

Apologetics and Evangelism

Probe's founder Jimmy Williams, a master in classical apologetics, explores the use of apologetics in sharing the gospel.

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Today as never before, Christians are being called upon to give reasons for the hope that is within them. Often in the evangelistic context seekers raise questions about the validity of the gospel message. Removing intellectual objections will not make one a Christian; a change of heart wrought by the Spirit is also necessary. But though intellectual activity is insufficient to bring another to Christ, it does not follow that it is also unnecessary. In this essay we will examine the place and purpose of apologetics in the sharing of our faith with others.

The word “apologetics” never actually appears in the Bible. But there is a verse which contains its meaning:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give *an answer* to every man who asketh you the reason for the hope that is within you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

The Greek word *apologia* means “answer,” or “reasonable defense.” It does not mean to apologize, nor does it mean just to engage in intellectual dialogue. It means to provide reasonable answers to honest questions and to do it with humility, respect, and reverence.

The verse thus suggests that the *manner* in which one does apologetics is as important as the words expressed. And Peter tells us in this passage that Christians are to be ready *always* with answers for those who inquire of us concerning our faith. Most Christians have a great deal of study ahead of

them before this verse will be a practical reality in their evangelistic efforts.

Another question that often comes up in a discussion about the merits and place of apologetics is, "What is the relationship of the mind to evangelism?" "Does the mind play any part in the process?" "What about the effects of the fall?" "Isn't man dead in trespasses and sins?" "Doesn't the Bible say we are to know nothing among men except Jesus Christ and Him crucified?" "Why do we have to get involved at all in apologetics if the Spirit is the One Who actually brings about the New Birth?"

I think you will agree that today there are many Christians who are firmly convinced that answering the intellectual questions of unbelievers is an ineffectual waste of time. They feel that any involvement of the mind in the gospel interchange smacks too much of human effort and really just dilutes the Spirit's work.

But Christianity thrives on intelligence, not ignorance. If a real Reformation is to accompany the revival for which many of us pray, it must be something of the mind as well as the heart. It was Jesus who said, "Come and see." He invites our scrutiny and investigation both before and after conversion.

We are to love God with the *mind* as well as the heart and the soul. In fact, the early church was powerful and successful because it out-thought and out-loved the ancient world. We are not doing either very well today.

Reasoning and Persuading

Most Christians today seem to prefer experiencing Christianity to thinking about or explaining it. But consider these verses:

Matthew 13:23: "But he who received the seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and *understands* it, who indeed bears fruit." They all heard it, but only the "good soil" *comprehended* it.

Acts 8:30: "When the Spirit prompted Philip to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch (who was reading Isaiah 53), he asked, 'Do you *understand* what you are reading?' The eunuch replied, 'How can I except some man should *guide* me?'"

Acts 18:4: Paul at Corinth was "reasoning in the synagogue every sabbath and trying to *persuade* the Jews and Greeks."

Acts 19:8: Paul at Ephesus "entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, *reasoning* and *persuading* them about the kingdom of God."

Romans 10:17: "So then faith comes by *hearing* and *hearing* by the word of God." Again the emphasis is on hearing with perception.

2 Corinthians 5:11: "We *persuade* men," says Paul. Vine's *Expository Dictionary* describes this Greek word like this: "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations."

All of these words—persuasion, dialogue, discourse, dispute, argue, present evidence, reason with—are vehicles of communication and are at the heart of Paul's classical evangelistic model. Can there be saving faith without understanding? Can there be understanding without reasoning? The Bible would appear to say no. Paul urges believers in 2 Timothy 2:15 to study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed.

J. Gresham Machen, a great Christian scholar, said the following words in 1912 to a group of young men at Princeton Seminary:

It would be a great mistake to suppose that all men are equally well-prepared to receive the gospel. It is true that the decisive thing is the regenerative power in connection with certain prior conditions for the reception of the

Gospel. . . . I do not mean that the removal of intellectual objections will make a man a Christian. No conversion was ever wrought by argument. A change of heart is also necessary . . . but because the intellectual labor is insufficient, it does not follow that it is unnecessary. God may, it is true, overcome all intellectual obstacles by an immediate exercise of His regenerative power. Sometimes He does. But He does so very seldom. Usually He exerts His power in connections with certain conditions of the human mind. Usually He does not bring into the kingdom, entirely without preparation, those whose mind and fancy are completely contaminated by ideas which make the acceptance of the Gospel logically impossible.

If these words were true in 1912, how much more are they needed today?

Individual Responses

People respond to the gospel for various reasons—some out of pain or a crisis, others out of some emotional need such as loneliness, guilt, insecurity, etc. Some do so out of a fear of divine judgment. And coming to know Christ brings a process of healing and hope to the human experience. To know Christ is to find comfort for pain, acceptance for insecurity and low self-esteem, forgiveness for sin and guilt.

And others seem to have *intellectual* questions which block their openness to accept the credibility of the Christian message. These finally find in Christ the answers to their intellectual doubts and questions.

Those today who are actively involved in evangelism readily recognize the need for this kind of information to witness to certain people, and there are many more doubters and skeptics out there today than there were even twenty years ago.

We can see more clearly where we are as a culture by taking a

good look at Paul's world in the first century. Christianity's early beginnings flourished in a Graeco-Roman culture more X-rated and brutal than our own. And we find Paul *adapting* his approach from group to group.

