

IN RESPONSE - NO BLIND LEAP REQUIRED, PART II

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Volume II, Number 1

We are making a case for the fact that we should argue for the validity of Christianity by setting forth evidences while being sensitive to presuppositions. In this I'm taking my lead from Dr. Wayne Spear of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Now the question should be asked: Is this a biblical approach? Over the protestations of many, my answer is 'Yes'. And my answer is positive because of the example of Jesus Christ.

In John 10 Christ explains that His miracles are evidences of the fact that He was sent into the world from the Father.

Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one' (John 10:23-30).

When challenged to answer plainly whether or not He was the promised Messiah, Christ stated that He had already answered that question more than once. And as William Hendriksen says commenting on this text,

The declaration, 'I *did* tell you,' is entirely justified, as anyone can see by reading the following passages: 5:17-47; 6:29, 35, 51-65; 7:37-39; 8:12-20, 28, 29, 42, 56-58; and 10:17-47."¹

And so, the *words* of Christ had been heard on several occasions which, when properly interpreted, yielded an understanding that He was the Messiah.

But the *words alone* were insufficient. Jesus knew this. "If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true" (John 5:31). He knew simple self-authentication was unacceptable. Something else was needed. Miracles were needed. Jesus puts it this way, "The works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me" (John 10:25). The *works* testified to the authenticity of the *words* of Jesus. The miracles were *evidences* that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. They bore witness to Him. Jesus explains this further in John 10:37-38,

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.

And so there is little doubt that Jesus used evidences. He never considered that His words, taken by themselves, were enough.

But Christ was also very sensitive to the pre-disposition of those *to whom* He spoke and *before whom* He worked the miracles. Concerning those who rejected the witness of the miracles, Christ said,

But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me (John 10:26-27).

Christ's opponents had dispositions antagonistic to His evidences. They held to preconceived notions which caused them to reject the evidences. They had presuppositions which forced them to repudiate the data. The Pharisees freely acknowledged the miracles occurred. "The Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs?'" (John 11:47). They refused to accept the evidence for what it was.

But this did not prevent Christ from presenting the evidence. In fact, the presentation of this evidence, along with its rejection, aggravated the sin of the Pharisees. This is seen in the second passage of Scripture to which we turn, Matthew 11.

In the first part of this chapter we find John the Baptist sending his disciples to query Jesus.

Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, and said to Him, 'Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?' And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me (Matthew 11:2-6).

The answer is not a simple, 'Yes'. Rather, Jesus points to the miracles performed in the Name of the Father. Here is evidence sufficient to verify that Jesus is the Messiah. How so? These are the miracles which Isaiah predicted would be performed by Christ. Compare Isaiah 35:4-5,

Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you.' Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

And also Isaiah 61:1,

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners.

And so Christ relays to John the fact that the evidence is in. It is evidence which matches the requirements of the previously written Word of God. This evidence must therefore be accepted at the eternal peril of the soul.

At the same time, Christ is also mindful of the predisposition of those who hear Him. There are those who are disposed to accept the evidence. And there are those inclined to reject it. For this reason, Jesus adds, "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me" (Matthew 11:6). Those who reject the evidence for Christ being the Messiah stumble over Him. And it is those who have closely held presuppositions against God and against miracles who suppress the evidence and reject its validity.

¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972) p. 121.

But again, this does not, in and of itself, deny the propriety of presenting such evidence. The evidence of miracles does support the claim of Christ as Messiah. And the evidence is *sufficient*. This point must be grasped. The evidence is sufficient to prove the point. And so, failure to accept this data is sin against better knowledge. It produces more severe judgment. Christ is quite clear about this in Matthew 11:20-24,

Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. `Woe to you, Chorazin. Woe to you, Bethsaida. For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.'

This is amazing. The judgment will be more tolerable for Sodom because that city, although found in gross immorality, was not presented with the miracles of Christ. That city therefore did not reject those miracles as did the cities listed by Christ. Failure to grasp the evidence that Jesus is the Christ is therefore serious error. It is inexcusable error. It is punishable error.

Finally, that Christ is fully aware of the closely held presuppositions of his opposition is made abundantly clear as He turns to the Father in prayer.

I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matthew 11:25-27).

Those predisposed to reject the evidence submitted will do so. Only grace makes the difference.

This means we are to argue for the Christian faith using the evidences at our disposal. Using evidences, we should argue forcefully and cogently. We should also be aware that although the evidence is *valid*, for it to be *persuasive*, closely held presuppositions rooted in hostile dispositions must be overcome by grace. Only grace persuades. All of this also means that faith is no leap in the dark. Rather, faith is trust based upon solid evidence.

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