

# Evidence for Faith 101

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&  
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# Chapter 1

Faith is to believe what you do not yet see;  
the reward for faith is to see what you believe.

—*Augustine*

Faith is an amazing thing. Everybody has faith, and everybody talks about faith. “Keep the faith,” “Don’t lose faith,” and “Have faith” are just some of the faith expressions we throw at each other, usually to offer encouragement. That’s because faith offers hope. Faith tells us not to give up.

But faith isn’t much more than an expression or a wishful feeling if it’s not rooted in something or someone real. A child may have faith in Santa Claus, but it’s not a real faith because Santa Claus isn’t real. Besides being real, the object of our faith must be trustworthy. A Chicago Cubs fan can have all the faith in the world that this will be the year for his beloved team to win the World Series. But can the Cubs be trusted to deliver a championship?

In this chapter, we’re going to look at what it means to have faith. More importantly, we’re going to look at what it means to have faith in God, who is both real and completely trustworthy. Having faith in God doesn’t mean you take a leap in the dark. To the contrary, it means you step into the light as you trust the living God with your present and future life.

# A Case for Faith

## What's Ahead

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- More Than a Feeling
- A Different Kind of Faith
- Saving Faith
- Two Extremes to Avoid

*I*f you were to ask a random sampling of people—some Christians, some non-Christians—to give you a definition of faith, you would probably get a wide variety of answers. To give you an idea of what kind of responses you would receive, here are some definitions we've collected (along with the people who said them):

"Faith is believing something you know ain't true" (Mark Twain).

"Faith is not being sure of where you're going, but going anyway" (Frederick Buechner).

"Faith is belief without, or in spite of, reason" (George H. Smith).

"Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light" (Helen Keller).

"Faith is the opening of all sides and at every level of one's life to the divine inflow" (Martin Luther King, Jr.).

"I think that faith is, in principle, in conflict with reason" (Sam Harris).

That's quite a collection of quotes, isn't it? And did you notice that we left out one very important definition? It's from the Bible:

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1 NKJV).

Notice the contrast between the Bible's definition of faith and our sample definitions. Rather than describing faith as something nebulous or impractical, or a blind leap into the darkness, the Bible talks about faith as having substance and being the evidence of the things we can't see. And what are these things? Well, for starters, that God exists, that Jesus was raised from the dead, and that all who believe in Jesus will have eternal life.

## More Than a Feeling

So what are we to conclude from this quick glance at the Bible's definition of faith? For one, faith is more than a feeling, more than a blind leap in the dark, and certainly very different from "believing something you know ain't true." Neither is faith subjective. In other words, faith is not a private thing, subject to your own interpretation. Faith has substance, and it includes evidence that is clear and available for everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances.

### *Everybody Has Faith*

When people hear the word *faith*, they usually think of religion, and because Christianity is the most popular religion in the world, they usually think of *Christian* and *faith* together. We're going to talk about the Christian faith in a little while, but first we want to talk about faith in general.

The thing is, everybody has faith, and they have it every day. If you didn't have faith, you would never leave your home. But you do.

- You have faith that your car is going to start and get you to work or school or wherever you're going;
- you have faith in the other drivers on the road, that they won't slam into you;

- you have faith that your job or class will be there when you arrive; and
- you have faith that at a certain designated time in the future, which you can't see, you will receive a paycheck or a grade for your efforts.

Now is it possible that your car won't start, or that you could get into an accident, or that your job could be eliminated or your class cancelled? Yes, those things are possible, but they're not likely, so you move through your day on faith for two basic reasons:

- You've done all of this enough to know that your chances for success are pretty good; and
- You trust the manufacturer who built your car, you have confidence in the other drivers on the road, and you believe that your boss or your teacher will be where they are supposed to be.

In other words, your faith in these objects (your car, other drivers, your boss or teacher) rests in your knowledge of them and your experience with them, which add up to trust, confidence, and belief.

Properly understood, from both a Christian and philosophical perspective, faith is compatible with knowledge.

—David Hoerner

### *Faith and Belief*

Now we're getting to the heart of what faith is all about. Faith isn't blind, irrational, or stupid. Every person exercises faith every day—many times each day. Faith doesn't take away from belief. Faith adds to belief in that it adds trust, and in doing so, faith gives you the confidence to act on or to commit to the things you believe. In fact, without faith, we would never act on our belief in a car, belief in people, or belief in God.