For instance, he expected certain things to be in place when he approached the Jewish communities and synagogues from town to town. He knew he would find a group which already had certain beliefs which were not in contradiction to the gospel he preached. They were monotheists. They believed in one God. They also believed this God had spoken to them in their Scriptures and had given them absolute moral guidelines for behavior (the Ten Commandments).

But when Paul went to the Gentile community, he had no such expectations. There he knew he would be faced with a culture that was polytheistic (many gods), biblically ignorant, and living all kinds of perverted, wicked lifestyles. And on Mars Hill in Athens when he preached the gospel, he did somewhat modify his approach.

He spoke of God more in terms of His presence and power, and he even quoted truth from a Greek poet in order to connect with these "pagans" and get his point across: "We are God's offspring" (Acts 17:28).

One hundred years ago, the vast majority of Americans pretty much reflected the Jewish mentality, believing in God, having a basic respect for the Bible, and strong convictions about what was right and what was wrong.

That kind of American can still be found today in the 90s, but George Gallup says they aren't having much of an impact on the pagan, or Gentile community, which today holds few beliefs compatible with historic Christianity.

To evangelize such people, we have our work cut out for us. And we will have to use both our minds and our hearts to "become all things to all men in order to save some."

A Variety of Approaches

As we're considering how we as Christians can have an impact on our increasingly fragmented society, we need to keep in mind that many do not share our Christian view of the world, and some are openly hostile to it.

In fact, a college professor recently commented that he felt the greatest impediment to social progress right now was what he called the bigoted, dogmatic Christian community. That's you and me, folks.

If we could just "loosen up a little," and compromise on some issues, America would be a happier place. What is meant by this is not just a demand for tolerance . . . but wholesale acceptance of *any* person's lifestyle and personal choices!

But the Bible calls us to be "salt and light" in our world. How can we be that effectively? I don't have a total answer, but I'll tell you after 30+ years of active ministry what isn't working. And by my observation, far too many Christians are trying to address the horrendous issues of our day with one of three very ineffective approaches.

Defensive Approach – Many Christians out there are mainly asking the question, "How strong are our defenses?" "How high are our walls?" This barricade mentality has produced much of the Christian subculture. We have our own language, literature, heroes, music, customs, and educational systems. Of course, we need places of support and fellowship. But when Paul describes spiritual warfare in 2 Corinthians 10, he actually *reverses* the picture. It is the *enemy* who is behind walls, inside strongholds of error and evil. And Paul depicts the Christians as those who should be mounting offensives at these walls to tear down the high things which have exalted themselves above the knowledge of God. We are to be *taking* ground, not just holding it.

Defeatist Approach – Other Christians have already given up. Things are so bad, they say, that my puny efforts won't change anything. "After all, we are living in the last days, and Jesus said that things would just get worse and worse." This may be true, but it may not be. Jesus said no man knows the day or the hour of His coming. Martin Luther had the right idea when he said, "If Jesus were to come tomorrow, I'd plant a tree today and pay my debts." The Lord may well be near, He could also tarry awhile. Since we don't know for sure, we should be seeking to prepare ourselves and our children to live for Him in the microchip world of the 21st century.

Devotional Approach – Other Christians are trying to say something about their faith, but sadly, they can only share their personal religious experience. It is true that Paul speaks of us as "epistles known and read" by all men. Our life/experience with Christ is a valid witness. But there are others out there in the culture with "changed" lives . . . and Jesus didn't do the changing! Evangelism today must be something more than "swapping" experiences. We must learn how to ground our faith in the facts of history and the claims of Christ. We must have others grapple with Jesus Christ, not just our experience.

Apologetics and Evangelism

I want to conclude this essay with some very important principles to keep in mind if we want to be effective in seeing others come to know Christ through our individual witness.

1. Go to people. The heart of evangelism is Christians taking the initiative to actually go out and "fish for men." Acts 17:17 describes for us how Paul was effective in his day and time: "Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the gentile worshippers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there."

2. Communicate with people. Engage them. Sharing the Gospel involves communication. People must be focused upon and then understand the Gospel to respond to it. It is our responsibility as Christians to make it as clear as possible for all who will listen. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

3. Relate to people. Effective witness involves not only the transmission of biblical information; it also includes establishing a relationship with the other person. Hearts, as well as heads, must meet. "So, affectionately longing for you," said Paul to the Thessalonians, "we were well pleased to import to you not only the good news of God, but also our own lives, because you have become dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8).

4. Remove barriers. Part of our responsibility involves having the skills to eliminate obstacles, real or imagined, which keep an individual from taking the Christian message seriously. When God sent the prophet Jeremiah forth, He said, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth . . . and I have ordained you to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Sometimes our task as well is one of "spiritual demolition," of removing the false so the seeds of truth can take root. Apologetics sometimes serves in that capacity, of preparing a highway for God in someone's life.

5. Explain the gospel to others. We need an *army* of Christians today who can consistently and clearly present the message to as many people as possible. Luke says of Lydia, "The Lord opened her heart so that she heeded the things which were spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Four essential elements in sharing the gospel:

- someone talking (Paul)
- things spoken (gospel)
- someone listening (Lydia)
- the Lord opening the heart.

6. Invite others to receive Christ. We can be clear of presentation, but ineffective because we fail to give someone the opportunity and encouragement to take that first major step of faith. “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we beg you in Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

7. Make every effort by every means to establish them in the faith. Stay with them, ground them in the Scripture, help them gain assurance of their salvation, and get them active in a vital fellowship/church.

