

The Conflicting Evidence Of Faith

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

Evidence is defined as, “data presented to a court or jury in proof of the facts in issue and which may include the testimony of witnesses, records, documents, or objects.”

In other words when you are in a court of law, each lawyer makes a claim that something happened in a case.

Suppose the case of robbery: the prosecution might claim that a person was in a strange neighborhood late at night for no other reason other than to find a vacant home and rob it. The defense, on the other hand, might claim that the defendant was in the neighborhood to visit his sick mother.

Each side has a story that they feel explains the situation, but without evidence they are both just stories. It would fall on the jury to decide which of the stories they believe the most. If the defense could provide evidence that there was a sick mother who lived in the neighborhood, for example, then the evidence would be proof that the story was true.

What happens when two pieces of evidence conflict? What happens when, say, one set of the witness’s places a person at one location and a different set of witness’s places the same person at a different location?

Both sides present evidence in the case, but the evidence conflicts with each other. Lawyers sometimes refer to this as the “evil twin” defense: to claim that police have arrested the wrong person and that someone else who looks exactly like the defendant is the actual perpetrator.

This defense was actually used in Huffington, MA in 2012. Someone robbed the Stop-N-Wait-N-Go in Huffington on January 21, 2012. Police had video footage of the robbery and soon arrested Harold Jenkins. Some of the evidence they had on Jenkins was:

- He looked like the person in the video
- Make and model of the car in the video matched Jenkins' vehicle
- The license plate of the vehicle matched the license plate of Jenkins' vehicle
- Jenkins was arrested wearing the exact same clothes of the person in the video

Yet Jenkins was successful in convincing the jury that he was not the person in the video but rather looked very similar. This was despite the fact that his own parents testified that Jenkins did not have a twin brother and was in fact an only child.

What do you do when two pieces of evidence conflict with each other?

In Hebrews 11:1 it says, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." One thing I want you to note here is what faith is not:

- Faith is not evidence of things that you can see.
- Faith is not evidence of something that has already happened.

Evidence is the evidence of something that has already happened. I don't have faith that the universe exists; I can see that the universe exists. The universe is evidence of itself.

Faith is the evidence – the proof – of things that I can't see, of things that do not exist yet.

What happens when faith, the evidence of things in the future, conflicts with the evidence of things in the present?

1 Samuel 16:1 I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

Samuel heard from God that there was to be a new king to replace Saul and that that king was to be chosen from among Jesse's sons. Samuel did not know which of Jesse's sons was to be the king, but he knew what God had told him.

Samuel had faith in God and that faith is the evidence that Samuel needed. Samuel had not seen the king as yet; no one in Jesse's lineage had been given a crown to rule the people.

If Samuel had shown up to Bethlehem and seen one of Jesse's sons there with kingly robes and a crown on his head, that would have been evidence – proof that there was a king in Jesse's family.

But there was no crown; there was no robe; there was no scepter; there was nothing to indicate that the kingship had been granted to one of Jesse's sons.

Jesse's sons becoming king was an event that was still going to happen in the future. Samuel's faith was the evidence that one of Jesse's sons would become king.

1 Samuel 16:6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed [is] before him.

1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for [the LORD seeth] not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

But now we have conflicting evidence.

Samuel had evidence that one of Jesse's sons would become king, yet he also had evidence that at least one of those sons (Eliab – the oldest) would not be that king.

Now Samuel has to examine his evidence. He has one piece of evidence that says a son of Jesse will be king (his faith) and one piece of evidence that says that is false.

1 Samuel 16:8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

OK, now the evidence against Samuel's evidence is getting worse. Now Samuel has 2 pieces of evidence that says Jesse's sons will never be king. The score is now 2 pieces of evidence against and 1 piece of evidence in favor.

1 Samuel 16:9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

1 piece of evidence in favor of Samuel and 3 pieces against.

1 Samuel 16:10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel.

So Samuel goes through Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, Nethaneel, Raddai, Ozem, plus an unnamed 7th son. Each time Samuel had to ask himself, "Did I miss the will of God?"

He finally gets down to the end of the list and he is left with 2 things: 7-to-1 evidence that his faith is wrong, no more possibilities to choose from.

