

Reasonable Faith – Why Biblical Christianity Rings True

Dr. Michael Gleghorn briefly examines some of the reasons why noted Christian philosopher William Lane Craig believes that Christianity is an eminently reasonable faith.

Reasonable Faith

One of the finest Christian philosophers of our day is William Lane Craig. Although he has become very well known for his debates with atheists and skeptics, he's also a prolific writer. To date, he has authored or edited over thirty books and more than a hundred scholarly articles.^[1] His published work explores such fascinating topics as the evidence for the existence of God, the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and God's relationship to time. In 2007 he started a web-based apologetics ministry called Reasonable Faith (www.reasonablefaith.org). The site features both scholarly and popular articles written by Craig, audio and video recordings of some of his debates, lectures, and interviews, answers to questions from his readers, and much more.

But before he launched the Reasonable Faith Web site, Craig had also authored a book by the same title. One of the best apologetics books on the market, a revised and updated third edition was recently released. His friend and colleague, the philosopher J. P. Moreland, endorsed Craig's ministry with these words:



It is hard to overstate the impact that William Lane Craig has had for the cause of Christ. He is simply the finest

Christian apologist of the last half century, and his academic work justifies ranking him among the top one percent of practicing philosophers in the Western world. Besides that, he is a winsome ambassador for Christ, an exceptional debater, and a man with the heart of an evangelist. . . . I do not know of a single thinker who has done more to raise the bar of Christian scholarship in our generation than Craig. He is one of a kind, and I thank God for his life and work.{2}

Although the book has been described as “an admirable defense of basic Christian faith,”{3} many readers will find the content quite advanced. According to Craig, “*Reasonable Faith* is intended primarily to serve as a textbook for seminary level courses on Christian apologetics.”{4} For those without much prior training in philosophy, theology, and apologetics, this book will make for some very demanding reading in places. But for those who want to seriously grapple with an informed and compelling case for the truth of Christianity, this book will richly repay one’s careful and patient study.

Although we cannot possibly do it justice, in the remainder of this article we will briefly consider at least some of the reasons why Craig believes that biblical Christianity is an eminently reasonable faith.

The Absurdity of Life Without God

Imagine for a moment that there is no God. What implications would this have for human life? Science tells us that the universe is not eternal, but that it rather had a beginning. But if there is no God, then the universe must have come into being, uncaused, out of nothing! What’s more, the origin of life is nothing more than an unintended by-product of matter, plus time, plus chance.{5} No one planned or purposed for life to arise, for if there is no God, there was no one to plan or purpose it. And human beings? We are just the unpredictable

result of a long evolutionary process that never had us in mind. In fact, if one were to rewind the history of life to its beginning, and allow the evolutionary process to start anew, it's virtually certain that none of us would be here to think about it! After all, without an intelligent Agent guiding this long and complicated process, the chances that our species would accidentally emerge a second time is practically zero.{6}

Depressing as it is, this little thought experiment provides the appropriate backdrop for Craig's discussion of the absurdity of life without God. In his view, if God does not exist, then human life is ultimately without meaning, value, or purpose. After all, if human beings are merely the accidental by-products of the unintended forces of nature, then what possible meaning *could* human life have? If there is no God, then we were not created for a *purpose*; we were merely "coughed" into existence by mindless material processes.

Of course, some might wonder why we couldn't just create some meaning for our lives, or give the universe a meaning of our own. But as Craig observes, "the universe does not really acquire meaning just because *I* happen to give it one . . . for suppose I give the universe one meaning, and you give it another. Who is right? The answer, of course, is neither one. For the universe without God remains objectively meaningless, no matter how we regard it."{7}

Like it or not, if God does not exist, then the universe—and our very lives—are ultimately meaningless and absurd. The difficulty is, however, that no one can really live consistently and happily with such a view.{8} Although merely recognizing this fact does absolutely nothing to show that God actually exists, it should at least motivate us to sincerely investigate the matter with an open heart and an open mind. So let's now briefly consider some of the *reasons* for believing that there really is a God.

The Existence of God

In the latest edition of *Reasonable Faith*, Craig offers a number of persuasive arguments for believing that God does, in fact, exist. Unfortunately, we can only skim the surface of these arguments here. But if you want to go deeper, his book is a great place to start.

After a brief historical survey of some of the major kinds of arguments that scholars have offered for believing that God exists, Craig offers his own defense for each of them. He begins with a defense of what is often called the *cosmological* argument. This argument takes its name from the Greek word *kosmos*, which means “world.” It essentially argues from the existence of the cosmos, or world, to the existence of a First Cause or Sufficient Reason for the world’s existence.[{9}](#) Next he defends a *teleological*, or design, argument. The name for this argument comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means “end.” According to Craig, this argument attempts to infer “an intelligent designer of the universe, just as we infer an intelligent designer for any product in which we discern evidence of purposeful adaptation of means to some end (*telos*).”[{10}](#) After the design argument, he offers a defense of the *moral* argument. This argument “implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of the ultimate Good,” as well as “the source of the objective moral values we experience in the world.”[{11}](#) Finally, he defends what is known as the *ontological* argument. Ontology is the study of being, and this much-debated argument “attempts to prove from the very concept of God that God exists.”[{12}](#)

Taken together, these arguments provide a powerful case for the existence of God. As Craig presents them, the cosmological argument implies the existence of an eternal, immaterial, unimaginably powerful, personal Creator of the universe. The design argument reveals an intelligent designer of the cosmos. The moral argument reveals a Being who is the transcendent

source and standard of moral goodness. And the ontological argument shows that if God's existence is even possible, then He must exist!

But suppose we grant that all of these arguments are sound. Why think that *Christianity* is true? Many *non-Christian* religions believe in God. Why think that Christianity is the one that got it right? In order to answer this question we must now confront the central figure of Christianity: Jesus of Nazareth.

The Son of Man

When the previous edition of *Reasonable Faith* was published in 1994, most New Testament scholars thought that Jesus had never really claimed to be the Messiah, or Lord, or Son of God. But a lot has happened in the intervening fourteen years, and "the balance of scholarly opinion on Jesus' use of Christological titles may have actually tipped in the opposite direction."[\[13\]](#)

For example, we have excellent grounds for believing that Jesus often referred to himself as "the Son of Man."[\[14\]](#) Although some believe that in using this title Jesus was merely referring to himself as a human being, the evidence suggests that he actually meant much more than that. Note, for example, that "Jesus did not refer to himself as 'a son of man,' but as '*the* Son of Man.'" [\[15\]](#) His use of the definite article is a crucially important observation, especially in light of Daniel 7:13-14.

In this passage Daniel describes a vision in which "one like a son of man" comes before God with the clouds of heaven. God gives this person an everlasting kingdom and we are told that "all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him" (Dan. 7:14). It's clear that Daniel's "son of man" is much more than a human being, for he's viewed as an appropriate

object of worship. Since no one is worthy of worship but God alone (see Luke 4:8), the “son of man” must actually be divine, as well as human.

According to Mark, at Jesus’ trial the high priest pointedly asked him if he was the Christ (or Messiah), “the Son of the Blessed One.” Jesus’ response is astonishing. “I am,” he said, “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). Here Jesus not only affirms that he is the Messiah and Son of God, he also explicitly identifies himself with the coming Son of Man prophesied by Daniel.[{16}](#) Since we have excellent reasons for believing that Jesus actually made this radical claim at his trial, we’re once again confronted with that old trilemma: if Jesus really claimed to be divine, then he must have been either a lunatic, a liar, or the divine Son of Man!

Now most people would probably agree that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, but they might still find it difficult to accept his claim to divinity. They might wonder if we have any good reasons, independent of Jesus’ claims, for believing his claims to be true. As a matter of fact we do!

The Resurrection of Jesus

Shortly after Jesus’ crucifixion, on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter stood before a large crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem and made a truly astonishing claim: God had raised Jesus from the dead, thereby vindicating his radical personal claims to be both Lord and Messiah (see Acts 2:32-36). The reason this claim was so incredible was that the “Jews had no conception of a Messiah who, instead of triumphing over Israel’s enemies, would be shamefully executed by them as a criminal.”[{17}](#) Indeed, according to the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (21:22-23). So how could a man who had been crucified

as a criminal possibly be the promised Messiah? If we reject the explanation of the New Testament, that God raised Jesus from the dead, it's very difficult to see how early Christianity could have ever gotten started. So are there good reasons to believe that Jesus really was raised from the dead?

According to Craig, the case for Jesus' resurrection rests "upon the evidence for three great, independently established facts: the empty tomb, the resurrection appearances, and the origin of the Christian faith."[{18}](#) He marshals an extensive array of arguments and evidence in support of each fact, as well as critiquing the various naturalistic theories which have been proposed to avoid the resurrection. He concludes by noting that since God exists, miracles are possible. And once one acknowledges this, "it's hard to deny that the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of the facts."[{19}](#)

This brings us to the significance of this event. According to the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg:

The resurrection of Jesus acquires such decisive meaning, not merely because someone . . . has been raised from the dead, but because it is Jesus of Nazareth, whose execution was instigated by the Jews because he had blasphemed against God. If this man was raised from the dead, then . . . God . . . has committed himself to him. . . . The resurrection can only be understood as the divine vindication of the man whom the Jews had rejected as a blasphemer.[{20}](#)

In other words, by raising Jesus from the dead, God has put His seal of approval (as it were) on Jesus' radical personal claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and the divine Son of Man! This forces each of us to answer the same haunting question Jesus once asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15).

Notes

1. See "About William Lane Craig" at www.reasonablefaith.org/william-lane-craig/, accessed 20 May 2018.
2. J. P. Moreland, cited in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 1.
3. C. Behan McCullagh, cited in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 1.
4. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 12.
5. Ibid., 76.
6. In the minds of some people, this is a rather controversial claim. But it's been convincingly defended by naturalist authors like Stephen J. Gould and Michael Shermer. For a brief defense by Shermer, please see the articles on "Glorious Contingency" at www.metanexus.net/Magazine/ArticleDetail/tabid/68/tabid/72/Default.aspx?aid=27, accessed 4 September 2008.
7. Ibid., 79.
8. Ibid., 78.
9. Ibid., 98.
10. Ibid., 99-100.
11. Ibid., 104.
12. Ibid., 95.
13. Ibid., 301.
14. See Craig's discussion on pp. 315-318.
15. Ibid., 315.
16. Ibid., 317.
17. Ibid., 388.
18. Ibid., 360-61.
18. Ibid., 399.
20. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Jesu Geschichte und unsere Geschichte," in *Glaube und Wirklichkeit* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1975), 92-94; cited in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 399.

Making a Defense

Rick Wade explores the meaning of the word “defense” in 1 Peter 3:15, suggesting that all Christians can do what Peter is urging us to do in defending our faith.

Apologetics has grown into a very involved discipline over the last two millennia. From the beginning, Christians have sought to answer challenges to their claims about Jesus and complaints and questions about how they lived. Those challenges have changed over the years, and apologetics has become a much more sophisticated endeavor than it was in the first century.

The Scripture passage most often used to justify apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15: “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” This verse is probably used so often because it sounds like marching orders. Other Scriptures show us defense in action; this one tells us to do it.



The word translated “defense” here is *apologia* which is a term taken from the legal world to refer to the defense a person gave in court. It is one of several words used in Scripture that carry legal connotations. Some others are *witness*, *testify* and *testimony*, *evidence*, *persuade*, and *accuse*.

Something that scholars have noticed about Scripture is the presence of a kind of trial motif in both Old and New Testaments, what one New Testament scholar calls the “cosmic trial motif.”^{1} There is a trial of sorts with God on one side and the fallen world on the other. The use of legal terminology isn’t merely coincidental.

Think about the arguments you've heard presented by apologists that are philosophical or scientific or historical. The core issue of apologetics is generally thought as being truth.^{2} While all this fits with what Peter had in mind, I believe there was something deeper and wider behind his exhortation.