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Why Isn't the Evidence Clearer? – The Truth of the Scriptures

Written by Lou Whitworth

[Note: “Why Isn't the Evidence Clearer?” is the name of a chapter in the Probe book, *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, an excellent collection of articles on Christian evidential apologetics. The chapter (pp. 305-17) was written by John A. Bloom (Ph.D. in physics, Cornell University, Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Dropsie College, and now Associate Professor of Physics at Biola College). This essay is an edited and condensed version of the chapter as found in the book. For the documentation of this material, please see the original. The book was edited/compiled by Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, who holds eight earned degrees in philosophy, law, and theology.]

Sometimes unbelievers complain, "If God really exists, why isn't the evidence more plain and simple?" "Is God tricking us by making us hunt and search for answers?" They say, "Why isn't the evidence for the God of the Bible clearer?" That is, why isn't the evidence for the truth of the Scriptures so obvious and undeniable that virtually everyone would acknowledge it, repent, and accept Christ as personal savior?

In his book, *Contact*, Carl Sagan satirically asks why God doesn't place a glowing cross in the sky at night to serve as irrefutable proof of Jesus' resurrection? One could extend this line of thought further and ask why God doesn't have His own television channel and toll-free "hotline"?

Despite Sagan's ridicule, he has a legitimate point. Why must we read a two-thousand-year-old book and study ancient history for proof of the existence of God? Why isn't the evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible made obvious to everyone, no matter how rebellious or blinded by sin? What we are really asking is, "Are there any reasons for the evidence to appear obscure other than the possibility that the God of the Bible doesn't exist?" This question should be addressed seriously, and, as we do so in this brief discussion, I think we will find that the answer is more profound than many realize.

There are two reasonable demands for any set of evidence. First, the evidence should be clear enough to be intellectually sound at the same level of certainty one uses in making other important decisions. Second, the evidence must be clear enough to select one set of claims over another (that is, clear enough to select Christianity over other religions).

Some are tempted to apply the rule that "the more critical the decision, the clearer the evidence must be." They demand that the evidence for Christianity must be extraordinarily and especially clear to win their allegiance. The problem with this standard is that it assumes that there are no

consequences to the decision. If, however, there are cataclysmic consequences to the observer, he will have to settle for “sufficient evidence, or the most trustworthy evidence.”

The more appropriate rule is: “The more severe the consequences, the less we should take risks.” Therefore, even if biblical Christianity has a less than one-in-ten-million chance of being true, we should accept it because the possibility of an eternal Hell is such a great torment. If the available evidence shows that biblical Christianity is “the most trustworthy” of all religions, then we are on even firmer ground.

For the balance of this article, we’ll be looking at this issue of the clarity of the evidence from several perspectives. We’ll consider the scientific and historical perspectives on this question; we’ll attempt to look at it from God’s point of view and from our own human vantage point. Finally, we’ll summarize the results of our analysis in light of God’s grace and our human accountability.

The Scientific Perspective

The chief task of the scientist is to comb through “raw” data and attempt to extract useful information from which he constructs a hypothesis. He then tests the hypothesis against the original data and against new data from experimentation. Often the data are inconclusive or ambiguous preventing a rigorous conclusion. However, abandoning the research and pronouncing that no one can ever discover the answer is poor methodology. The fact is that the natural order rarely produces ideal data, and nature appears to be more far more complex the more we know about it. Is it logical to expect the Creator to be less complex than His creation?

The scientist should have a healthy skepticism and desire careful experimentation. However, the extremely skeptical

position we mentioned above Carl Sagan in demanding a glowing cross in the sky as proof of Christ's resurrection is not scientific. It is like not believing in galaxies unless someone has one in his laboratory. Some people may refuse to believe in the authority of the Ten Commandments because they aren't written on the surface of the moon, but those same people would consider a person an idiot if he said he doubted the authority of the periodic table because it wasn't written on the surface of the moon. The point is that clarity is relative, not absolute; thus skepticism must have practical limits.

In addition, the clarity and conclusiveness of experimental data must be judged relative to competition, that is, alternate explanations. In our case, the clarity of the evidence for the truth of biblical Christianity would be obscured by competition from other belief systems if any of them had comparable evidence to support their truth claims. Scientists have learned that they cannot wait for irrefutable data.

The Historical Perspective

Arguments against the Bible based on a "Why isn't it clearer?" foundation can appear stronger than they really are because of the distortions inherent in recording history. For example, a casual reading of the Bible might lead one to the conclusion that miracles were a daily occurrence in ancient Israel. Thus the absence of similar miracles in modern times could lead one to assume that "God is dead" or that those events which the ancients thought were miracles were only natural events which were not understandable at the time.

In fact, a close study of the Bible indicates that miracles were rare and mainly cluster around four specific points:

- Moses and the Exodus
- The time of Elijah and Elisha

- The lives of Jesus and the Apostles, and
- The still future Second Coming of Christ

The clusters of miracles appear in conjunction with some new aspect of God's plan or new revelation and seem more prominent than they really are because of the historical compression of the biblical record.

God's Perspective

We have been looking at the question of why the evidence for the truth of the Bible isn't clearer, and now we will look at this question from God's perspective. In other words, could God have reasons for not making the evidence so striking that even the most sinful and rebellious person would see it and repent?