Does that mean that your faith in cars and their drivers is the same as your belief in God? No. The difference between everyday faith and the kind of faith described in Hebrews 11:1 has to do with the object of your faith.

## A Different Kind of Faith

Christianity is a religion (just like Islam or Judaism). But it is also called a faith. You may have even told someone that you believe in the Christian faith. That's good! In this sense, faith includes a body of knowledge that Christians believe and affirm. It means that true Christians believe that God exists and that what He says in His word (the Bible) is true. That in itself is good, but it's not good enough. It's not enough just to believe in God (even the demons believe in God—see James 2:19). We need to put our trust in God and commit ourselves to Him. That's what having faith in God means.

This is what distinguishes the Christian faith from other kinds of faith. The object of the faith is completely reliable and completely trustworthy. We can't say that about other objects of faith, whether it's a person, an organization, a machine, or even a religion. As good as those objects are, they aren't 100 percent reliable. At some point, regardless of how much you think these things won't happen, your best friend may betray you, your job may not live up to your expectations, your car could stall on the freeway, and that religious leader you admire so much may have a secret sin that comes to light. Consequently, you would never want to completely stake your life on these objects, especially your life for eternity. It's just too risky. Only one object is worthy of that kind of faith, and that's God.

### Talk about Mr. Dependable

We're going to talk more about God and His personality traits (sometimes called *attributes*) in chapter 3. But this is a great place to mention a few traits that show us just how reliable and trustworthy God is.

*God is holy.* He is righteous. No fault is found in Him. His moral character is without flaw. In the negative context, God has no evil in Him; from a positive perspective, He is completely pure.

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory*  
(Isaiah 6:3 NIV).

*God doesn't change.* He is *immutable*—the same yesterday, today, and forever. And He cannot be changed.

*Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts shifting shadows (James 1:17).*

*God is just. He is fair and impartial. He does not play favorites.*

*He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is! (Deuteronomy 32:4).*

## *The Object of Faith*

When we talk about God being the object of our faith, we don't mean to reduce Him to something you can put on your shelf or stick in a box and carry around with you. That kind of object is an idol. Rather, we are focusing on the whole person of God—His character traits and the way He interacts with His creation. For the Christian, this includes everything that God has revealed in the Bible about Himself and the world He created.

We have access to everything God has revealed in the Bible, but that doesn't mean we can know everything about Him. Even though God has revealed enough for us to know Him, we will never know or understand God completely.

*“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).*

At the same time, God is knowable. He has given us enough information about Himself for us to trust Him completely as the object of our faith. That doesn't mean that knowing these things is easy. As we will see in chapter 5, the Bible gives us what we need in order to know God and live for Him, but the information about God and His dealings with humankind isn't laid out in some kind of easy-to-follow outline. The Bible contains great literature, and like all great literature, you have to read it carefully and study it diligently in order to get the most out of it.

Even then, some aspects of the Christian faith aren't easy to grasp. In order to help people understand the basis and the basics

of the Christian faith—and to put the basic elements of the Christian faith into some kind of systematic order—thoughtful people throughout the history of the church have organized the teachings of the Bible (called *doctrines*) into a series of propositions (called *creeds*) or doctrinal statements of belief. Basically, a creed is a set of statements that Christians consider and accept as true.

## *A* Creed Is a Measurement

The purpose of a creed is to act as a measurement or standard of correct belief. The historic creeds of Christianity—such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed—were written in order to present in an organized fashion what God has revealed in the Bible about Himself and the world.

Though comprehensive and accurate, a set of propositions like those contained in the Nicene Creed is a little formal for people today. We like more informal doctrinal statements, such as the one formulated at Rock Harbor, where our friend Mike Erre is the teaching pastor. In a very simple yet accurate way, these five statements define what it means to have faith in God.<sup>1</sup>

- God is a Trinity who exists and is the self-existent Creator of all.
- Jesus is fully God and fully human; He died for our sins, rose from the dead to give us new life, and will return again.
- Human beings are created in the image of God. We have each rebelled against God's kingdom and are in need of the salvation that He alone can provide.
- God's salvation comes to us through trusting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and is given to us by grace alone. We can do nothing to earn God's favor.
- The Bible is inspired by God and is authoritative over everything on which it speaks.

