

SEEING THE LIGHT

how to prepare your heart for learning and sharing the gospel

LESSON 10 | AMAZING STRENGTH AND CONVINCING PROOFS | 2/7/2021

Some argue that using evidence and reason doesn't bring people to faith. However, when we consider Paul's conversion experience coupled with his evangelism technique, we discover there is nothing to that at all. In fact, some have said that preaching the gospel is simply "letting the Holy Spirit do his job". Some say evangelism is bringing people to emotional jump-off points. Yet it is Paul, the model missionary, who said that preaching Christ with eloquent speech would empty the cross of its power (1Corinthians 1:17) and never left his words out of the message he delivered for people's conversion (c.f. 1Thessalonians 2:13).



When arguments like these are made, they sound "spiritual." It is true the Spirit "will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment" (John 16:9-10). And people's hearts are "cut to the quick" (Acts 2:37). Faith will come by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). But if we look closer at Paul's teaching and life, we will see that Paul absolutely relied on logic, reason, argumentation, and evidence to defend the truth of the gospel. For example, Paul told the Philippians that he was "appointed for the defense of the Gospel". (Philippians 1:16) In his letters he appealed to fulfilled prophecy and eyewitnesses to the resurrection as evidence (Romans 1:3-4, 15:12, 16:25-26, 1Corinthians 15:3-8). He also invoked God's creation as evidence (Romans 1:20). Paul even said that one qualification for ministers is that they would be able to defend the faith (Titus 1:9, 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

So, there is amazing strength in convincing proofs. HERE ARE 7 EXAMPLES FROM ACTS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE EVIDENTIAL FAITH OF PAUL.

1. **Acts 9:22** | "But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ." Right after Paul's conversion, Paul threw the Jews in his Damascus for a loop by being so difficult to refute. This verse shows Paul arguing like a lawyer. He was able to examine evidence, compare that evidence and find what best explains the facts to prove that Jesus was the Christ. As a devout Pharisee, Paul knew the Scriptures and was able to demonstrate to the Jews that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah.
2. **Acts 17:2-4** | "And according to Paul's custom, he visited them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a significant number of the leading women." Paul's custom was to go into the local synagogues wherever he traveled and reason with them from the Scriptures. He'd provoke people to think, evaluate things and form judgments through the process of logic. Reason is no enemy to faith; it is the foundation of where faith comes from. Paul made a large number of converts – including Greeks who came to Jesus by sharing evidence for the resurrection and how Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy.
3. **Acts 19:8-10** | "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (NIV). Paul wasn't a bully – but he did demonstrate persistence and persuasion in his attempts to evangelize, for three months. Notice that after Paul left the synagogue, he set up shop in a public lecture hall. These lecture halls were a place where thinkers of the day could share their ideas. Notice that these were daily discussions, so Paul must have been doing more than preaching. Paul was likely having Q and A sessions with outsiders for two years until the whole city heard the word of God. So if Paul is our model missionary, evangelism can happen in the public square as well as house to house (Acts 2:42). Evangelism can happen among the scholarly and among the common. Our faith should also be open to questions, so we had better be prepared to meet objections and be willing to work with people for a long period of time. Some use 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 as evidence that Paul gave up on using evidence and arguments, but instead, when he came to Ephesus, he persisted for years by reasoning.
4. **Acts 26:22-26** | "To this very day, I have had help from God, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would take place— that the Messiah must suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles" (CSB).

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As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, “You’re out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad.” But Paul replied, “I’m not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I’m speaking words of truth and good judgment... I am convinced that none of these things has escaped his notice since this was not done in a corner.” When Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus, he said he would testify before kings. (Acts 9:15) Here he is before Festus, and Paul said he was happy to make his defense (Acts 26:2). Notice that Paul was appealing to public facts Festus would have known.

5. **Acts 13:15-39** | “After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, you can speak.” Paul stood up and motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites, and you who fear God, **listen!... But God raised him from the dead, and he appeared for many days to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we ourselves proclaim to you the good news of the promise that was made to our ancestors...** Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. Everyone who believes is justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses.” This is the longest speech we have from Paul on record. While preaching to an audience of Jews and Gentile proselytes, Paul reviews historical facts, then recent historical facts, then harmonized prophecies. After showing Jesus as fulfillment of Israel’s hopes, then and only then does he share the gospel – that Jesus died and was raised for the forgiveness of sins.
6. **Acts 17:22-34** | “Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands... He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ Since we are God’s offspring then, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination. “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” Paul doesn’t quote Scripture but instead reasons from the evidence of general revelation. For evidence, Paul quotes two of their own thinkers. The first quote is from *Epimenides of Crete*, and the second is from *Aratus’ poem Phaenomena*. Paul works to build some common ground; but he is reasoning with them – not getting them in emotional frenzies nor circling them around the Holy Spirit to wait for Him to drop them.
7. **Acts 28:23** | “After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he expounded and testified about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.” (CSB). And here’s how Acts ends. Paul pulled all-day and all-night shifts, trying to persuade people about the truth of Jesus through the Old Testament.

In summary, we find from Paul’s writings and especially from Acts is Paul used evidence and arguments for the truth of Christianity, arguing for: 1) The existence of God; 2) The resurrection; 3) The fulfillment of messianic prophecy; 4) His own personal testimony (c.f. Galatians 2:20). Let’s learn from the model of Paul. We should be prepared to share evidence for the existence of God and the resurrection. We need to learn the arguments from prophecy, something that’s too often neglected. And we should know something about the philosophies and worldviews around us and learn how to use them to build common ground. We need to be able to adapt to our audience so that we can be all things to all men in order that some might be saved. (1Corinthians 9:19-23). If we want to turn the world upside-down with Amazing strength and convincing proofs like Paul, we need to be about to present the evidence for the truth of the gospel as he did.

Lesson 11 – Amazing Conditions and Compelling Resolve.