First a few observations about God. Ancient thought often held that the gods made man because they were in need of servants. Much modern thought argues that God made man because He was lonely or did not have anyone around to love or appreciate Him. However, the God of the Bible is in no way dependent upon mankind even for love or worship. That He reveals Himself at all is for our benefit, not His.

But even if He reveals evidence of Himself only to benefit us, why isn't He more forthright about it? This much seems clear: If He made His presence or the evidence too obvious, it would interfere with His demonstration, which is intended to draw out or reveal the true inner character of mankind. We know from several passages of Scripture that this is part of God's purpose for maintaining a relative silence. For example, in Psalm 50:21-22 we read, "These things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes." From these statements we come to see that God is not struggling desperately to gain man's attention. Actually He is restraining Himself in order to demonstrate to human beings

something about our inner character, or tendency to evil. We might call this “the Sheriff in the tavern” principle—people tend to be good when they think they are being watched by an authority. If a sheriff wants to find out or reveal who the troublemakers are in a tavern, he must either hide or appear to be an ineffective wimp, otherwise the bad guys will behave as well as everyone else.

Of course we should not push this analogy too far: unlike the Sheriff, God doesn't need to see men's evil actions in order to accurately judge them. Moreover, He has not stated His full reasons for allowing men to demonstrate their evil intent through their actions. The point we are trying to make here is that there are reasons that we can understand that may explain to some degree why God has chosen to run the world the way He has.

So why isn't the evidence clearer? To use another analogy, it is because God is like a good scientist who doesn't want to disturb His experiment by intruding into it. The problem of disturbing an experiment while measuring it is the bane of the experimental sciences in that any and every measurement changes and thus distorts to some degree the system it measures. Of course God is not running an experiment because He already knows the outcome. It is more like a demonstration with the results saved for Judgment Day.

The Human Perspective

We have been dealing thus far in this essay the question of why the evidence for the truth of the Bible isn't clearer, that is, overwhelmingly and inescapably clear. Now we want to examine this question from man's viewpoint, that is, the human factor that is involved whenever a person tries to judge the quality of the evidence.

In Romans 1:1-8 Paul wrote that God has given human beings sufficient evidence that He exists. However, some people

cannot bear to think that there is an authority or power greater than themselves, especially one that they cannot control and to which they should be subject. We should not be surprised, therefore, when we find that many people often distort the evidence that God has already given them (yet keep demanding more).

Given this tendency on the part of man, how clear does the evidence have to be before people would universally recognize the existence of the God of the Bible? Would a cross in the sky actually be sufficient to convert Carl Sagan? Would the performance of an undeniable miracle in a scoffer's presence be enough? However impressive such feats would be, the records of history show that most people choose to ignore whatever evidence they have, no matter how clear it may be.

During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites, who had personally observed the miracles in Egypt and who were being fed and guided daily by miraculous means (manna and the pillar of fire), repeatedly rebelled against the God-directed leadership of Moses. The miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha were not sufficient to convert the Northern Kingdom of Israel to unperverted forms of biblical worship. In the New Testament Jesus healed the lame and the blind and even raised the dead, yet the Jewish leaders, who could not dispute the genuineness of His miracles, wanted to kill Him.

In His account of an unnamed rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, Jesus Himself makes our point clear: The rich man, now in hell, pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers so they will not face the same torment that he is experiencing. Abraham replies, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

From the human perspective, why isn't the evidence clearer? Because God knows, and has already demonstrated, that no matter how clear He makes the evidence, it will never be

sufficient for some. More evidence by itself will not convince people whose minds are already emotionally attached to an opposing view, because people are not always rational. The mind is all too often the servant of the desired fantasy.

Is God frustrated and defeated by the fact that man is so sinful he will not pay attention to God no matter how big the flag is that God waves in front of him? Only if we assume that God's purpose in giving evidence is to convert everyone.

God's Grace and Man's Accountability

In this discussion we have observed that the God of the Bible does not intend to make His presence so obvious that it curbs the actions of evil men, and that most men will ignore whatever evidence they receive anyway. This being the case, why does God bother to give any evidence at all? Why doesn't He hide Himself even better? From the Bible we deduce that God gives the level of evidence He does because He is both a gracious God and a God who holds men accountable for the evidence they receive.

Some people will repent on seeing even a low level of evidence; for others a higher level is required. Some people will get much more evidence than is needed to convert others but still not repent. Despite the varying levels of evidence to which people are exposed throughout various times and cultures, God states that He has given each person enough so that they know better than to continue doing evil. Given the willful rejection of the evidence which they do receive, God is not obligated to provide more.

At the very least, the evidence which God gives includes His glory as seen in nature, evidence which in our day we tend to obscure by ascribing it to less personally demanding causes like "chance" or the "laws of nature."

However we might personally feel about it, God says that He

has provided evidence clear enough that every human being is morally responsible to respond to it. The evidence He has provided is sufficient; therefore, He is saddened but not frustrated that many do not respond. Those who choose to ignore His evidence will have to answer to Him and it is not an enviable task—somewhat like arguing with a Judge over a speeding ticket: How can we say we did not see the sign when the Judge himself posted it? How foolish would we be if we tried to argue that we saw the sign but thought it was too small and too quaint to take seriously?

This points out the main purpose for miracles and biblical evidence: they are warning signs to get us to pay attention to the message associated with the sign. A traffic sign may simply advise us to slow down around a curve, but it may also warn us that a bridge is out ahead. We would be foolish indeed to accelerate past a “Bridge Out” sign because the sign seemed a little too small or too old. But the warning God gives through miracles and biblical evidence is far worse than a bridge being out. Man is accountable to God, and there is eternal torment ahead for those who brush aside God’s warning signs and refuse to repent.

