from the grave—one of the more important Christian evidences.

Another evidence would be the origin or existence and then the spread of the early church. The early church was brought into existence during a time of great persecution. The early church promulgated its faith during this time of persecution. It came into the world during a time when it was illegal to have any new religion in the Roman Empire. Yet, the church spread and within three hundred years turned the world upside down and became the state religion. So, we have to ask, How could this happen? What made it possible for the early church to do such a tremendous task of subduing the Roman Empire? The reason for it is that the church is true. It's one of the great evidences of biblical Christianity.

Another Christian evidence would be the matter of Christian experience, and that is what happens in the life of a person when that person receives the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When we believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word states that we become a new creation, a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). The evident effect of this, the transformation in our life, is an evidence of the genuineness of Christianity. That God has not only revealed Himself, He has not only sent His Son Jesus Christ to save the world, but also that He has made it possible that through believing upon Him there will be a manifestation of the grace of God in our lives. This we can point to. Surely this is used within Scripture: the experience of the apostle Paul, for example. Here he was, a proud Pharisee, persecuting the Christian church, and then God dealt with him and broke his heart. The Lord saved him and made him one of the early defenders of biblical Christianity.

Another one of the great Christian evidences is Christian literature and the creeds of the early church: early Christian literature and the creeds. I have a lecture later on in this series in which I want to refer to some of this early Christian literature. Many believers fail to understand how much literature we have from these early periods. What a wonderful thing to realize that God raised up some very fine men in those early days of the church, men to formulate the meaning of Christianity. Men to take the Word of God and to put it into writing, and we have a lot of this literature today. I will speak of that later.

Another great evidence of the Christian faith is the character of the Bible itself, and some of the early versions of the Bible. People wanted the Word of God, and it was translated very early into



different versions so that people might have the Word of God in their own language. The very character of the Scripture itself points to the genuineness of biblical Christianity.

And then we have such a thing as the great science of archaeology in our day. How many of the artifacts that are dug up in the Holy Land point to the reality of Christianity? Of course, we have the beneficial effects of preaching the gospel. These are some of the more important Christian evidences, and I will pick up some of them in some of the later lectures within this series.