In short, I think Peter was concerned with two things: faithfulness and speaking up for Christ. He wanted Christians to acknowledge and not deny Christ. And, as we'll see later, Jesus said demands for a defense were to be seen as opportunities to bear witness. Defense in the New Testament doesn't function separately from proclaiming the gospel.

The Old Testament Background

As I noted earlier, there is a kind of cosmic trial motif running through Scripture, or what we might call a "forensic theme," which provides a background for understanding Peter's exhortation. One thing that will help us think about defense and witness in the New Testament is to look at the trial motif in the Old Testament.

Bible scholar A. A. Trites notes the frequency with which one encounters lawsuits or controversy addressed in a legal manner in the Old Testament such as in the book of Job and in the prophets. On occasions of legal controversy, witnesses were the primary way of proving one's case. They were not expected to be "merely objective informants," as we might expect today.^{3} The parties involved "serve both as witnesses *and* as advocates," Trites says. "It is the task of the witnesses not only to attest the facts but also to convince the opposite side of the truth of them (Isaiah 41:21-4, 26; 43:9; 51:22; cf. Gen. 38:24-6)."^{4}

Especially notable in the Old Testament is the controversy between Yahweh and the pagan gods, represented by the other nations, recorded in Isaiah chapters 40-55. "The debate is

over the claims of Yahweh as Creator, the only true God and the Lord of history (40:25-31; 44:6-8; 45:8-11, 21)," says Trites.^{5} Yahweh brings charges and calls the nations to present their witnesses, and then calls Israel to be His witness. A representative passage, which I'll leave you to look up for yourself, is Isa. 43:9-12.

Since the other nations have nothing to support their case on behalf of their gods, they lose by default. By contrast, Israel *has* witnessed the work and character of Yahweh.

The New Testament: John and Luke

As I continue to set the context for understanding 1 Peter 3:15, I turn now to look at defense in the New Testament.

The apostles had a special role to fulfill in the proclamation of the gospel because they were eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus' life. Trites says that they "were to be Christ's advocates, serving in much the same way that the witnesses for the defendant served in the Old Testament legal assembly."^{6} Beyond giving the facts, they announced that Jesus is Lord of all and God's appointed judge, and they called people to believe (see Acts 10:36; cf. 2:36-40; 20:21).^{7}

I spoke above about the controversy recorded in Isaiah 40-55 between Yahweh and the nations and their gods. This "lawsuit" continues in the Gospels in the conflict between Jesus and the Jews. New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham writes, "It is this lawsuit that the Gospel of John sees taking place in the history of Jesus, as the one true God demonstrates His deity in controversy with the claims of the world."^{8} Multiple witnesses are brought forth in John's Gospel. In chapter 5 alone Jesus names His own works, John the Baptist, God the Father, and the Old Testament. And there are others, for example the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, and the crowd who witnessed the raising of Lazarus in chapter 12.

This witness extends beyond simply stating the facts. As in the Old Testament, testimony is intended to convince listeners to believe. The purpose of John's Gospel was to lead people to belief in Christ (20:30-31).

The concept of witness is important for Luke as well; obviously so in the book of Acts, but also in his Gospel. In Luke 24 we read where Jesus told His disciples, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (24:45-49). Here we have a set of events, a group of witnesses, and the empowerment of the Spirit.

The New Testament: Luke and Paul

It was a dangerous thing to be a Christian in the first century, just as it is in some parts of the world today. Jesus warned His disciples, "they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons." Listen to what He says next: "This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer" (Lk. 21:12-14). "How to answer" is the word *apologia*, the one Peter uses for "make a defense" in 1 Peter 3:15.

It's important to keep the central point of this passage in Luke in view. What Jesus desired first of all were faithful witnesses. The apostles would face hostility as He did, and when challenged to explain themselves they were not to fear men but God, to confess Christ and not deny Him. This warning is echoed in 1 Peter 3:14-15. Jesus' disciples would be called upon to defend their actions or their teachings, but their main purpose was to speak on behalf of Christ. Furthermore,

they shouldn't be anxious about what they would say, for the Spirit would give them the words (Lk. 12:12; 21:15). This isn't to say they shouldn't *learn* anything; Jesus spent a lot of time teaching His followers. It simply means that the Spirit would take such opportunities to deliver the message He wanted to deliver.

Witness and defense were the theme of Paul's ministry. He said that Jesus appointed him to be a witness for Christ (Acts 22:15; 26:16; see also 23:11). As he traveled about, preaching the gospel, he was called upon to defend himself before the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 22 and 23), before the governor, Felix, in Caesarea (chap. 24), and before King Agrippa (chap. 26).

Toward the end of his life when he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul told the church in Philippi, "I am put here for the defense of the gospel (1:16; cf. v.7). That claim is in the middle of a paragraph about preaching Christ (Phil. 1:15-18).

In obedience to Jesus, Paul was faithful to confess and not deny. Although he was called upon to defend *himself* or his *actions*, he almost always turned the opportunity into a defense and proclamation of the *gospel*.

1 Peter

Finally I come to 1 Peter 3:15. What is the significance of what I've said about the trial motif in Scripture for this verse?

A key theme in 1 Peter is a proper response to persecution. Christians were starting to suffer for their faith (3:8-4:2). Peter encouraged them to stand firm as our Savior did who himself "suffered in the flesh," as Peter wrote (4:1).

After exhorting his readers to "turn away from evil and do good" (1 Pet. 3:11), Peter says,

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame (3:13-16).

The main point of this passage is faithfulness: faithfulness in righteous living, and faithfulness in honoring Christ and speaking up when challenged.

So how does the idea of witness fit in here? I submit that Peter would have remembered Jesus' instructions to turn demands for a defense into opportunities to bear witness. Remember Luke 21:13? Peter did this himself. When he and John were called before Caiaphas, as we read in Acts 4 and 5, rather than deny Jesus as he did when Jesus was on trial (Mk. 14:66-72), Peter faithfully proclaimed Christ not once but twice. The second time he said, "We must obey God rather than men," and then he laid out the gospel message (Acts 5:27-32; see also 4:5-22).

Sometimes I hear apologists talking about how to put apologetics and evangelism together. While there may be a conceptual distinction between the two, they are both aspects of the one big task of bearing witness for Jesus. The trajectory of our engagement with unbelief ought always to be the proclamation of the gospel even if we can't always get there. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:5, our faith rests properly in Christ and the message of the cross, not in the strength of an argument.

Defense and witness are the responsibility of all of us. If that seems rather scary, remember that we're promised, in Luke 12:12, the enabling of the Spirit to give us the words we

need.

Notes

1. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 389.
2. See for example James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 20.
3. Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 21.
4. Ibid., 46.
5. Ibid., 45.
6. Ibid., 139.
7. Ibid., 133.
8. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 387.

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The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood (Radio Transcript)

Steve Cable examines the faulty reasoning and interpretation of the Bible in Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek article "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin."

Dissecting the Bible by Focusing on Nits

Recently, New Testament scholar, Dr. Daniel Wallace, addressing our strong confidence in our modern translations, mentioned others presenting a false view of this situation. One example, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald^{1}, appeared in *Newsweek*. This article presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let's evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.^{2}

Eichenwald begins by parroting negative stereotypes about American evangelicals. Adding rigor to his rant, he states, "A Pew Research poll in 2010^{2} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with **the New Testament and Jesus's teachings**."^{4}



He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve answered correctly. However, only **two of the twelve related to the New Testament** and **none to Jesus's teachings**.^{5} Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone's knowledge of the New Testament, But, for the record, the two questions were "Name the four gospels" and "Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?" 53% of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus 20% of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a "smidgen higher" must mean almost three times as many.

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Dr. Wallace and others, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today's translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today's popular translations^{6} and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling in Mark).

He also lists three short passages, claiming they did not appear in earlier Greek copies. Upon examination, we find that one of those passages does not appear in modern translations. The other two do appear in the translations. Why? Because they appear in numerous early Greek manuscripts.[{7}](#) Once again his scholarship is found wanting.

All scholars agree there are variations between ancient manuscripts from different areas but they do not change the message. As Wallace points out, “We are getting closer and closer to the text of the original. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world. If we have to be skeptical . . . , that skepticism . . . should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.”[{8}](#)

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

Eichenwald continues attacking the Bible with nine different topics he claims reveal contradictions in the biblical record. Let’s examine three of them to see if his arguments have substance.

First, he claims there are three different creation models, stating that “careful readers have long known that the two stories of Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other.”[{9}](#)

However, a clear-headed examination sees chapter 1 describing the overall creation while chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve. As commentators explain, “what follows Genesis 2:4 is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment.”[{10}](#)

In his third creation model “the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab.”[{11}](#)

Reading the relevant verses shows no creation story but rather the creature Rahab representing Egypt. Job 9:13 says “under (God) the helpers of Rahab lie crushed.” Some speculate this could relate to the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this speculation were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this reference tells us God destroys all idols raised up by others.

Eichenwald’s claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

His second claim states the Gospel of John was written “when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus’s death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews,”[{12}](#) implying the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans.

Examining his claim, in Luke we read, “The chief priests . . . were trying to find some way to execute Jesus.” While the Roman governor did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death.[{13}](#) In Acts, Peter squarely places the responsibility onto the Jewish leaders and nation.[{14}](#) We find similar verses in Matthew[{15}](#) and Mark[{16}](#). All the gospels place the blame on the Jewish nation. There is no shift in perspective in John.

In a third supposed contradiction Eichenwald writes, “As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there.”[{17}](#)

The gospel of Matthew ends saying **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven. In Acts, Luke says the Lord was with His disciples over a forty-day period and could have easily traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee and back.

Not surprisingly, his other six so-called “contradictions” all

fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

Faulty Interpretation Part 1

Eichenwald wants to show that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended. He begins by pointing out “the word homosexual didn’t even exist until . . . 1,800 years after the New Testament was written . . . these modern Bibles just made it up.”[\[18\]](#)

But this could be said of many English words used today. A respected dictionary of New Testament words[\[19\]](#) defines the Greek word he questions as “a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite. . .”

He then tells us not to trust 1 Timothy when it lists homosexuality as a sin because “Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy.”[\[20\]](#)

The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars[\[21\]](#) do not agree it is a forgery.[\[22\]](#) Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He writes, “So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood.

He claims people are not banished for other sins such as adultery, greed, and lying.

But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from

any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.{23} Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, “plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus.”{24}

Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew the details of Leviticus.

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Faulty Interpretation Part 2

To strengthen his position on homosexuality, Eichenwald calls out “a fundamental conflict in the New Testament – arguably the most important one in the Bible.”{25} As Christians, are we to obey the Mosaic Law or ignore it?

He claims, “The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, . . . to achieve salvation.”{26} He says this is contrary to Paul’s message of salvation through grace not works.

What a mistaken understanding. In Matthew, Jesus explains that to enter God's kingdom "our righteousness must surpass that of (the most religious Jews){27}." We must not get angry, call people names, or lust even once. In fact, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." {28} Jesus clearly taught we cannot be good enough. Only through His sacrifice can we be made righteous.

In Acts 15, some believers with Pharisaical backgrounds brought the Mosaic Law up to the apostles. Peter told them, "Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? . . . we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as (the Gentiles) also are." {29} The apostles and the whole church agreed to send the Gentiles word that they were not required to follow the Law.

Eichenwald is right: we are not required to follow the Law. The New Testament is very careful to identify actions and attitudes which are sin so may try to avoid them. This truth is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. {30} Even in Acts 15, the apostles tell Gentile Christians to abstain from fornication {31}, a term covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the biblical teaching about government. He says Romans has "eight verses condemning those who criticize the government." {32} Pat Robertson sinned by stating, "We need . . . to pray to be delivered from this president."

