

## The Detective and the Theory

by Mike Tucker \*

There are many people who believe that Sherlock Holmes was a real person. After all, his “biography” is as easy to find as is Winston Churchill’s! From 1887 to 1927, sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote of the famous detective known for his heightened skills of observation. Holmes was both memorable and beloved—and entirely fictional. Yet, there are a great number of people who would claim the clues suggest otherwise. As Holmes himself said, “The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession.”

The process of gathering and interpreting information is never ending. From childhood we learn patterns of life around us and create theories on how it all works. For instance: *pans on the stove burn fingers*. This is one theory a child might form after a firsthand encounter with the stove. But as data becomes more complete, a child’s theories are readily adjusted—namely: *certain parts of a pan on a hot stove burn fingers*.

The temptation Sherlock Holmes speaks of—forming theories upon insufficient data—seems to grow with age. Strangely, as adults, we are often less willing to adjust our theories than we were as children. The biases we bring to the investigation often prevent us from recognizing data as insufficient or flawed. For instance: *God cannot exist, because if God did exist my mother wouldn’t have died so young; or if God did exist, tsunamis and hurricanes wouldn’t kill people, or if God did exist, I wouldn’t still be struggling with my finances*. How would we respond to a child who insisted that if broccoli were good for her, it would taste like candy?

“If God exists,” we essentially ask, “why wouldn’t God be like the God I want to believe in?” or “Why wouldn’t God be revealed in the way that I need God to be revealed?” We unreasonably hold the answers without actually recognizing what questions we are asking. “I maintained that God did not exist,” noted C.S. Lewis of his years as an atheist, “I was also very angry with God for not existing.”

The clues of a creative and personal God are all around us. Christ’s humanity is unique in its ability to change and transform lives. I, too, know the desperation of clinging to the answers that keep us from really seeing the evidence. But this is not seeing. The apostle Paul states, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that we are without excuse.” (Rom. 1:20)

Will we investigate the evidence of God with a mind to see what is really there? Perhaps there is indeed something to the call of Jesus to receive the kingdom of God like a little child.

With love,  
Mike

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Faith Moment  
August 10, 2015