Keep in mind that these propositions, though accurate in the way they describe God and what He has told us in the Bible about

Himself and the world He created, are not the ultimate objects of faith. They are more like a map that points us to God or a structure that shows us what God is like. Ultimately, the object of our faith is God Himself. God is not a proposition or an idea or set of beliefs. God is the living, personal Creator who loves you and wants a relationship with you. You can't have a relationship with a proposition or set of beliefs, but you can have a relationship with the living God, something that is essential to faith. It's not enough to know *about* God; we need to actually know Him.

That doesn't mean we can throw out the propositions. We need objectivity in our understanding of who God is and what He wants for us. Otherwise faith is reduced to a subjective feeling, where one person's opinion about God and Christianity is as good as another's, even if the opinions are very different. As Peter Kreeft writes, "without propositions, we cannot know or tell others what God we believe in and what we believe about God."<sup>2</sup>

### *The Author of Faith*

God is not only the object of faith but also the author of faith in that He is the one who revealed the propositions we believe. God "authored" faith in two ways:

- through His written word, the Bible (more about the Bible in chapter 5)
- through the living Word, Jesus Christ (more about Jesus in chapter 6)

Here's how the writer of Hebrews summarizes these two ways God the author has spoken to us:

*Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son (Hebrews 1:1).*

### *The Act of Faith*

So far we have looked at God as both the object and also the author of our faith. We've briefly considered why God is worthy

of our faith (and we will consider many more reasons in chapter 3). But another aspect of faith goes beyond merely believing that God exists. Faith certainly includes this kind of belief, but it isn't enough to connect us with God on a personal level. James writes about this rather sarcastically:

*You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror (James 2:19).*

Faith at this level puts us in the same category of the demons, which is pretty lousy company. The point James is making is that believing *in* God is not enough. We need to actually *believe* God and put our trust in Him, that who He is and what He says in His word are not only true but also true for us.

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## Faith Is Not Ignorance

Yes, knowledge about God and all He created is absolutely critical to faith. In fact, we're going to spend several chapters in part 2 discussing what we can know about God, the world, the Bible, and Jesus. We'll see that all of them point to God as holy, unchanging, just, and much more. Without knowledge, faith is reduced to wishful thinking and empty hope, and at that level it doesn't help us at all. As Harold Lindsell writes, "No man can be saved without knowing something. Faith is not ignorance. It is not closing one's eyes to the facts. Faith is never afraid to look the truth squarely in the face."

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Knowledge about God guides us to belief in God, and then we must act by faith by adding trust and commitment to our belief. Here's what we mean.

### *Faith and Trust*

When the Bible talks about faith and belief, it means much more than mere confidence in knowledge of a fact. It goes beyond the kind of belief that is based on seeing the truth for ourselves. After Jesus was resurrected from the dead, He appeared to all of His disciples except for one, the disciple famously known as "doubting Thomas." Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus first

appeared to them in bodily form. Even though the other disciples told Thomas they had seen Him, Thomas refused to believe. He said, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side” (John 20:25). Thomas wanted absolute proof that Jesus was alive. He wanted to verify with evidence the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. That wasn’t a bad thing. Jesus didn’t criticize Thomas for this. In fact, a week after Thomas expressed his desire for evidence, Jesus appeared to His disciples again, and this time Thomas was there. The first thing Jesus did was to offer Thomas the marks on his physical body—the nail holes in His hands and the wound in His side—as evidence for His bodily resurrection. He told Thomas, “Stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27 NIV).

Thomas believed, of course (who wouldn’t after that dramatic episode), and he probably felt satisfied that his faith was based on empirical knowledge. But Jesus understood that faith must go beyond what we can personally know and experience with our senses. So He told Thomas the obvious: “Because you have seen me, you have believed.” Then Jesus defined the aspect of faith that goes beyond the senses, including sight: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29 NIV). This is the *trust* part of faith. This is what the writer of Hebrews means by “the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 NKJV). This is what Paul means when he writes, “For we live by believing and not by seeing” (2 Corinthians 5:7). This is the part of faith that moves from your mind to your heart.