On the other hand, humble seeker for truth will find that the evidence is indeed sufficient. Why? Because the biblical data, when compared to that offered by other religions or by atheism, is clear enough to show that the God of the Bible really exists and that His warnings should be heeded.

In Matthew 12:38-39 the Pharisees challenged Jesus by demanding that He perform a sign impressive enough to force them to believe His warnings. But God does not feel obligated to cater to the egos of the morally and sexually corrupt who bend whatever evidence they receive to suit their own ends.

These demands express a sovereignty over God at the opposite extreme from repentance. Should we expect God to jump through any hoop we set up to please us? Is God so insecure that He

needs our approval? Yet some people deal with the Creator of the universe as if He were a dog. But in spite of such attitudes, God provides sufficient evidence for self-centered people.

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The New Testament: Can I Trust It?

Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright examine how the New Testament documents measure up when subjected to standard tests for historical reliability.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

“How can any well-educated person believe the New Testament? It was written so long after the events it records that we can’t possibly trust it as historically reliable.” This is a common question on the university campus and deserves an honest answer.

How does one determine the authenticity of an ancient book? C. Sanders, a military historian, outlines three basic tests used by historians and literary critics.^{1} These are the internal, external and bibliographic tests. Let’s consider briefly how the New Testament stands up to each one.

1. The Internal Test

Here our question concerns the trustworthiness of the writers as revealed by the text itself. One of the chief issues is whether or not we have eyewitness testimony. The New Testament

accounts of the life of Christ were written by eyewitnesses or by people relating the accounts of the eyewitnesses of the actual events. John wrote, "what we have seen and heard [concerning Christ], we proclaim to you also."[{2}](#) Peter stated that he and his associates were "eyewitnesses of His majesty."[{3}](#) Luke claimed that his gospel was based on accounts compiled from eyewitnesses.[{4}](#) In a court of law, eyewitness testimony is the most reliable kind.

Another issue in the internal test is the consistency of the reports. If two writers present testimony that is contradictory, doubt is cast on the integrity of one or both records.

Many have charged that the New Testament contains contradictions. To deal with such charges, it is important to understand that "contrary" is defined by Webster as "a proposition so related to another that, though both may be false, they cannot both be true." Thus, the statement, "Joe and Bill are in this room" contradicts the statement, "Only Joe is in this room." It does not, however, contradict the statement, "Joe is in this room." *Omission does not necessarily constitute contradiction.*

With this in mind, consider several alleged New Testament contradictions. Some observe that Luke writes of two angels at the tomb of Jesus after the resurrection[{5}](#) while Matthew mentions "an angel."[{6}](#) The observation of the statements is accurate, but the interpretation of them as contraries is not. If Matthew explicitly stated that only one angel was present at that time, the two accounts would be dissonant. As it is, they are harmonious.

Others note an apparent discrepancy in the accounts of the birth of Jesus. Hans Conzelmann, a German theologian, writing of Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the nativity, states that "in every detail they disagree."[{7}](#) He focuses on apparent geographical inconsistencies.

Simple observation shows that the two accounts do differ. Luke tells of Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth and traveling to Bethlehem (for the census and the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem). He then records the family's return to Nazareth.[{8}](#) Matthew's account begins with the couple in Bethlehem (and Jesus' birth there) and records their flight into Egypt to escape King Herod's wrath, and relates their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.[{9}](#)

Contradictory vs. Complementary

Conzelmann regards these details as contradictory, but are they? The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records of the life of Christ. Any biographer must of necessity be selective. Could not Matthew have chosen to omit the census journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and Luke the flight into Egypt? As such, the accounts are complementary, rather than contradictory.[{10}](#)

Often such critics seem unable to carefully discern the content of biblical texts because of their own negative presuppositions and lofty speculations. One is inclined to agree with C. S. Lewis' criticism of these skeptics when he writes, "These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence (that they cannot) is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves."[{11}](#) Consider a final (and more difficult) example of alleged inconsistency. Many have noted a difference between the synoptic accounts (those in Matthew, Mark and Luke) and John's account of the dating of the death of Jesus. Specifically, the issue concerns the chronological relationship of the crucifixion to the celebration of the Passover meal by the Jews. Mark refers to some Jews observing the Passover the evening before the crucifixion.[{12}](#) John seems to indicate a Passover celebration *after* the crucifixion.[{13}](#) In a recent definitive article, Dr. Harold Hoehner of Dallas Theological Seminary solves the puzzle.[{14}](#) Citing evidence from the *Mishnah* and the scholars

Strock-Billerbock, Hoehner shows that the Pharisees and Sadducees (two contemporary religious parties) disagreed about the day of the week on which the Passover should fall. The result was that the Pharisees celebrated the Passover one day before the Sadducees did. This makes it entirely plausible that the synoptics use the reckoning of the Pharisees, while John presents that of the Sadducees, thus accounting for the difference.