Actually, Romans says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God." {33} We are not required to say good things about the government, but rather to obey the law. Our Bill of Rights states that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech." {34}

So, if we do not voice our opinions about our government, we are not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Faulty Interpretation Part 3

As we examine popular arguments against the Bible, we will conclude by looking at prayer. In his *Newsweek* article, Kurt Eichenwald castigates a Houston prayer rally^{35} saying, “(Rick) Perry . . . boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America.” He claimed Perry “heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”

In reality, Perry prayed succinctly for about two minutes with no empty phrases.

Eichenwald explains, Perry is just an example of our error. Most Christians are disobeying by praying in front of people. Jesus told us, “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others.”

But someone can speak a prayer before others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our God. But Jesus prayed often before synagogue attenders, in front of His disciples,^{36} and before over 5,000 people.^{37} Those times, although numerous, were less than the time He spent praying alone as should be true for us.

Eichenwald states we should repeat the Lord’s prayer verbatim.

But in Matthew, Jesus gave an example of how to pray, not a set of words to repeat meaninglessly. The New Testament contains many prayers offered by the apostles and none repeat the words from the Lord’s prayer. If Eichenwald were there to instruct them, the apostles would not have sinned so

grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could pray in front of a large crowd, or on television, is “to be seen.” This claim does not make sense; the people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

In this article we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace concludes, “But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for . . . genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald’s . . . grasp of genuine biblical scholarship (is), at best, subpar.”[\[38\]](#)

If Eichenwald’s article represents the best arguments discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. However, realizing many readers of such pieces don’t know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

1. Eichenwald, Kurt, “The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin,” *Newsweek Magazine*, December 2014.
2. There are numerous web postings placed after release of Eichenwald’s article. Two you may find interesting that deal with areas of the article not addressed herein are as follows: Daniel B. Wallace, [“Predictable Christmas fare: Newsweek’s Tirade against the Bible,”](#) blogpost December 2014; and Darrell Bock, [“Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald’s Newsweek Article on the Bible,”](#) blogpost December 2014.
3. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, September 2010, pages 17-23.

4. Eichenwald, paragraph 4.

5. The 12 questions are as follows:

1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . ., no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. Check your footnotes and the italics applied to the story of the woman caught in adultery and the last few verses of the Gospel of Mark.

7. Insert summary on 1 John 5:7, Luke 22:20, and Luke 24:51.

8. Wallace.

9. Ibid, paragraph .

10. New English Translation, Genesis 59 Chapter 2, Notes 9 and

11.

11. Ibid, paragraph 66.
12. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.
13. See Luke 23:4,14,22.
14. See Acts 2:23,23,3:14-15,4:10,5:30.
15. Matthew 26:4,27:23-24.
16. Mark 14:1, 15:14-15.
17. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.
18. Ibid, paragraph 68.
19. William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006.
20. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.
21. Among those disagreeing with Eichenwald's assertion are Daniel Wallace, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, and Craig Keener.
22. In Daniel Wallace, *Intro to 1st Timothy*, Dr. Wallace writes, "In sum, although the evidence against the authenticity of the pastorals is as strong as any evidence against the authenticity of any NT book, it still cannot overthrow the traditional view. The traditional view, however, must be modified by the substantial linguistic evidence against authenticity: an amanuensis (possibly Luke) had great freedom in writing these letters for the apostle Paul."
23. See the Watermark Community Church story: www.watermark.org/statement.
24. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.
25. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.
26. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.
27. Matthew 5:20.
28. Matthew 5:48.
29. Acts 15:10-11.
30. For example in Mt 5:xx, Luke x:xx, John x:xx, Romans x:xx, Ephesians x:xx, Phil x:xx, 1 Peter x:xx, 1 John x:xx.
31. Acts 15:20,29.
32. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.
33. Romans 13:1,2.
34. Amendment 1 to the Constitution of the United States of America.

- 35. Houston 2011.
- 36. John chapter 17.
- 37. Luke chapter 9.
- 38. Wallace, paragraph ??.

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Defending Theism: A Response to Hume, Russell, and Dawkins

T.S. Weaver looks at anti-God arguments from three prominent philosophers, showing why belief in God is more reasonable than their objections to His existence.

Theism, broadly defined, is the belief in the existence of a supreme being or other deities. Believers in Jesus Christ would say we follow Christian Theism, believing in and trusting the one true God who has revealed Himself through His word and through His Son Jesus. In pursuit of the defense of theism and answering profound antagonists to the faith, I will engage with some of the objections raised by three prominent thinkers: David Hume, Bertrand Russell, and Richard Dawkins.

David Hume

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher who is often considered the best philosopher to have written in the English language. Although he was wary of metaphysical things like God, he was very fascinated by religion. He is widely considered to be an atheist, but we do not know for certain whether he was atheist [one who denies that God exists], agnostic [one who is not sure if God exists], or deist [one who believes God created the universe but then let it run

according to natural laws without divine intervention] by the time of his death. Regardless, his more prominent work is *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In it he presents classical challenges to theism.

The strongest challenge to theism Hume presents in *Dialogues* is the problem of evil and God's moral nature. His view is that with the amount of evil in the world, we cannot consider God as morally sensible, morally great, and powerful. His assumption is that if God were to exist, He does not care to solve the problem of good and evil. While this is the toughest intellectual challenge a theist has to answer, I believe there is an answer.

When God created, He gave humans the ability to make free decisions. If this ability were denied, our love (the supreme ethic) for Him would not be a choice and thus coerced. As a result, it would not be real love. Church Father Augustine (354-430) commented on this in his book *On the Free Choice of the Will*, by arguing that free will is what makes us human. God made us that way so we could freely choose to venerate, trust, and follow Him. So built into love, veneration, trust, and obedience was the ability to make free decisions. Consequently, certain choices are going to be terrible or evil (e.g., Adam and Eve's disastrous disobedience in the Garden of Eden). As a result, the only way to eradicate evil is to eradicate free will. Hence, evil is merely the consequence of the free will of humanity. John Stackhouse rearticulates this case:

God desired to love and be loved by other beings. God created human beings with this in view. To make us capable of such fellowship, God had to give us the freedom to choose, because love, though it does have its elements of "compulsion," is meaningful only when it is neither automatic nor coerced. This sort of free will, however, entailed the danger that it would be used *not* to enjoy God's love and to love God in return, but to go one's own way in

defiance of both God and one's own best interest. This is what the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden portrays.^{1}

It is not that God is insensitive to evil (Proverbs 6:16, 15:26; Psalm 5:4), but that moral and natural evils are the cause of the sin (free choice to disobey God) of man.

Bertrand Russell

Shifting gears, Bertrand Russell, (1872-1970) a famed agnostic philosopher, argued against theism with a famous view that everything on this globe is the result of "an accidental collocation of atoms."^{2} Thus, there is no real aim for which we were produced. I believe this view is both incredibly depressing and incredibly wrong. If one were to take what Timothy Keller would call a "clue of God" like beauty and think this through, it would have serious implications. If this were true, as Keller put it in *The Reason for God*, "Beauty is nothing but a neurological hardwired response to particular data."^{3} Conductor Leonard Bernstein once spoke of the effect of the beauty of Beethoven's music:

Our boy has the real goods, the stuff from Heaven, the power to make you feel at the finish: Something is right in the world. There is something that checks throughout, that follows its own law consistently: something we can trust, that will never let us down.^{4}

Does that sound like a "neurological hardwired response to particular data"? Or is Beethoven's music beautiful? As a seminary student, I often yearn for an excellent night of sleep. The thought is beautiful to me. Augustine in his *Confessions* argued that yearnings like this were clues to the existence of God. While my tiredness does not prove that my desire for an excellent night of sleep will happen tonight, it is correct that native yearnings like this link to actual substances that can fill them. For example, sensual yearning

(linking to sex), hunger (linking to food), tiredness (linking to sleep), and interpersonal yearning (linking to relationship). We have a desire for joy, love, and beauty that no quantity or condition of sex, food, sleep, and relationship can satisfy. We hope for something that nothing on this globe can satisfy. Do you think this is a clue? I assert this unpleasing yearning is a deep-rooted native longing that is an undeniable clue not only for the existence of God, but also that God is the only one who can satisfy that yearning. C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[\[5\]](#) (Please also see Dr. Michael Gleghorn's article "C.S. Lewis and the Riddle of Joy" at probe.org/c-s-lewis-and-the-riddle-of-joy/) Tying all this back to Russell's famous view, it makes sense that if there were a God who can satisfy that kind of yearning, this God likely made us, not by accident, but with a purpose. That is worth investigating.

Richard Dawkins

Now I turn to Richard Dawkins (1941-), who I think is best described as a militant atheist scientist. He writes in his book *The God Delusion*, describing God:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.[\[6\]](#)

Tell us how you really feel, Dawkins. Although there is a lot said here, what is most obvious is his portrayal of God as immoral because of what God displayed of Himself in the Old Testament. These acts are perceived to undermine his morally perfect nature. Although this will not be my main response, I

want to highlight that for Dawkins to grumble that God has perpetrated immoral acts, he acknowledges there is an objective moral law. In [a separate argument](#), I could go from here to make the case that for there to be an objective moral law there must be an objective moral law giver (God). However, I instead want to concentrate on “the God of the Old Testament.”

The Old Testament passage found in Deuteronomy (7:1-5; 20:16-18) tends to be the most cited in an argument against God such as Dawkins’s quote above. In this passage, God instructed the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites living in a specific region: “[T]hen you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy” (7:2), and “[D]o not leave alive anything that breathes” (20:16). This passage bothers many (including myself) and may be an example of where Dawkins got his characterization. It is understandable to wonder how a good and loving God could instruct this.

To make sense of a tough passage like this one must understand the context, starting with who God is. God is not like any earthly ruler. He’s not like Trump. He’s not like Biden. He is Creator of all things and King of the Universe. That said, He supplies life, and He can take life when He chooses, however He chooses. The next step is to think through whether His instruction was justified (as if it were up to us to define justice). There are occasions when we as humans may feel it is justified for people to take another’s life, as in self-defense, to safeguard others, or in a just war. What we must understand about the Canaanites in this passage is that this was not some illogical imperative for them to be murdered. The Canaanites were malevolent. In their obscene paganism, they were spiritually dangerous. They were unspeakably wicked. God said to the Israelites, “It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; *but on account of the wickedness of these nations*” (emphasis mine) (Deuteronomy 9:5).

The worst example of their wickedness is child sacrifice. Apologist Timothy Fox informs us, "They would burn their children alive in a fiery furnace as a sacrifice to the god Molech. Just that one act alone would be justification for their complete annihilation." [\[7\]](#) I wonder what Hume, who raised the problem of evil, would have to say to Dawkins about God dealing with and judging evil. One of the explanations God provided for wrecking the Canaanites was so that Israel would not embrace their malevolent ways. Dawkins may still object though and say, "What about the kids? How could a loving God instruct the Israelites to destroy harmless kids?" I do find this troubling as well, but as shown above, God can take life when He chooses, however He chooses. No one is promised a lengthy, peaceable life and to perish of old age. Furthermore, what if God saw that if these children were to mature, they would be just as evil and corrupt as their parents? What if ordering the death of children infected by their parents' wickedness is similar to an oncology surgeon cutting out small cancer cells along with the full-grown cells? That is a possibility. In addition, God does not appreciate the murder of the evil but patiently waits for repentance of sins (Ezekiel 18:23). In the case of the Canaanites, we see He will only allow wickedness for so long though.

Another objection Dawkins has to the existence of God is science. His view is that you can either be scientific and sensible, or religious. He is either ignoring, or ignorant of, the fact that modern science arose out of a biblical worldview. Christians are responsible for developing the scientific perspective and method. Francis Bacon, astronomers Kepler and Galileo, and the brilliant mathematician and physicist Isaac Newton all believed in God. They all helped shape the development of modern science; they believed that since God was a God of order, they expected nature to be orderly. They also understood that one man's opinion could be faulty because of sin, and therefore others needed to verify what any one scientist said. Kepler even characterized his

scientific perspective as “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.”