### *Faith and Commitment*

Knowledge and trust are both essential to faith, but there is one more aspect of faith that is critical. Having true faith means that you also commit yourself to God by conforming your will to God and His will. At this level, faith involves attitude and emotions and behavior. Your faith should be so strong that you voluntarily conform to God’s principles, not because you are forced to, but because you have faith that God’s values and God’s will are best for you. This is where faith goes into action.

The Bible is very clear that our actions (or *works*) don’t save us.

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

At the same time, unless we make a commitment to obey God and to “do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10), our faith is quite literally “dead and useless” (James 2:17).

## Committing Yourself to Fly

Flying in an airplane is a great way to see how trust and commitment add to belief. Let's say that you have never flown in a plane before, but you believe airplanes can fly because you've read about the principles of aerodynamics, and you've seen airplanes fly with your own eyes. You could actually say that you have faith in air travel because you trust the airplane and the flight crew to fly you safely to your destination (again, because you've read about it, you've seen it, and you've talked to people who have flown in airplanes). Is your faith worth anything? Not until you put your faith into action by actually committing yourself to fly.

## Saving Faith

In the book of Acts, an entire chapter is devoted to an encounter between the apostle Paul and King Agrippa, who ruled over much of Palestine in the middle of the first century. Paul has been on trial for two years (talk about a slow judicial system), accused by the Jews of subversion against the Roman state (these are trumped-up charges brought by those who want Paul eliminated). Paul has already defended himself before Governor Felix and then his replacement, Governor Festus (now you know where those colorful names came from). Now, after two years, Paul ends up pleading his case before Agrippa II, the son of Agrippa I, who had executed James and imprisoned Peter 15 years earlier.

As the scene opens in Acts 26, Paul is in the royal court, giving his *apologia* before the king. This is classic apologetics, delivered with gentleness and respect. Paul tells his story and explains his

beliefs—in effect, he gives an explanation for the hope he has in Christ—beautifully summarizing the gospel (or *good news*) of Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul quotes Jesus, who spoke these words to Paul on the day of his conversion:

*Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me (Acts 26:17-18).*

This is what God does for people when He saves them: He opens their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light (Ephesians 5:8); He frees them from Satan's power (Hebrews 2:14); He forgives their sins (Acts 2:38); and He sets them apart by virtue of their faith in Him (1 Peter 2:9). This is saving faith.

And how does Agrippa respond? We know he has knowledge of God, and he believes the prophets (what we call the Old Testament). Yet Agrippa doesn't put his trust in Jesus for salvation. He isn't a Christian because he doesn't have saving faith, and he says so directly to Paul: "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?" (Acts 26:28).

### *Faith Is a Decision*

Many people are like King Agrippa (only without the *king* part). They believe in God, and they have knowledge about God through the stories of other people and the content of the Bible, but they haven't decided to completely trust in God to save them through the person and work of Jesus. Theologian Wayne Grudem puts it this way:

In addition to knowledge of the facts of the gospel and approval of those facts, in order to be saved, I must decide to depend on Jesus to save me. In doing this I move from being an interested observer of the facts of salvation and the teachings of the Bible to being someone who enters into a new relationship with Jesus Christ as a living person. We may then define saving faith in the following way: *Saving faith*

*is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.*<sup>3</sup>

## Why Did God Choose Faith?

For many people, one of the frustrating things about the Christian faith—and Christians and non-Christians alike can struggle with this—is that it has enough evidence to show that it's a reasonable faith but not enough to demonstrate that it's absolutely true. Why didn't God leave us a "smoking gun" as irrefutable evidence to show that He exists and to demonstrate without question to the whole world that the Bible is true? In a word, the answer is that God didn't want saving faith to depend on us, but on Him. He didn't want saving faith to be just a condition of the mind. It must also be an attitude of the heart. As Grudem says, "When we come to Christ in faith, we essentially say, 'I give up! I will not depend on myself or my own good works any longer.'"<sup>4</sup>

## Two Extremes to Avoid

We're going to talk a lot about balance in this book. As you seek evidence and reasonable explanations for your faith, you'll want to avoid two extremes:

*Evidentialism.* This view says that everything we know by faith can and should be understood or proved by reason. People who emphasize this view believe that the Christian faith should be anchored in evidence and historically verifiable facts. They argue that defending Christianity should rest primarily in the evidence for creation, the Bible, and Jesus (especially His resurrection).