2. External Test

This test asks whether other historical and archaeological materials confirm or deny the internal testimony provided by the documents themselves. Several authors of antiquity wrote of Jesus as a person of history. Among them were Tacitus, Josephus, Seutonius, and Pliny the Younger.[{15}](#) Sir William Ramsey, an eminent archaeologist, once held that Luke's writings were not historically sound. His own subsequent investigation of near-eastern archaeology forced him to reverse his position and conclude that "Luke is a historian of the first rank."[{16}](#)

Nelson Glueck, former president of Jewish Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, one of the greatest archaeologists, and a Jew, wrote: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."[{17}](#)

Archaeological Evidence

Consider a few examples of archaeological confirmation of the New Testament. In I Corinthians, Paul refers to the meat market in Corinth.[{18}](#) An inscription from ancient Corinth has been discovered which refers to the "meat market."[{19}](#) Luke refers to the temple of Artemis in Ephesus and speaks of a riot that occurred in a theater in the same city.[{20}](#) The temple was excavated in 1803 and measured 100 by 340 feet.[{21}](#) Twentieth-century Austrian archaeologists unearthed the theater and found it could hold nearly 25,000 people.[{22}](#)

Mark writes of Jesus healing a blind man as He left Jericho.[{23}](#) Luke, apparently writing of the same event, says it happened while Jesus was *approaching* Jericho.[{24}](#)

Excavations in 1907-09 by Ernest Sellin, of the German Oriental Society, showed that there were “twin cities” of Jericho in Jesus’ time—an old Jewish city and a Roman city separated by about a mile.[{25}](#) Apparently Mark referred to one and Luke referred to the other, and the incident occurred as Jesus traveled between the two.

William F. Albright, one of the world’s leading biblical archaeologists, adds a helpful comment: “We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date of between A.D. 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today.”[{26}](#) This statement is crucial because it means that some of Christ’s opponents, who were living when He was on earth, were undoubtedly still around when the New Testament books were penned. Their presence would have prompted the New Testament writers to give careful attention to the veracity of the statements. And we can be certain that if any errors were made in their accounts the opponents of Christ (of which there were many) would have been quick to expose them.

3. Bibliographic Test

This final test is necessary because we do not possess the original manuscripts of most ancient documents. The question that must be asked, then, is: “How many early copies do we have and how close in time are they to the original?” A. T. Robertson, author of one of the most comprehensive grammars of New Testament Greek, wrote, “...we have 13,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament.”[{27}](#) Many of these copies are dated only a short time (80-400 years) after the original.

When the New Testament documents are compared with other

writings of antiquity for the numbers of early copies and the chronological proximity of the copies to the original, the New Testament is far superior. (For instance, we have only 10 good copies of *Gallic Wars* and they are 1,000 years after the original; seven copies of Plato's *Tetralogies*, 1,200 years after the original. Similar results hold for the writings of Thucydides, Herodotus and a host of others.)[\[28\]](#)

The late Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, was one of the leading authorities on the reliability of ancient manuscripts. He drew this conclusion:

"The interval then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."[\[29\]](#)

If one concludes that the New Testament documents are historically reliable, it stands to reason that he should seriously consider the message they present. In the Old Testament and the New, the message of the Bible is the message of Jesus Christ. And He offers an abundant and eternal life to anyone who will consider and respond to His claims: "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life...and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[\[30\]](#)

Notes

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2. I John 1:3.
3. 11 Peter 1:16.
4. Luke 1:1-3.
5. Luke 24:1-4.
6. Matthew 28:1-8.
7. Conzelmann, Hans. *Jesus*. The classic article from the RGG expanded and updated (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), pp. 26-27.
8. Luke 1:26, 2:40.
9. Matthew 2:1-23.
10. Cheney, Johnston. *The Life of Christ in Stereo*. (Portland, OR: Western Seminary Press, 1971), pp. 6-14, 243.
11. Hooper, Walter (ed.). *Christian Reflections* (William B. Eerdmans) quoted in McDowell, Josh. *More Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1975), p. 342.
12. Mark 14:12ff.
13. John 18:28.
14. Hoehner, Harold W. "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Part IV" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, July, 1974), pp. 241-264.
15. Bruce, F. F. *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp.19-41.
16. Ramsay, W.M. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. (1915), p. 222; quoted in Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents – Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 91.

17. Glueck, Nelson. *Rivers in the Desert History of Negev*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society of America, 1969); quoted in McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1972), p. 68.
18. 1 Corinthians 10:25.
19. Bruce, *Christian Origins*. p 200.
20. Acts 19:27-29.
21. Free, Joseph P. *Archaeology and Bible History*. (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1951), p.324.
22. Ibid.
23. Mark 10:46-52.
24. Luke 18:35 43.
25. Free, op cit, p. 295; the old Jewish Jericho may have been a "ghost town" or merely a mound in Jesus' day.
26. Albright, William. *Recent Discoveries in Biblical Lands*. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955), p. 136; quoted in McDowell, op. cit., p. 65.
27. Robertson, A T., *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), p. 70; quoted in Montgomery, op. cit., p. 6.
28. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 46-56; Montgomery, op. cit., p. 6; Bruce, op. cit., pp. 10-20.
29. Kenyon, F. G. *The Bible and Archaeology*. (New York and London: Harper, 1940), pp. 288, 89; quoted in Montgomery, op. cit., p. 6.
30. John 8:12, 32.

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Who's Got the Body?

Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright provide a short documented examination of evidences for Jesus' resurrection.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

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 Christians have lived and died for a hoax.

If, however, He did rise, then He is still alive and can act now to straighten out our chaotic world. Facts always speak louder than opinions. Let's take a look at some of the historical evidence for the resurrection and see where the facts lead.