Dawkins thinks God and science do not mix. Yet two legendary experiments performed in 1916 and 1997 reveal this view is not as widely held as Dawkins and others make it seem. In 1916, American psychologist James Leuba conducted a study asking scientists if they believed in a God who actively communicates with humanity, no less than via prayer. 40 percent confirmed they did, 40 percent confirmed they did not, and 20 percent were not confident either way. Edward Larson and Larry Witham duplicated this study in 1997 using identical queries with scientists. They discovered the figures had not altered substantially. Even atheist philosopher Thomas Nagle disagrees with Dawkins’s view of reality. Nagle even questions whether atheist naturalists think their moral instincts (yes morality has come up again), for example the belief that genocide is morally incorrect, are true instead of just the consequence of neurochemistry hardwired into humans. He writes:

The reductionist project usually tries to reclaim some of the originally excluded aspects of the world, by analyzing them in physical—that is, behavioral or neurophysiological—terms; but it denies reality to what cannot be so reduced. I believe the project is doomed—that conscious experience, thought, value, and so forth are not illusions, even though they cannot be identified with physical facts.[\[8\]](#)

Science *cannot* explain all and *can* be consistent with religious faith. Therefore, it is unreasonable to think that an individual can only be a believer of science *or* a believer of God. It is also irrational to believe we came into the world by accident, or that because of the presence of evil in the world theism is not workable. In short, it is more reasonable to believe in theism than not to.

Notes

1. J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 552.
2. Bertrand Russell, "The Free Man's Worship," *The Independent Review* 1 (Dec 1903), 415-24 Title of essay changed after 1910 to "A Free Man's Worship."
3. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 138.
4. From Leonard Bernstein's "The Joy of Music" (Simon and Schuster, 2004), 105.
5. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 105.
6. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 51.
7. crossexamined.org/god-behaving-badly-destruction-canaanites/, accessed March 31, 2022.
8. Thomas Nagel, "The Fear of Religion," *The New Republic* (October 23, 2006).

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Probe Survey Report #4: Witnessing to Your Faith and the Response

Steve Cable continues to explore Probe's 2020 survey on religious beliefs and practices, examining how people witness to their faith or not, and reasons for both sharing and for not trusting Christ.

1. How Often Do You Witness to Your Faith?

Let's consider the topic of witnessing or sharing your faith with others. In our 2020 survey we asked two questions about this topic. The first question was: *How often do you engage in intentional spiritual conversation with non-believers about your faith with a desire to see them accept it for themselves?* With this question, we wanted to avoid casual mentions of your faith and discussions with no intent at conversion. The results as shown in the chart below are surprising.

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God not beyond just their faith.

Looking at the detailed results, all religions except the Unaffiliated showed very similar results: over 20% (1 in 5) of those witnessed at least monthly and about half witnessed at least yearly. So, it would appear that there is a lot of witnessing going on with very few conversions.

Figure 1 Witness with a Desire to See Conversion

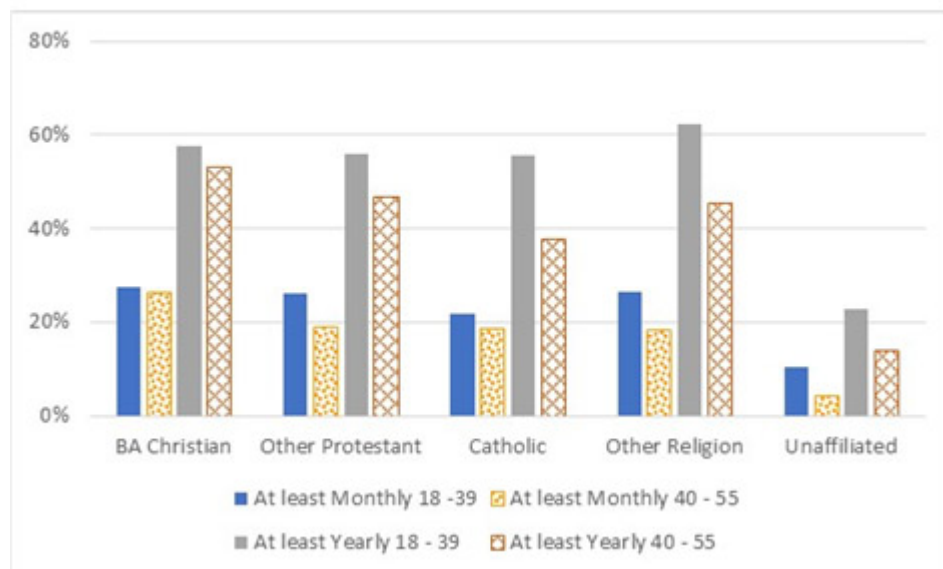


Table 1 below shows several estimates as to how many people are the recipients of these “*intentional spiritual conversations*” in a given year. The different levels shown are based on different assumptions as to how often they share with the same person and how many people they share with in a year consistent with the responses to the survey. More details are provided in the endnotes.

Table 1 Potential

Number of People Shared with by American Adults Ages 18 through 55

Religious Affiliation of Person Sharing with Intent to Convert	Potential number of individuals shared with in one year		
	Low estimate (millions){1}	Nominal estimate (millions){2}	High estimate (millions){3}
Born Again Protestant	27	56	118
Other Protestant	24	50	106
Catholic	25	51	108
Other Religion	15	31	65
Unaffiliated	12	25	52
Total	103	212	449

These results amazed me. If the nominal estimate was truly happening almost 60% of the population would have someone attempting to convert them every year. This topic deserves additional related questions to determine what level of sharing with the intent of conversion is actually happening in America. It may be that most people answering this question are only sharing with one or two family members such as their teenage children or a sibling. Or perhaps, many people think they would do this, but really they do not.

What makes this especially surprising is that Other Protestants and Catholics have a lot more people witnessing than they have holding a Basic Biblical Worldview or actually being involved in their religion. While only about one in ten (10%) strongly disagree with the statement that Mohammed, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God, over half (50%) of them are sharing their faith with the intent to convert at least once a year. And, one in five (20%) are sharing monthly or more. If you think that there are multiple ways to heaven, why would you want to go out of your way to convert someone to your religion. Of course, you could be sharing with an Unaffiliated person who needs to choose a valid religion.

Only 4.6% of Other Protestants and 0.7% of Catholics have a Basic Biblical Worldview, but almost half of them say they intentionally witness to their faith at least yearly. When they engage in a conversation with the intent of having this other person accept their faith for themselves, WHAT IS THIS FAITH THEY ARE TRYING TO GET THE OTHER PERSON TO ACCEPT? These results do suggest that most people desire more people to think like them when it comes to religion.

In a similar vein, less than 1 in 10 (10%) Catholics and Other Protestants say they pray daily, attend church at least monthly, read the Bible weekly and say their faith is important in their daily life. So, the question remains, "What are they witnessing to???"

In contrast, only 29% of Born Again Christians have a Basic Biblical Worldview while well over half of them report intentional witnessing at least once a year. But at least BAC's have something to witness to. Those Born Again Christians with a Basic Biblical Worldview report that almost two thirds (63%) of them share their faith at least once a year. This level is only a few percentage points higher than that for Born Again Christians as a whole.

How Should We Respond?

If the number of people sharing their faith is actually consistent with the answers to this question, then we know that the percentage of people actually converting as a result of their witness is very small. Otherwise, we would have many people toggling back and forth between different professed religions.

Among Born Again Christians, we project they are sharing their faith with between 25 million and 100 million nonbelievers. However, they are sharing ineffectively with the number being shared with far exceeding the growth rate of evangelicals in America. So, pastors and parachurch organizations need to up

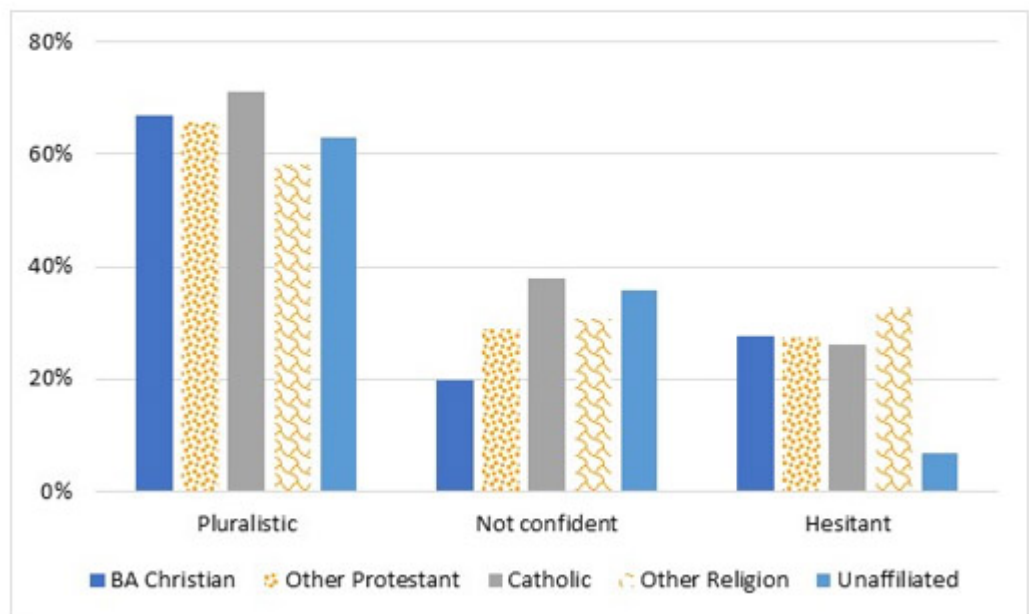
their game in training their people to share the good news of Christ. BAC's need to understand and practice the following:

1. Bathe their unsaved acquaintances in prayer asking God to bring to a clear feeling of need
2. Recognize their call to effectively share the gospel looking for opportunities to share
3. Understand how to build bridges spanning the gaps of understanding for those with different worldviews
4. Clearly explain the wonderful gift purchased for us through Jesus' death and resurrection
5. Unapologetically ask for a response to the good news shared with others
6. Realize that they should not be discouraged by a lack of interest or the lack of a positive response

2. What Keeps You From Communicating Your Religious Belief?

We also asked the question: "When I refrain from communicating my religious belief with someone, it's usually because:"[4](#)

*Figure 2 Reason for Refraining from Witnessing
Americans 18 through 39*



1. They can get to heaven through their different religious belief. [Pluralism]

2. We shouldn't impose our ideas on others. [Pluralism]
3. The Bible tells us not to judge others. [Pluralism]
4. It just doesn't seem to be that important and I don't want to risk alienating them. [Not confident]
5. I'm not confident enough in what I believe. [Not confident]
6. I'm waiting for a better opportunity. [Hesitant]

For the chart in Figure 2, we grouped these responses into three sets:

- **Pluralism** – There are other ways besides my way and I don't need to impose my way on others (responses 1, 2 and 3)
- **Not confident** – Not confident that what I have to share is important to them and/or not confident that what I believe is true (responses 4 and 5)
- **Hesitant** – No rush, I can probably find a better time (response 6)

As seen in the chart, the level of respondents selecting each set of reasons for refraining are consistent across all religious beliefs. At first glance, this may seem surprising. But in a culture where pluralism is a dominant part of all religious groups, it begins to make sense. And the pluralistic reasons were dominant, attracting around two thirds of the population across all religious groupings.

For Born Again Christians, lack of confidence in what they believe is less of an issue than for other groups. And we see that the Unaffiliated are much less likely to be hesitant waiting for a better time at around 5% of all Unaffiliated. But note that most of the other groups had less than 25% say that they were hesitant.