How many of you have had to make the same evaluation in your life? How many of you were standing on faith in something yet the Devil keeps showing you evidence that you are wrong? The important thing to remember is that faith isn't evidence of things that you can see; faith is the evidence of things that you cannot see.

The strength of your faith is demonstrated by how long it can stand up to evidence to the contrary.

Does the evidence of your faith stand up to just one piece of counter-evidence? Does it stand up to 2? 5? 7? How many pieces of worldly evidence does it take before you abandon your faith evidence?

Joel's Story

In 2000 I was on a plane from Salt Lake City to Cincinnati when I felt the Lord move on me and say, "You need to get the bedroom ready for your son." It was not a verbal speech that I heard; I can only describe it as "remembering something that I didn't know before." Have you ever forgotten something and then suddenly you remember the thing that you had forgotten? Perhaps you forgot where you left your car keys. You look all over and suddenly you get a flash of an image in your mind of you handing the keys to your son or daughter. You remember something that happened to you. You remember that it happened, but you had forgotten, and now you remember that you remember.

For me this was like that except that I knew that I was remembering something that I hadn't known before. This was a new thing that I had never known, but now I did. It wasn't that I had suddenly had a wish that I would have a son; I had had that for years before but my wife and I were not able to make that happen on our own. I didn't simply have a wish that I might someday have a son and then call that wish "faith;" I had a revelation that I would have a son and that revelation was the evidence that it was about to occur. But since it had not occurred yet, that made it faith.

A young girl in Arizona and the daughter of a UPC minister was engaging in activities that she shouldn't have and got pregnant. The Lord spoke to me 9 months before Joel was born. I didn't write down the exact date, but it is entirely possible that I knew she was pregnant before she did. I didn't know who she was or where she lived, but I knew that somewhere "out there"

was a woman carrying a baby and that God told me that I needed to start painting his room.

So I started decorating his room. The only evidence I had that there was something going on was the faith I had in God. The faith that God had spoken to me on a plane about something that I had not seen and had no personal knowledge about. Yet that was the evidence I needed to begin redecorating. My faith was the evidence of things that I had not seen.

A few months later I was almost done with the room when we got a call from New Beginnings of Tupelo. They called to say that they had a young girl who was pregnant with a boy and while we weren't at the top of the waiting list, they wanted to know if we would be interested. There was one catch though, in that the girl was adamant that this be an open adoption. Normally adoptions are closed so that the birth parents and the adoptive parents never meet, never speak, and never know anything about each other besides basic medical history. This young girl wanted to have a fully open adoption where she would not only meet us but also basically "approve" us as the parents of the baby she was carrying. A few other people who were higher than we on the waiting list had already turned down that offer. We accepted.

So we waited patiently some more and got a call that she had gone into labor. We dropped everything and flew down to Tupelo, MS. We were in the room the day that Joel was born. I sang "Happy Birthday" to him in the hospital room on the day he was born. We met his birth mother and her mother, had a few days together in the hospital room, and then they left to return home to Arizona.

Here is where the evidence in our faith started to be attacked by counter-evidence in the world. You see the thing that the adoption agency had never told the birth mother is that they would not release Joel for adoption until both his birth mother and his birth father had signed the papers releasing parental rights. The problem is that the birth father refused to

sign the paper because his mother (Joel's birth grandmother) wanted to raise him. So Joel was placed into foster care and we flew home. We left Joel in foster care in Mississippi while we flew home to Ohio. Our faith was the evidence that we were going to have a son, but the world had counter-evidence that said he was not.

For every one of us, there will come a time when the evidence that is our faith is going to have to be tested and compared to evidence to the contrary.

Just like Samuel when he went through Jesse's sons one by one, so your faith is going to have to stand up against the evidence that is mounted against it. The Devil is going to try and throw the "evil twin" story up against the evidence that is your faith.

The question is, how long will you keep defending your evidence before you decide to settle you're the lawsuit and abandon your case?

For me, I was willing to give up on the evidence of my faith right away. Even though my faith had been strong enough to cause me to redecorate a bedroom without any other corroborating evidence, as soon as the first sign of counter-evidence showed up I was willing to walk away.

I simply assumed that I must have misunderstood God, or perhaps God had changed his mind.