One preliminary consideration: countless scholars—among them, the apostle Paul, St. Augustine, Sir Isaac Newton and C. S. Lewis—believed in the resurrection. We need not fear committing intellectual suicide by accepting it also.

Paul wrote that “Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He was raised on the third day. He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now. [\[1\]](#)”

Consider also these four pieces of evidence:

1. The Explosive Growth of the Christian Church

Within a few weeks after the crucifixion a movement arose which, by the later admission of its enemies, “upset the world.” {2} Something happened to ignite this movement a very short time after its leader had been executed. What was it?

2. The Changed Lives of the Disciples

After Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, most of the disciples were frightened. Peter, for instance, denied Christ three times (twice to two servant girls!) Yet 10 out of the 11 disciples were martyred for their faith. Peter was crucified upside down; Thomas was skewered; John was boiled in oil but survived. Something had happened to revolutionize these men’s lives. Each believed he had seen the risen Christ.

3. The Empty Tomb

Jesus’ dead body was removed from the cross, wrapped in graveclothes like a mummy, covered with 100 pounds of aromatic spices and placed in a tomb. {3} The tomb had been hewn out of rock {4} and apparently contained only one cavern. {5} An extremely large stone {6} was rolled into a slightly depressed groove at the tomb’s entrance. {7} Some have conservatively estimated the weight of the stone at one-and-a-half to two tons.

A crack “Green Beret” unit of Roman soldiers was placed out front to guard the grave. {8} The military discipline of the Romans was so strict that severe corporal and often capital punishment awaited the soldier who left his post or failed in his duty. {9} Sunday morning, the stone was found rolled away, the body was gone, but the graveclothes were still in place. {10} What happened?

Some say that Christ’s friends stole the body. This means that

either one of the women sweet-talked the guards while the other two moved the stone and tip-toed off with the body, or else guys like Peter (remember how brave he was) and Thomas (how easily convinced he was) overpowered the guards, stole the body, and fabricated a myth.

These theories hardly seem plausible. The guard was too powerful, the stone too heavy, and the disciples, not yet experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit were too spineless to attempt such a feat.

Others say that Christ's enemies stole the body. Yet if the Romans or Jews had the body, they would have exposed it publicly and Christianity would have died out. They didn't and it didn't.

Then there is the "swoon theory," that Christ 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. Then, according to this theory, 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 that He'd been raised from the dead. This one is harder to believe than the resurrection itself.

In other words, if Jesus was put to death, who's got the body? All that we do have is an empty tomb.

4. The Appearances of the Risen Christ

For 40 days after His death, Christ was reported to be seen alive on earth. Some say these were hallucinations, but do the accounts show that?

Only certain high-strung and imaginative types of people usually have such psychic experiences. Yet a woman, a stubborn tax collector, several fisherman and more than 500 people at

one time claimed they saw Him. Hallucinations are very individualistic—contrasting with the fact that over 500 people saw the same thing at the same time and place.

Two other facts undermine the hallucination idea. Such imaginations are usually of expected events, yet the disciples had lost hope after the crucifixion. Also, psychic phenomena usually occur in cycles, but the appearances came in no set pattern.[{11}](#)

Attempts to explain away the appearances run into a brick wall of facts. The facts point to one conclusion: Christ is risen.

The above does not constitute an exhaustive proof, but rather a reasoned examination of the evidence. We must each consider and evaluate the evidence ourselves to determine the truth of the resurrection claim. (Of course, the truth or falsity of the resurrection is a matter of historical fact and is not dependent on any individual's belief.)

If the facts support the claim, then we can conclude that He arose. In any case, a mere intellectual assent to the facts does nothing for one's life.

A major evidence comes experientially, in personally receiving Christ as Savior and Lord. Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him."[{12}](#)

Care to give Him a try?

Notes

1. 1 Corinthians 15:3-6.
2. Acts 17:6.
3. John 19:38-40.
4. Eusebius of Caesarea. Theophania; quoted in Latham, Henry.

The Risen Master. (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1904). pp. 87,88; quoted in McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA.: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1972), p. 209.

5. Ibid.

6. Mark 16:4.

7. Holloman, Henry W. "An Exposition of the Post Resurrection Appearances of Our Lord" (Unpublished Th.M. Thesis: Dallas Theological Seminary, May, 1967). p. 38, quoted in McDowell, op. cit. p. 216.

8. Matthew 27: 65,66.

9. McDowell, op. cit. pp. 218-224.

10. Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1-11.

11. Anderson, J. N. D. *The Evidence for the Resurrection*. (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968). pp. 20-23.

12. Revelation 3:20.

A Short Story

There was once a rich man, who dressed in purple and the finest linen, and feasted in great magnificence every day. At his gate, covered with sores, lay a poor man named Lazarus, who would have been glad to satisfy his hunger with the scraps from the rich man's table. Even the dogs used to come and lick his sores.

One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, where he was in torment; he looked up, and there, far away, was Abraham with Lazarus close beside him.

"Abraham, my father," he called out, "take pity on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my

tongue, for I am in agony in this fire.” But Abraham said, “Remember, my child, that all the good things fell to you while you were alive, and all the bad to Lazarus; now he has his consolation here and it is you who are in agony. But that is not all: there is a great chasm fixed between us; no one from our side who wants to reach you can cross it, and none may pass from your side to us.”