Looking at both of the charts, we see that (even with a lot of people saying they sometimes used excuses to avoid the subject) a majority of people of any religious group (not including the unaffiliated) share with someone with a desire

to recruit them at least once a year. I would suspect that most of these people are sharing with a family member or close friend. However, we did not ask the question so that is only reasonable speculation.

How Should We Respond?

If you are a church leader or a person who desires to see Christians sharing the good news of Jesus with those who need to know, how should you respond to this data on self-identified barriers to sharing with others?

On the most common reasons (which indicate a belief that other people don't really need to know about salvation through faith in Jesus), we need to make the exclusive role of Jesus Christ in any hope of salvation a recurring and prominent theme in our teaching. This is not a topic to tiptoe gingerly around. Rather, we need to boldly proclaim, "There is salvation in no other name under heaven other than the name of Jesus Christ." God would not have planned from before the beginning of time to sacrifice himself on the cross for our salvation if there were any other means to reconcile sinful men and women to Himself. God will not force reconciliation on us. We can choose to reject His grace. But as Paul tells us in Romans, "How are they to believe in one they have not heard of?" If we think we can slough off our responsibility to tell others, we do not understand the grace of God and our role as citizens of heaven living on this earth.

For those who do not feel confident in their ability, we need to provide training and practice environments for them to learn to share their faith experience. You are telling someone about the most important element of your life; the process that brought you out of death into true life. Help prepare them and put them in a position to share the good news with a mentor alongside them.

3. Why Have You Not Believed In Salvation Through Jesus Christ?

Finally, we wanted to know why people have not accepted the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is really a question on the other side of witnessing. I am including it here, but it could easily be a separate topic.

The question asked was as follows: *What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?*

The following options were given to select from:

1. Don't believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
2. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
3. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
4. There is no personal, creator God.
5. Another answer not listed here.
6. Never gave the question any thought.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

The table below captures the range of answers to this question.

Ages 18 – 39					
	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Other Religion	Unaffiliated
Don't believe that God would take the penalty for my sin	4.1%	13.7%	16.3%	10.6%	5.9%
Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned	15.7%	20.1%	23.8%	22.0%	8.0%
I am clearly as good as Christians I know	11.9%	10.6%	16.2%	12.9%	8.1%

There is no personal, creator God	1.0%	2.8%	2.7%	5.8%	23.9%
Another answer not listed here	6.9%	9.9%	9.3%	21.9%	28.2%
Never gave the question any thought	15.0%	29.7%	16.3%	12.7%	13.5%
Not applicable, I do believe	45.4%	13.3%	15.5%	14.1%	12.5%

The first thing to notice in this table is that less than half of Born Again Protestants selected “Not applicable, I do believe.” This result is odd since one of the questions required to be considered a Born Again Protestant is “The statement that best describes you own belief about what will happen to you after you die is ‘*I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.*’” Perhaps some of the Born Agains thought we wanted to know what was keeping them away before they surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is because some of them consider “confessed my sins and accepted” as something they did to earn their salvation. In that case, one could possibly consider answers 2, 5, 6 and 7 as consistent with Born Again Protestants. Although that would be somewhat of a stretch. That assumption still leaves 17% of BA Protestants whose answers are clearly inconsistent.

Other Protestants are most likely to say, “I never gave the question any thought” or “Salvation must be earned” with only 13% saying they do believe the statement about salvation through faith alone. Catholics are about the same as Other Protestants in saying they believe in salvation through faith alone. The more frequent answers for Catholics being “it must be earned”, “I am clearly as good as Christians I know”, and “never gave the question any thought.”

The most common answer from the Unaffiliated is “another answer not listed here” followed by “there is no personal, creator God”. Those who claim that most “nothing in

particulars” are really Christians find little support in that only one in five (20%) say that they do believe in salvation through faith in Jesus.

4. Christianity and Other Major World Religions

One of the things that drives our attitude toward and our approach to witnessing to our faith is how we think Christianity relates to other world religions. In part 2 of this series, we looked at some questions that dealt with believing that multiple religions could offer a workable road to an eternity with God. In this part we will look at what people believe distinguishes Christianity from other world religions if in fact anything does.

We asked our respondents the following question: *“How does Christianity relate to other major world religions?”* The respondents selected from the following choices:

1. Serves the same function with only minor differences
2. Focuses on living after the example of Jesus Christ
3. Teaches that reconciliation with God is a gift of God accessed by faith not by works
4. Promotes love for other people more deeply than other religions
5. Differs based on misconceptions about God and/or history
6. Not sure how it relates

Note that answers 1, 5 and 6 indicate an ignorance about the tenets of Christianity and/or the tenets of other major world religions. As noted earlier, Christianity teaches a way to reconciliation that is very different from other world religions and is not compatible with the reconciliation stories of those other religions.

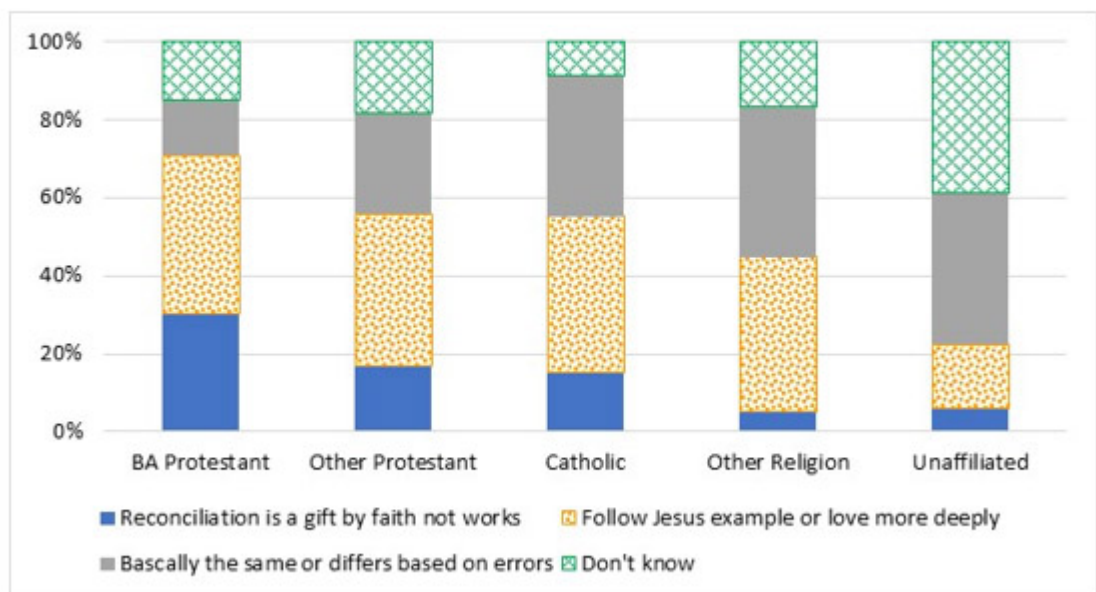
Answers two and four reflect potential differences between Christianity and other world religions. We do want to follow

Christ's example and other world religions would not teach us to do that. Other religions could not promote loving other people more deeply that Christianity does, but some of them might argue that they also promote love for others.

Teaching that reconciliation is a gift of God accessed by faith alone not through works is the greatest substantial difference between Christianity and other world religions. This teaching is significantly different than the teachings of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and others.

The results are charted in the graph to the right. First, notice the interesting result

*Figure 3 How Does Christianity Relate to Other Religions
Ages 18 - 39*



that only about 30% of Born Again Protestants selected 'reconciliation is a gift' while 40% selected following Jesus' example or love others more deeply. As noted above, this second answer is not inconsistent with the concepts of Christianity but is not as fundamental as the first. However, selecting this answer over reconciliation is a gift' is consistent with what we saw earlier: 70% of Born Again Christians are not exclusivists.[\[5\]](#)

Other Protestants and Catholics have less than one in five that selected 'reconciliation is a gift' and the total selecting answers 1 and 2 is slightly over one half. Thus,

almost half of them selected answers showing ignorance of or disbelief in the basic tenets of Christianity.

The results for the Unaffiliated shows their total disregard for salvation by grace and any substantial difference between Christianity and other religions.

5. Summary of Key Results

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God beyond just their faith.

We also discovered that Born Again Christians are not really more likely than other religious groups to share their faith with the purpose to convert. Born Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview are only marginally more likely to share with the purpose to convert at least yearly as Born Again Christians as a whole (63% vs. 57%).

Amazingly, one could project that nominally about 212 million Americans a year would be the recipients of these spiritual conversations with the intent to convert. However, if almost all of these

conversations were with the same person it might represent as few as 34 million Americans which could be primarily the children and relatives of the person sharing their faith. We

cannot know for sure without asking more questions.

Conversely, when asked what makes them refrain from sharing their faith, almost 70% of Born Again Christians selected a reason that indicated they believed that the other person did not really need to know; a universalist belief where all religious beliefs lead to heaven.

About one out of seven (14%) of adults under age 40 who **are not** Born Again Protestants believe that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. This small number is true for Other Protestants, Catholics and Other Religions. This same group of religious affiliates has about 1 in 3 who believe that salvation is a result of good works and is earned or rewarded on a curving scale.

Less than one in three, Born Again Christians selected the redeeming work of God through faith as the key difference between Christianity and other religions. And less than one in five Other Protestants and Catholics selected that answer. Instead, about three out of four (75%) selected love deeply, obey Jesus or Christianity is basically the same as the message of other religions.

Notes

1. Low Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 12 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 1 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual four times.
2. Nominal Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 18 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 2 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual three times.
3. High Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 24 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly

shared on the average 4 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual two times.

4. Although most people selected only one answer, on this question they could select multiple answers

5. Exclusivists are those who believe that their religion is the only source of correct teaching concerning our relationship with God. When I get time, I will check out the relationship between those who are exclusivists and those who selected 'reconciliation is a gift'

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Atheism 2.0? Talking Back to a TED Talk

In 2011, atheist Alain de Botton gave a now-famous TED talk "Atheism 2.0." As part of a seminary class on apologetics, Probe intern T.S. Weaver was assigned to write a response to it, which we are honored to publish. First, here is a video of that TED talk:

Dear Mr. de Botton,

First, I want to say I admire your courage to share these ideas publicly and I do think you are a gifted orator. I am a Christian seminary student and have both many things I agree with and disagree with from your talk. I will try to touch on them in the order you bring them up in your talk.

To start with when you say, "Of course there's no God . . . now let's move on. That's not the end of the story. That's the very very beginning," I can respect that because I agree that a truth claim regarding the existence of God is just the beginning. This truth claim informs our entire worldview and how we live. To me, knowing there is a God (the same conclusion to which avowed atheist [Sir Antony Flew](#) came) gives me meaning, purpose, knowledge of where we came from, where we are going, and how to live. I wonder from your perspective, though, how without a God, any of these key issues in life can be addressed. Without a God, where do we come from? What does life really mean? How do we differentiate between good and evil? What happens when we die?

Going further in your talk, I must say I too love Christmas

carols, looking at churches, and turning the pages of the Old Testament. We have common ground here, so again, we do not disagree on everything.

However, evaluating your view again, I do not see how you can be attracted to the “moralistic side” of religion without the existence of God. You say you are “stealing from religion;” that I agree with as well. I wonder if you have thought, if you are truly an atheist, how can there even be such things as morals? How can you define good? In relation to what? Where does this come from? If there is some moral law, have you thought about where it comes from? Do you think that implies there must be some sort of law giver? In the atheistic worldview what is the moral law and who is the law giver?

You go on to say, “There’s nothing wrong with picking out the best sides of religion.” That sounds nice, but I disagree. You must either adopt it all or nothing, otherwise you do not have a worldview that makes sense. There will be self-contradictions all throughout your view. A perfect example as I touched on above is your idea of “Atheism 2.0.” It is impossible to adopt a moralistic side because without God there are no morals. There is no reason to have a moralistic side. This is a contradiction. Have you considered this?