My wife, on the other hand, refused to give up her faith so easily. She said to me, "That little boy has no one else who is willing to fight for him except me." And with that she hopped into the car and drove from Ohio to Mississippi, leaving Cara and me alone.

She wasn't quite sure what she was going to do when she got there, but she knew that she had to go and so she did. It turns out that the foster family that New Beginnings had given Joel to was a UPCI minister and his wife in Columbus, MS. They had a little room that they used for visiting

evangelists in their church. So while Janet had no legal standing with Joel, there was also no law that said that foster parents couldn't have visitors. Since taking care of a baby is a hard job, it only made sense that a foster parent might lean on whatever help she could get from a visiting guest to help her take care of a young infant. So my wife lived in the room at the church with Joel. Cara and I joined her about a week later. The 4 of us lived in a single room in the back of a church in Columbus, MS while the lawyers worked out the details of his adoption.

Finally on August 24, 2001, 3 months and 15 days after he was born, we went before the judge and finalized the adoption.

Every day for months on end we had evidence being presented to us that undermined the evidence that was our faith. Every day the score got worse.

- First it was the evidence of our faith against 1 piece of negative evidence.
- Then it was 1 to 2.
- At the end it was 107 days of evidence against us standing up to 1 piece of evidence in our favor; our Faith in Jesus Christ.

Our 1 piece of evidence is all it took.

God's Corroborating Evidence

It turns out that while we could only see the negative evidence piling up against us, the Lord was presenting an entire mountain of evidence in our favor that only He could see. The Lord could see into the future and could see not only a future with Joel living with us, but he also saw using living bringing him up in this church. Some of the evidence that we could not see:

- I mentioned that Joel's birth mother lived in Arizona. It turns out that Brent and Beth Kelley knew her. In fact Brent's dad had preached at his church. They knew that she had gotten into trouble and had given the baby up for

adoption, but never knew the rest of the story until we were discussing it in their living room one night.

- We mentioned that we stayed in the home of the Blaylocks in Columbus, MS. It turns out that the Blaylocks are very good friends with the Netherys.
- Joel's birth mother is still a good friend of ours. We still visit them regularly. This past Christmas we went over to their house and found that they live not ½ mile from the house we lived in when where I redecorated in anticipation of Joel joining our family.

Even though we thought that we were battling our one piece of evidence of faith against hundreds of pieces of evidence to the contrary, God was looking out over the expanse of time and was quietly building a case in our favor all his own. Even though we were not aware of the evidence at the time, God continued to build that evidence for us.

Seeing The Evidence Of Things Not Seen

A few months ago the doctors had evidence that Greyson Pamer was having issues with her brain development. Paul and Brooke, on the other hand, had their own evidence that the baby had a normal brain.

The doctors presented as evidence a scan of the unborn baby's brain; Paul and Brooke had evidence in the form of faith in God. While the doctors presented the picture on the left as evidence, Paul and Brooke had the picture on the right in faith because they had not seen it come to pass. Today that picture on the right is no longer evidence in faith it is evidence in evidence.

When evidence becomes evidence in reality it no longer needs to be faith. But until it becomes evidence in reality it exists as evidence in faith.

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

How long with your faith last?

Samuel had been through 7 of Jesse's sons. None of them had been the one that God had given him liberty to anoint as King. Now Samuel was standing there in the midst of the crowd looking at an empty spot. There were no more children of Jesse standing before him. Samuel could have begun to doubt his own faith, to doubt the evidence that was his faith. Instead he responds:

1 Samuel 16:11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all [thy] children?

Even though it is often overlooked, I think this is one of the greatest statements of faith in the Bible. Even after he has gone through every one of Jesse's sons, Samuel doesn't challenge God; he challenges Jesse.

He doesn't ask God why he was abandoned and why his faith was unrewarded; he challenges Jesse and says, "Is this all you've got?"

How is your faith? When the Devil mounts his "evil twin" defense against you, what is your response? Do you ask God why he has abandoned you? Do you ask why he has embarrassed you in front of all your friends? Do you assume that you must have misunderstood what God intended and instead agree to "settle" your lawsuit in light of the mounting counter-evidence that the Devil has presented?

Turn to the Devil and say, "Is that all you've got?"