*Fideism.* This term comes from the Latin word *fide*, meaning faith. The fideistic view holds that the only knowledge we can have is by faith. While evidentialism says that the best way to come to faith in God is *through* reason and evidence, fideism says that you should come to faith by believing in God *apart from* reason and evidence. Faith in God cannot be rooted in rational argument because faith is a matter of the heart, not the head.

### *A Balanced Approach*

The Christian faith is a balanced faith. It is reasonable, and the evidence supports the truth claims of Christianity, so you don't have to check your brains at the door when you act in faith to trust and commit yourself to Jesus Christ. But neither do you need to have rational answers for every question in order for your faith to be valid. It's not either faith or reason. It's both faith and reason.

### What's That Again?

1. Christian apologetics is the process of providing reasonable explanations for the truth claims of the Christian faith.
2. Faith is more than a feeling or a blind leap in the dark. Faith has substance, and it includes evidence for faith that is available for everyone.
3. Faith doesn't take away from belief. Faith adds to belief in the form of trust and commitment.
4. It's not enough to believe *in* God; we need to *believe* God by trusting Him and committing ourselves to Him.
5. The difference between the Christian faith and other kinds of faith is that the object of the Christian faith is completely reliable and trustworthy. The object of the Christian faith is, of course, God, including everything God has revealed about Himself in the Bible.
6. We have propositions (statements of belief) to help us understand the basis and the basics of the Christian faith. Although propositions help us define what it means to have faith in God, they are not the objects of our faith.

7. God is not only the object of faith but also the author of faith. God has “authored” faith through the Bible and through Jesus.
8. Knowledge about God guides us to believe in God, and then we must act in faith by adding trust and commitment to our belief.
9. Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.
10. The Christian faith is a reasonable faith. We can find reasons and evidence to support the truth claims of Christianity, but we don’t have to have rational answers to every question in order for our faith to be valid.

## Dig Deeper

We consider three books to be indispensable for anyone who wants to get good at Christian apologetics:

*Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft is well organized, thorough, and written in a conversational manner.

The *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Norman Geisler is exactly what the title says: an encyclopedia. This is a great resource for anything even remotely related to Christian apologetics.

*Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem gives an excellent explanation of Christian doctrine. This is a book you will use throughout your life.

In the first of what will be a series of shameless self-promotions, we also want to recommend one of our books in the Christianity 101 series: *Knowing God 101* explains the basics of the Christian faith in a way that is correct, clear, and casual (our trademarks).



## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Take a look at the truth claims listed in the introduction to part 1. Why do you believe these are true? Are there any on this list—or some that aren't listed—that trouble you?
2. What's the difference between defending your faith and getting defensive about your faith? What kind of signal do you send to someone when you get defensive? What kind of signal do you send when you present the truth in love?
3. Other than driving your car or flying in an airplane, give an example of something you do every day that requires faith. Why do you think some people who exercise faith in ordinary things have trouble exercising faith in God?
4. St. Augustine once said, "A god we understand completely is an idol." What does that mean to you? How can we know God without understanding Him completely? Why is it important that there are things about God we don't understand?
5. Read the five statements of belief written by Rock Harbor. If these are considered essential statements about the Christian faith (and they are), what makes them essential? Are there any other essential statements you think should be included in this list? Why is it important to avoid adding nonessential statements to a list like this?
6. What's the difference between knowing God and knowing about God? Has there ever been a time in your life when you knew about God but didn't really know Him?
7. What's the difference between believing in God and believing Him? Why doesn't mere belief in God lead to salvation? What do we mean when we say, "This is the part of faith that moves from your mind to your heart"?

8. Explain the elements of saving faith as found in Acts 26:17-18.

### **Moving On...**

We hope you are beginning to see that the Christian faith is a matter of both the head and the heart. And we don't just exercise this balanced faith once when we come to faith in Christ. We need to live our lives in faith every day, trusting God for the things we can't see and believing that God will deliver on His promises. Part of that belief comes from a conviction of the heart, and part of it comes from a confirmation of the mind that the things we believe are really true. In chapter 2 we will consider a number of these confirmations and evidences for faith.