As your talk goes on, you say some remarkably interesting things I have not heard before, even from an atheist. Your claim the church in the early nineteenth century looked to culture to find morality, guidance, and sources of consolation is new to me. I would like to know how you came to this conclusion. Which denomination? Which church? What was your source of information? It is noticeably clear to me that the practice of the (Christian) church is to find all those things from Scripture and God. In fact, the Bible tells us in several places not to conform to culture. Here is one example from my favorite verse: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) So, your claim is the exact opposite of what I as a

Christian know presently and have learned about church history.

Furthermore, does not this refute how you opened your talk when you said, "We have done secularism bad"? You even say the church replacing Scripture with culture is "beautiful" and "true" and "an idea that we have forgotten." This is the very description of how atheists "have done secularism," is it not? From my understanding, atheism replaces Scripture with culture. Is this true, or am I missing something? If it is true, you have already done the reflection on how it is working and concluded it is "bad." Yet you want to "steal from religion." So, if your claim about church history is true, this is how it falls out: You think secularism has been done bad and want to instead steal morality from religion. And yet, religion (according to you) has gotten morality from culture (i.e., secularism). So, the very thing you would be stealing is what you yourself already called bad and would end up stuck with in the end anyway. Nothing has changed. Do you see how this is incoherent if it were true? Have you thought about this?

I do like your thoughts about the difference between a sermon (wanting to change your life) and a lecture (wanting to give you a bit of information). I also agree we need to get back to "that sermon tradition," and we are in need of morality, guidance, and consolation, because like you said, "We are barely holding it together." And I do mean "we" to cover both the atheist and the Christian alike. This is exactly what Christianity is about. We cannot "hold it together" on our own. That is why we have a Savior, and we live dependently on God, the moral law giver. Now again, you cannot have morality without the moral law giver. Furthermore, if you get guidance from atheists preaching sermons are you not facing the same problem I wrote of in the earlier paragraph? Where is the guidance coming from? Culture? Have you considered this to be the blind leading the blind?

I also agree with your point about the value of repetition. I have so much information coming at me so fast that if I do not revisit it enough, almost none of it sticks. That is another reason I am repeating some of my points.

Now you mentioned one of the things you like about religion is when someone is preaching a rousing part of a sermon, we shout "Amen," "Thank you Lord," "Yes Lord," "Thank you Jesus," etc. Your idea of atheists doing this when fellow atheists are preaching passionate points is both clever and funny. However, as Rebecca McLaughlin (a Christian) pointed out in her book, *Confronting Christianity*, your examples of secular audiences saying, "Thank you Plato, thank you Shakespeare, thank you Jane Austen!" falls flat because of the examples you chose. McLaughlin writes, "One wonders how Shakespeare, whose world was fundamentally shaped by Christianity, would have felt about being cast as an atheist icon. But when it comes to Jane Austen, the answer is clear: a woman of deep, explicit, and abiding faith in Jesus, she would be utterly appalled."

Your point on art is amazingly fascinating. You say if you were a museum curator, you would make a room for love and a room for generosity. While this sounds beautiful, there is a problem. This will sound repetitive (helping us both learn and remember), but it is just like the morality dilemma you have presented earlier. If no God exists, what is love? What is generosity? How do you define it? Where does it come from? Why is it valuable? Why is anything valuable?

To beat the dead horse one more time (apologies) . . . In your closing statements you again you say all these things are "very good." Well, what is good? How do you define it? In relation to what? Where does it come from? How do you know that? As you earlier confessed, you are stealing from religion. These stolen values have no grounding if atheism is true.

I know some of the issues I raised were not necessarily the

purpose of your talk, but in all, I wonder if you have considered how the facts and implications you presented correspond to reality. Do you think all the assertions you made cohere? Do you find your idea of Atheism 2.0 logically consistent and rational? If you could give a follow up talk, could you offer any way to verify your claims empirically? Could you supply answers to the questions of origin, meaning, morality, and destiny?

Sincerely,

A Christian – T.S. Weaver

The Apologetics of Jesus: A Defense of His Deity

Dr. Zukeran shows us that the greatest defense of the deity of Jesus was made by Jesus Himself. Claiming to be God in the flesh, His words and His actions had to be an apologetic for His claim. People could see He was a man; He had to prove to them that He was also deity, God in the flesh.

Jesus was one of the greatest leaders, teachers, and remarkable individuals that ever lived, but few realize that Jesus was also the greatest apologist. Apologetics is the rational defense of Christianity. Christian apologists use reason and evidence to present a convincing case for Christianity, challenge unbelief, expose errors, and defend the message of the gospel. Apologetics was an essential part of Jesus' ministry. If it was important in His ministry, it certainly should be in all ministries looking to impact the unbelieving world for Christ.



The Bible commands us in 1 Peter 3:15, "But set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have." We are commanded to provide a well-reasoned answer for our faith in Christ to an unbelieving world. Jesus commanded us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37). Apologetics involves knowing why you believe and complies with Christ's command of loving God with your mind.

There exists some misunderstanding among Christians as to whether apologetics is necessary. Some believe that our belief in Christ is based on "faith" and thus does not require solid reasons or evidence to support it. Therefore, in witnessing to unbelievers, some mistakenly suppose that apologetics is ineffective in leading anyone to faith. The call of the Christian is to simply present the gospel, and the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures will do the rest. However, this was not the example of Christ.

Christ made extraordinary claims to be the divine Son of God. He made such claims as being the source of life, forgiver of sins, the embodiment of truth, and authority over the Old Testament Law. Such claims were met with skepticism, doubt, and hostility. Jesus knew He was making remarkable claims, and He did not expect people to simply believe His message without good reasons. He was not seeking or wanting people to exercise "blind faith." Jesus understood that we are rational and moral beings, for we are created in the image of God who is a rational and morally perfect being. For this reason, we exercise our rational capacity and investigate the evidence before making decisions.

Christ knew He would have to make a convincing case to uphold His claims and He did. Throughout His ministry, Christ presented compelling reasons and evidence to uphold His claim to be the divine Son of God. Jesus' apologetics included the testimony of witnesses, miracles, the resurrection, prophecy,

reason, the use of parables and more. The apologetic methods of Jesus serve as a model for every believer who desires to engage and impact an unbelieving world for Christ.

The Testimony of Witnesses

A man ill for thirty-eight years lay beside the Pool of Bethesda along with a multitude of crippled individuals. Suddenly an unknown stranger walks up and asks him a strange question. "Do you want to get well?" As the lame man begins to explain his situation, the stranger orders the man to "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!" Immediately, strength enters his legs and he rises and walks, carrying his mat as the stranger orders. Soon afterwards the Pharisees arrive and an examination ensues.

What should have been a moment of rejoicing turns into a serious interrogation. The Jewish leaders in John 5 confront Jesus seeking an opportunity and reason to kill Him. Instead of praising God in the healing of the lame man, the focus of the Jewish leaders is on the apparent violation of their Jewish tradition by Jesus.

Jesus responded saying, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." (Jn. 5:17). The following verse states, "For this reason, the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." (Jn. 5:18). In this chapter Jesus performed some remarkable feats and made some extraordinary claims. When questioned, Jesus gave an answer or an *apologia*, a defense of His work and character. In His answer, we see that He was the greatest apologist and that apologetics was a key component in the ministry of Jesus.

In the passage that follows, Jesus presents one of the clearest and strongest cases regarding His nature as the divine Son of God. New Testament scholar Leon Morris states,

“Nowhere in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship, as we find in this discourse.”[\[1\]](#)

What was the apologetic method Jesus used in this instance? Jesus’ apologetic involved the testimony of witnesses. According to Jewish law, a testimony is valid only if there were at least two witnesses who could testify to the truth of an individual’s claims (Deut. 19:15). Jesus knew these men needed solid testimony to confirm His claims but also testimony that would convict them of their error regarding their understanding of His identity.

Jesus brings forth five witnesses that testify on His behalf; John the Baptist (5:32-35), His works (5:36), the Father (5:37), the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39-40), and Moses (5:41-46). There were no more authoritative witnesses than these. In a brilliant presentation, Jesus makes His case. The testimony of witnesses was part of the apologetics of Jesus.

Apologetics in the Parables

It is a well-known fact that Jesus was a great storyteller. His stories captivated the audience and taught a valuable lesson. The term “good Samaritan” and “the prodigal Son,” are recognized all over the world because of the unforgettable stories told by Jesus. One of the best ways to communicate truth is to illustrate it through stories which are also an effective way to penetrate into hardened hearts that would not be receptive to a direct gospel presentation. The parables of Christ are some of the most remarkable lessons ever taught. However, did you know that the parables of Christ were also powerful apologetic presentations of our Lord?

Through the use of these stories, Jesus makes a declaration and a defense of His ministry and claims. The images He

selects are used in the Old Testament and later Jewish literature in reference to God. Jesus uses these images and applies them often to Himself. Philip Payne states, "Out of the fifty-two recorded narrative parables, twenty depict Him in imagery which in the Old Testament typically referred to God. The frequency with which this occurs indicates that Jesus regularly depicted Himself in images which were particularly appropriate for depicting God."[\[2\]](#)

By applying these images to Himself Jesus indicates his [self-understanding](#) as the divine Son of God and was communicating this truth to His audience. Payne identifies ten prominent images used in the parables in which images used in reference to God in the Old Testament Jesus applies to Himself.[\[3\]](#) Jesus' repeated use of such images indicates He wanted His audience to recognize His divinity and that He was carrying out the very will of God in His ministry on earth.

Here are a few examples where Christ declares His divinity in the gospels. The image of the rock is used to describe God, especially in the Psalms (Ps. 19:14, 28:1, 42:9, 61:2, 62:2, 71:3, 78:35). In the parables of Jesus, He states that those who build their lives upon His teachings have built their lives upon "a rock" (Matt. 7:24-26 and Lk. 6:46-49). In Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34, God is portrayed as a shepherd. In John 10 Jesus identifies Himself as the good shepherd. In another parable, Jesus uses the example of a bridegroom. In Isaiah 49, 54, Jeremiah 2, and Hosea, God is pictured as a bridegroom. In Mk. 2:19, Matt. 9:15, and Lk. 5:34-35, Jesus identifies Himself as the bridegroom. The parables were powerful stories Jesus used to communicate truth but they were also part of the apologetics of Jesus.

The Use of Reason

Jesus commanded us to "Love the Lord your God with all your . . . mind" (Mt. 22:37). Jesus exemplified what it meant to love

God with “all your mind.” He was the greatest thinker who ever set foot upon the earth. Philosopher Dallas Willard states,

We need to understand that Jesus is a thinker, that this is not a dirty word but an essential work, and that his other attributes do not preclude thought, but only insure that he is certainly the greatest thinker of the human race: ‘the most intelligent person who ever lived on earth.’ He constantly uses the power of logical insight to enable people to come to the truth about themselves and about God from the inside of their own heart and mind.[\[4\]](#)

Jesus understood that we are created in the image of God. Our creator is a reasonable and rational being. We are thus endowed with the capacity for reason and rationality. In Isaiah 1:18, God invited Israel saying, “Come now let us reason together.” God wanted the people of Israel to use their ability to reason and consider the consequences of their behavior.

Jesus showed Himself to be a brilliant apologist who used the laws of logic to reveal truth, demolish arguments, and point out error. The communication of truth and discerning error requires the use of reason. Since our faith is a reasonable faith, reason was part of the apologetics of Jesus.

An example of the use of reason is found in Matthew 12:22-28. Here the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the Devil. Through the use of reason, Jesus showed their accusation to be false. The argument He used is the argument known as *reductio ad absurdum* [Latin for “reduction to the absurd”]. This is an argument that demonstrates if the primary premise is supposed to be true, then it leads to a contradiction that is absurd. One would then inevitably have to conclude that the original premise is false.

Jesus responded stating that “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and every city or household divided

against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?" Jesus points to the illogical nature of their accusation and further points to the testimony of His miracles that confirm His authority being from God.

Apologetics of Miracles

Something had gone terribly wrong. The Messiah had arrived but the Kingdom, which would be characterized by liberty, freedom, and the just rule of God, had not arrived. Instead, John the Baptist found himself in prison awaiting execution. Confused and discouraged, John sent his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Lk. 7:20). Jesus responds by pointing to the testimony of His miracles: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (Lk. 7:22-23). When asked by John if He was indeed the Messiah, Jesus defends His claim by pointing to the testimony of His miracles. Miracles represent another component in the apologetics of Jesus.

A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the normal course of events. Natural laws describe what occurs regularly by natural causes, but miracles describe what happens rarely, by supernatural causes. A miracle is an act of God designed to confirm the word of God through a messenger of God.[\[5\]](#)

Throughout the Old Testament, God used miracles to confirm His message and His messenger. Christ's miracles demonstrated that what He claimed about Himself was true and that God's confirming hand was on the message He preached. Jesus performed a vast array of miraculous signs that demonstrated His divine authority over every realm of creation.

When friendly as well as hostile audiences questioned Jesus, He defended His claims with the testimony of miracles (Mk. 2:1-12, Jn. 2, and 10:22-42). Many who witnessed Christ's miracles made the connection. Nathaniel, witnessing the omniscience of Christ, responded exclaiming, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." (Jn. 1:49). Nicodemus in his evening visit meets Jesus saying, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." (Jn. 3:2).

When Christ establishes His kingdom, all creation will be subject to Him. Sin, sickness, death, and disease will be overcome and the subjects of the kingdom will never be in want. The miracles of Christ reflect His divine character and demonstrate the King of the Kingdom has arrived.

Apologetics was an essential component of Christ's ministry and should be an important part of any ministry looking to engage this lost world for Christ. The Bible commands us to defend our faith, and Christ set the supreme example for us to follow.

To learn more about the apologetics of Jesus and gain valuable practical lessons from His examples, check out the online store at Probe.org and [purchase a copy](#) of the in depth book, *The Apologetics of Jesus* written by Norman Geisler and myself.

Notes

1. Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 311.
2. Philip Payne, "Interpreting Jesus' Parables," (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1980), 263.
3. Ibid., 313-17.
4. Dallas Willard, "Jesus the Logician," *Christian Scholars Review* (Summer 1999): 610.

5. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 201-2.

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God Questions From Little Kids

Recently I asked some of the mamas of littles in our church, "What God questions are your kids asking?" While not definitive, here are some answers I trust you'll find helpful.

Who made God?

God has always existed. No one made God. Everything that has been made, has been made by someone or something else. Eventually, when we go back far enough, there has to be a Someone or a Something that is eternal—that was not created. Smart thinkers called philosophers call this an "uncaused cause."

How do we know this? Because there are some things we can't figure out on our own, so God tells us in His word. Especially where Jesus is talking to His Father:

"So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:5, 24).

How do we know the Bible is true?

The biggest way we can know is fulfilled prophecy. (Prophecies

are a special kind of promise.) That means that God gave prophets information about the future that only He could know because He knows everything, and then the prophecies came true in even the smallest detail. This means that the Bible is a supernatural book because it is from God, who had human helpers to write down what He wanted written down.

We also have evidence supporting our belief that the Bible is a supernatural book:

Unity: The Bible's books were written over 1500 years, by 40 different authors, on three different continents. But there is one consistent, big message from beginning to end: God loves us and has a big plan and purpose for His creation.

Bibliographical Evidence: The reason we have a Bible at all is that the original texts were copied many times over. There are 25,000+ handwritten copies of New Testament documents, with many variations. These variations allow us to see where errors and changes (such as spelling which does not change the meaning of a word) crept into the copying. There are no variations that question essential Christian beliefs.

Concerning the Old Testament: the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1949 and 1956—thousands of fragments from every book of the Old Testament except Esther, including a complete copy of Isaiah. These fragments had been stored since 300-100 B.C. The book of Isaiah had not been changed in that entire time except for a few spelling changes. The scribes were exceedingly careful in copying God's word.

Archeological Evidence: Archeology, which is the study of old buried stuff, also supports details in the Bible. Not everything in the Bible has archeological support, but no archaeological findings have ever contradicted biblical details.

The evidence for both the Old and New Testaments shows that what we hold in our hands today is the same as what was

written by the original authors.

How can Jesus be God but also God's Son? (In other words, how does this Trinity thing work?)

First of all, it's a hard idea that nobody fully understands because our minds are just too puny and small. It's okay not to get it. This truth is called a mystery, and nobody will understand it until heaven.

Here are three very important truths about God:

1. There is one God.
2. God is three distinct Persons.
3. Each Person is fully God.

The three equal Persons are the Father; the Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. But all three Persons are still one God. Yes, it's confusing! Here's a hint: often when people refer to God they mean the Father. For example, when considering the question, "How can Jesus be God but also God's Son," we can say that Jesus is divine, meaning He is God, but He is the Father's Son. He's not the same as the Father.

So when we're talking about God it is helpful to refer to either the Father, and Son or the Spirit.

We can see all three Persons of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus. (Matthew 3:13-17)

Why can't we see God?

We can't see God the Father because He is spirit. That's like invisible energy, like sunlight. Or wind. And the Holy Spirit is, well, spirit. Jesus became a human being just like us when He left heaven to live on earth, but we can't see Him because He's back in heaven now. God is still on earth because God is everywhere, but He's invisible.

I know you'd like to see God, and you know what? So would I! Jesus knew we'd feel that way, which is why He said, "Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me." (John 20:29) But if you trust in Jesus, one day you will see Him very plainly in heaven.

Where is heaven?

Heaven is a spirit place. It's not like our house or our church or the park where we go, that you can find on a map or by walking there. I *can* tell you that when Jesus left the earth and went back to heaven, He went UP, and the Bible talks about Him coming back DOWN to earth. But it's not in the sky like the moon. When astronauts went up into space they didn't find heaven because heaven's not a place we can touch or see.

Why can't I hear God's voice? When I say, "Hello, God," why doesn't He talk back?

God doesn't speak to us the same way people do. That's because He is spirit. But Jesus taught us, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27) So hearing His voice is different from hearing Mommy or Daddy's voice. You hear His voice with your heart. (Matthew 13)

We recognize God's voice from reading and hearing His word in the Bible. Everything God says lines up with what He tells us in His word, so we can learn to tell the difference between His true voice and our imagination. We have to practice listening. It's not easy, and we have to know what He says in His word in order to know what His voice sounds like.

If everything God makes is good, why did He make Satan?

Satan did not start out as an evil creature. God made him a beautiful, powerful, good angel. The good angel decided to become a bad angel by trying to become like God instead of being content with how God made him as a good angel.

Some people have asked why God made angels and people who could choose to disobey. That's because God wanted angels to CHOOSE to obey Him, and He wanted people to CHOOSE to love Him. Without the ability to choose, it wouldn't be real obedience or real love.

How will I know how to get to heaven when I die?

Getting to heaven from earth is like stepping from one room into a hallway or another room. Very simple, right? And you will probably have angels with you as well. Jesus will make sure to bring you to Himself, so you don't need to worry about it.

Before I was in your tummy was I in heaven with God?

No, you didn't exist before you were in my tummy. God knew you in His mind and in His heart, but He didn't create you until just the right time to form you inside my body. The only person who was in heaven with God the Father before He became a tiny baby was Jesus.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/god-questions-from-little-kids/
on October 15, 2019.

The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Real Historical Event

Dr. Pat Zukeran presents strong evidence discounting the most common theories given against a historical resurrection. The

biblical account and other evidence clearly discount these attempts to cast doubt on the resurrection. Any strong apologetic argument is anchored on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical event.

Introduction

The most significant event in history is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the strongest evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. This event gives men and women the sure hope of eternal life a hope that not only gives us joy as we look to the future but also provides us with powerful reasons to live today.

Throughout the centuries, however, there have been scholars who have attempted to deny the account of the Resurrection. Our schools are filled with history books which give alternative explanations for the Resurrection or in some cases, fail even to mention this unique event.

In this essay we will take a look at the evidence for the Resurrection and see if this event is historical fact or fiction. But, first, we must establish the fact that Jesus Christ was a historical figure and not a legend. There are several highly accurate historical documents that attest to Jesus. First, let's look at the four Gospels themselves. The authors Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John recorded very specific facts of the events surrounding the life of Jesus, and archaeology has verified the accuracy of the New Testament. Hundreds of facts such as the names of officials, geographical sites, financial currencies, and times of events have been confirmed. Sir William Ramsay, one of the greatest geographers of the 19th century, became firmly convinced of the accuracy of the New Testament as a result of the overwhelming evidence he discovered during his research. As a result, he completely reversed his antagonism against Christianity.

The textual evidence decisively shows that the Gospels were

written and circulated during the lifetime of those who witnessed the events. Since there are so many specific names and places mentioned, eyewitnesses could have easily discredited the writings. The New Testament would have never survived had the facts been inaccurate. These facts indicate that the Gospels are historically reliable and show Jesus to be a historical figure. For more information on the accuracy of the Bible, see the essay from Probe entitled [Authority of the Bible](#).

Another document that supports the historicity of Jesus is the work of Josephus, a potentially hostile Jewish historian. He recorded Antiquities, a history of the Jews, for the Romans during the lifetime of Jesus. He wrote, "Now there was about that time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man." (1) Josephus goes on to relate other specific details about Jesus' life and death that correspond with the New Testament. Roman historians such as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger also refer to Jesus as a historically real individual.

Skeptics often challenge Christians to prove the Resurrection scientifically. We must understand, the scientific method is based on showing that something is fact by repeated observations of the object or event. Therefore, the method is limited to repeatable events or observable objects. Historical events cannot be repeated. For example, can we repeatedly observe the creation of our solar system? The obvious answer is no, but that does not mean the creation of the solar system did not happen.

In proving a historical event like the Resurrection, we must look at the historical evidence. Thus far in our discussion we have shown that belief in the historical Jesus of the New Testament is certainly reasonable and that the scientific method cannot be applied to proving a historical event. For the remainder of this essay, we will examine the historical facts concerning the Resurrection and see what the evidence

reveals.

Examining the Evidence

Three facts must be reckoned with when investigating the Resurrection: the empty tomb, the transformation of the Apostles, and the preaching of the Resurrection originating in Jerusalem.

Let us first examine the case of the empty tomb. Jesus was a well-known figure in Israel. His burial site was known by many people. In fact Matthew records the exact location of Jesus' tomb. He states, "And Joseph of Arimathea took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb" (Matt. 27:59). Mark asserts that Joseph was "a prominent member of the Council" (Mark 15:43).

It would have been destructive for the writers to invent a man of such prominence, name him specifically, and designate the tomb site, since eyewitnesses would have easily discredited the author's fallacious claims.

Jewish and Roman sources both testify to an empty tomb. Matthew 28:12-13 specifically states that the chief priests invented the story that the disciples stole the body. There would be no need for this fabrication if the tomb had not been empty. Opponents of the Resurrection must account for this. If the tomb had not been empty, the preaching of the Apostles would not have lasted one day. All the Jewish authorities needed to do to put an end to Christianity was to produce the body of Jesus.

Along with the empty tomb is the fact that the corpse of Jesus was never found. Not one historical record from the first or second century is written attacking the factuality of the empty tomb or claiming discovery of the corpse. Tom Anderson, former president of the California Trial Lawyers Association states,

Let's assume that the written accounts of His appearances to hundreds of people are false. I want to pose a question. With an event so well publicized, don't you think that it's reasonable that one historian, one eye witness, one antagonist would record for all time that he had seen Christ's body? . . . The silence of history is deafening when it comes to the testimony against the resurrection.(2)

Second, we have the changed lives of the Apostles. It is recorded in the Gospels that while Jesus was on trial, the Apostles deserted Him in fear. Yet 10 out of the 11 Apostles died as martyrs believing Christ rose from the dead. What accounts for their transformation into men willing to die for their message? It must have been a very compelling event to account for this.

Third, the Apostles began preaching the Resurrection in Jerusalem. This is significant since this is the very city in which Jesus was crucified. This was the most hostile city in which to preach. Furthermore, all the evidence was there for everyone to investigate. Legends take root in foreign lands or centuries after the event. Discrediting such legends is difficult since the facts are hard to verify. However, in this case the preaching occurs in the city of the event immediately after it occurred. Every possible fact could have been investigated thoroughly.

Anyone studying the Resurrection must somehow explain these three facts.

Five Common Explanations

Over the years five explanations have been used to argue against the Resurrection. We will examine these explanations to see whether they are valid.

The Wrong Tomb Theory

Proponents of this first argument state that according to the

Gospel accounts, the women visited the grave early in the morning while it was dark. Due to their emotional condition and the darkness, they visited the wrong tomb. Overjoyed to see that it was empty, they rushed back to tell the disciples Jesus had risen. The disciples in turn ran into Jerusalem to proclaim the Resurrection.

There are several major flaws with this explanation. First, it is extremely doubtful that the Apostles would not have corrected the women's error. The Gospel of John gives a very detailed account of them doing just that. Second, the tomb site was known not only by the followers of Christ but also by their opponents. The Gospels make it clear the body was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council. If the body still remained in the tomb while the Apostles began preaching, the authorities simply would have to go to the right tomb, produce the body, and march it down the streets. This would have ended the Christian faith once and for all. Remember, the preaching of the Resurrection began in Jerusalem, fifteen minutes away from the crucifixion site and the tomb. These factors make this theory extremely weak.

The Hallucination Theory

This second theory holds that the Resurrection of Christ just occurred in the minds' of the disciples. Dr. William McNeil articulates this position in his book, *A World History*. He writes,

The Roman authorities in Jerusalem arrested and crucified Jesus. . . . But soon afterwards the dispirited Apostles gathered in an upstairs room' and suddenly felt again the heartwarming presence of their master. This seemed absolutely convincing evidence that Jesus' death on the cross had not been the end but the beginning. . . . The Apostles bubbled over with excitement and tried to explain to all who would listen all that had happened.(3)

This position is unrealistic for several reasons. In order for hallucinations of this type to occur, psychiatrists agree that several conditions must exist. However, this situation was not conducive for hallucinations. Here are several reasons. Hallucinations generally occur to people who are imaginative and of a nervous make up. However, the appearances of Jesus occurred to a variety of people. Hallucinations are subjective and individual. No two people have the same experience. In this case, over five hundred people (Corinthians 15) have the same account. Hallucinations occur only at particular times and places and are associated with the events. The Resurrection appearances occur in many different environments and at different times. Finally, hallucinations of this nature occur to those who intensely want to believe. However, several such as Thomas and James, the half brother of Jesus were hostile to the news of the Resurrection.

If some continue to argue for this position, they still must account for the empty tomb. If the Apostles dreamed up the Resurrection at their preaching, all the authorities needed to do was produce the body and that would have ended the Apostles' dream. These facts make these two theories extremely unlikely.

The Swoon Theory

A third theory espouses that Jesus never died on the cross but merely passed out and was mistakenly considered dead. After three days He revived, exited the tomb, and appeared to His disciples who believed He had risen from the dead. This theory was developed in the early nineteenth century, but today it has been completely given up for several reasons.

First, it is a physical impossibility that Jesus could have survived the tortures of the crucifixion. Second, the soldiers who crucified Jesus were experts in executing this type of death penalty. Furthermore, they took several precautions to make sure He was actually dead. They thrust a spear in His

side. When blood and water come out separately, this indicates the blood cells had begun to separate from the plasma which will only happen when the blood stops circulating. Upon deciding to break the legs of the criminals (in order to speed up the process of dying), they carefully examined the body of Jesus and found that He was already dead.

After being taken down from the cross, Jesus was covered with eighty pounds of spices and embalmed. It is unreasonable to believe that after three days with no food or water, Jesus would revive. Even harder to believe is that Jesus could roll a two-ton stone up an incline, overpower the guards, and then walk several miles to Emmaus. Even if Jesus had done this, His appearing to the disciples half-dead and desperately in need of medical attention would not have prompted their worship of Him as God.

In the 19th century, David F. Strauss, an opponent of Christianity, put an end to any hope in this theory. Although he did not believe in the Resurrection, he concluded this to be a very outlandish theory. He stated,

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of life, an impression that would lay at the bottom of their future ministry.(4)

The Stolen Body Theory

This fourth argument holds that Jewish and Roman authorities stole the body or moved it for safekeeping. It is inconceivable to think this a possibility. If they had the body, why did they need to accuse the disciples of stealing it? (Matt. 28:11-15). In Acts 4, the Jewish authorities were

angered and did everything they could to prevent the spread of Christianity. Why would the disciples deceive their own people into believing in a false Messiah when they knew that this deception would mean the deaths of hundreds of their believing friends? If they really knew where the body was, they could have exposed it and ended the faith that caused them so much trouble and embarrassment. Throughout the preaching of the Apostles, the authorities never attempted to refute the Resurrection by producing a body. This theory has little merit.

The Soldiers Fell Asleep Theory

Thus far we have been studying the evidence for the Resurrection. We examined four theories used in attempts to invalidate this miracle. Careful analysis revealed the theories were inadequate to refute the Resurrection. The fifth and most popular theory has existed since the day of the Resurrection and is still believed by many opponents of Christianity. Matthew 28:12-13 articulates this position.

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money telling them, "You are to say, his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep."

Many have wondered why Matthew records this and then does not refute it. Perhaps it is because this explanation was so preposterous, he did not see the need to do so.

This explanation remains an impossibility for several reasons. First, if the soldiers were sleeping, how did they know it was the disciples who stole the body? Second, it seems physically impossible for the disciples to sneak past the soldiers and then move a two-ton stone up an incline in absolute silence. Certainly the guards would have heard something.

Third, the tomb was secured with a Roman seal. Anyone who moved the stone would break the seal, an offense punishable by

death. The depression and cowardice of the disciples makes it difficult to believe that they would suddenly become so brave as to face a detachment of soldiers, steal the body, and then lie about the Resurrection when they would ultimately face a life of suffering and death for their contrived message.

Fourth, Roman guards were not likely to fall asleep with such an important duty. There were penalties for doing so. The disciples would have needed to overpower them. A very unlikely scenario.

Finally, in the Gospel of John the grave clothes were found "lying there as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself separate from the linen" (20:6-7). There was not enough time for the disciples to sneak past the guards, roll away the stone, unwrap the body, rewrap it in their wrappings, and fold the head piece neatly next to the linen. In a robbery, the men would have flung the garments down in disorder and fled in fear of detection.

Conclusion: Monumental Implications

These five theories inadequately account for the empty tomb, the transformation of the Apostles, and the birth of Christianity in the city of the crucifixion. The conclusion we must seriously consider is that Jesus rose from the grave. The implications of this are monumental.

First, if Jesus rose from the dead, then what He said about Himself is true. He stated, "I am the Resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25). He also stated, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes to the father, but through me" (John 14:6). Eternal life is found through Jesus Christ alone. Any religious belief that contradicts this must be false. Every religious leader has been buried in a grave. Their tombs have become places of worship. The location of Jesus' tomb is

unknown because it was empty; his body is not there. There was no need to enshrine an empty tomb.

Second, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:54, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." Physical death is not the end; eternal life with our Lord awaits all who trust in Him because Jesus has conquered death.

Notes

1. Josephus, *Antiquities* xviii. 33. (Early second Century).
2. Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernadino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 66.
3. William McNeil, *A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 163.
4. David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus for the People* , vol. 1, 2nd edition (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), p. 412.

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Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian Perspective

Rusty Wright presents a compelling case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Looking at four outcomes of the resurrection, he presents a brief case supporting a Christian worldview understanding that Jesus actually died and was resurrected from the tomb.

At Easter, some might wonder what all the fuss is about. Who cares? What difference does it make if Jesus rose from the dead?

It makes all the difference in the world. If Christ did not rise, then thousands of believers have died as martyrs for a hoax.

If he did rise, then he is still alive and can offer peace to

troubled, hurting lives.

Countless scholars—among them the apostle Paul, Augustine, Sir Isaac Newton and C.S. Lewis—believed in the resurrection. We need not fear committing intellectual suicide by believing it also. Where do the facts lead?

Paul, a first-century skeptic-turned believer, wrote that “Christ died for our sins...he was buried...he was raised on the third day...he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve (Disciples). After that, he appeared to more than five hundred...at the same time, most of whom are still living.” Consider four pieces of evidence:

1. The explosive growth of the Christian movement. Within a few weeks after Jesus was crucified, a movement arose which, by the later admission of its enemies, “upset the world.” What happened to ignite this movement shortly after its leader had been executed?

2. The Disciples’ changed lives. After Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, most of the Disciples fled in fear. Peter denied three times that he was a follower of Jesus. (The women were braver and stayed to the end.) Yet ten out of the eleven Disciples (Judas committed suicide) were martyred for their faith. According to traditions, Peter was crucified upside down; Thomas was skewered; John was boiled in oil but survived. What turned these cowards into heroes? Each believed he had seen Jesus alive again.

3. The empty tomb. Jesus’ corpse was removed from the cross, wrapped like a mummy and placed in a solid-rock tomb. A one-and-a-half to two-ton stone was rolled into a slightly depressed groove to seal the tomb’s entrance.

A “Green Beret”-like unit of Roman soldiers guarded the grave. Sunday morning, the stone was found rolled away, the body was gone but the graveclothes were still in place. What happened?

Did Christ's friends steal the body? Perhaps one of the women sweet-talked (karate-chopped?) the guards while the others moved the stone and tiptoed off with the body. Or maybe Peter (remember his bravery) or Thomas (Doubting Thomas) overpowered the guards, stole the body, then fabricated—and died for—a resurrection myth.

These theories hardly seem plausible. The guard was too powerful, the stone too heavy and the disciples too spineless to attempt such a feat.

Did Christ's enemies steal the body? If Romans or Jewish religious leaders had the body, surely they would have exposed it publicly and Christianity would have died out. They didn't, and it didn't.

The "Swoon Theory" supposes that Jesus didn't really die but was only unconscious. The expert Roman executioners merely thought he was dead. After a few days in the tomb without food or medicine, the cool air revived him.

He burst from the 100 pounds of graveclothes, rolled away the stone with his nail-pierced hands, scared the daylights out of the Roman soldiers, walked miles on wounded feet and convinced his Disciples he'd been raised from the dead. This one is harder to believe than the resurrection itself.

4. The appearances of the risen Christ. For 40 days after his death, many different people said they saw Jesus alive. Witnesses included a woman, a shrewd tax collector, several fishermen and over 500 people at once. These claims provide further eyewitness testimony for the resurrection.

As a skeptic, I realized that attempts to explain away the evidences run into a brick wall of facts that point to one conclusion: Christ is risen.

The above does not constitute an exhaustive proof, rather a reasoned examination of the evidence. Each interested person

should evaluate the evidence and decide if it makes sense. Of course, the truth or falsity of the resurrection is a matter of historical fact and is not dependent on anyone's belief. If the facts support the claim, one can conclude that he arose. In any case, mere intellectual assent to the facts does little for one's life.

A major evidence comes experientially, in personally receiving Jesus' free gift of forgiveness. He said, "I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him (or her)."

Worth considering?

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