“Then, father,” he replied, “will you send him to my father’s house, where I have five brothers, to warn them, so that they too may not come to this place of torment?” But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.” “No, father Abraham,” he replied, “but if someone from the dead visits them, they will repent.” Abraham answered, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets they will pay no heed even if someone should rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:19-31, New English Bible)

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Jesus: The Divine Xerox – Reasons to Believe

Probe’s founder Jimmy Williams provides a compelling set of reasons to believe that Jesus is in fact the Son of God. By asking questions one would expect of God on this earth, we see that Jesus is the only one who fulfills them all. Jesus’ characteristics are His own apologetic.

You know, today when you walk across the campus and begin to talk about the New Testament, the claims of Christ, and how He

is relevant to high school or college life, often you get this expression of amazement, as if you have committed intellectual suicide, because you actually believe His claims. Some tell us that becoming a Christian involves a blind leap with little or no evidence to support it. In fact, the blinder the leap and the more lacking the evidence, the more noble the faith. It is certainly true that any philosophy or belief cannot be proved; I would not try and insult anyone's intellect by saying I could *prove* to him that Jesus Christ is God. However, I think when we look into the history of this unique person, we see some things that have to grasp the mind of any thinking man and impress upon him the strong consideration that Jesus may be who He claimed to be...namely, God incarnate in human flesh.

Now whatever we may say about Jesus Christ, most everyone would agree that in the person of Christ we view one of the most unique personalities of all the centuries—whether He is God or not. The unbeliever, atheist, Moslem, Hindu and Buddhist alike all generally agree on this one central fact, that Jesus Christ is indeed a unique personality.

“Here was a man born of a peasant woman in an obscure village. He grew up in another obscure military camp town where He worked as a carpenter's son. He never wrote a book; He possessed neither wealth nor influence. He never ran for political office; He never went more than 200 miles from His home town; He never even entered a big city. In infancy He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature and hushed the sea to sleep. During the last three years of His life He became an itinerant preacher, roaming the land of His birth, healing the sick and comforting the poor. At the end of this three years of ministry the tide of public opinion began to turn against Him. He was betrayed by one of His closest friends and arrested for disturbing the status quo. All of His followers deserted Him; one denied Him three times. He went through six trials, each of which was a mockery of

jurisprudence. Prior to one of the trials He was beaten to the point of death with leather strips imbedded with studs of iron. A crown of thorns was then rammed down upon His head, tearing the flesh so that blood poured down the side of His face. The Roman procurator officiating at His trial was nervous. The uniqueness of this man made Pilate want to wash his hands of the whole affair. But the crowds cried for His death.

“As the Roman procurator brought this insignificant, now mutilated and beaten carpenter’s son before the crowds, he hurled a challenge to them which has resounded across twenty centuries: he said, “Behold the man.” Pilate was impressed. He had never before seen such quiet dignity, intrepid courage, noble majesty. Never had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. The Roman was deeply impressed, and avowed his captor’s uniqueness. But the mob shouted, ‘Crucify Him.’ So He was taken outside the gates of the city and nailed to a cross to die the death of a common criminal.

“Yet the story doesn’t end here. For something happened after that strange, dark day that has changed the entire course of human history. He came forth from the tomb in resurrection power. His greatness has never been paralleled. He never wrote a book, yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. Every seventh day the wheels of commerce cease their turning and multitudes wind their way to worshiping assemblies to pay homage and respect to Him. The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone, but the name of this man abounds more and more. Though over 1900

years lie between the people of this generation and the time of His crucifixion, He still lives. Herod could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him. He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory.

“Never had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. The Roman was deeply impressed, and avowed his captor’s uniqueness. But the mob shouted, ‘Crucify Him.’ So He was taken outside the gates of the city and nailed to a cross to die the death of a common criminal. Still today He is the cornerstone of history, the center of human progress. I would be well within the mark when I say that all the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, and all of the kings that have ever reigned, put together, have not influenced the course of man’s life on this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth. History has been called His story. He split time: B.C., before Christ; A.D., *Anno Domini*, in the year of our Lord.{1}

When, some 20 centuries ago, Pontius Pilate said, “Behold the man,” I doubt that he had any idea of who it was that stood before him. He certainly wouldn’t have dreamed that this humble peasant would launch a movement (indeed, already had) that would change the course of Western civilization. In view of the claims that He made and the impact He had upon history, it behooves us to “Behold the man.” Who was He? Those who knew Him best were convinced that He was God. What do you say? I am convinced that the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from a fair examination of the evidence is that He was and is, indeed, God, the Saviour of the world. Let’s consider some of these evidences together.

I would like to consider several lines of historical evidence that suggest that Jesus Christ is God. The first line of evidence is:

Because the Hypothesis Fits the Facts.

Now what I would like to do in terms of presenting the first line of evidence for His claim that He is God is to ask the question, "What would God be like, if God became a man?" If the facts about Jesus Christ fit the answers to the above question—pre-eminently so, uniquely so, we will have offered evidence, that He may be who He claimed to be. So I would like to suggest four things that I think we would all agree would characterize God if God became a man.

If God were a man, we would expect His words to be the greatest words ever spoken.

What is great literature or great oratory? The masterpieces of one generation often appear stilted and artificial to another. The words which endure are the words which have something to say about that which is universal in human experience, that which doesn't change with time.

Statistically speaking, the Gospels are the greatest literature ever written. They are read by more people, quoted by more authors, translated into more tongues, represented in more art, set to more music, than any other book or books written by any man in any century in any land. But the words of Christ are not great on the grounds that they have such a statistical edge over anybody else's words. They are read more, quoted more, loved more, believed more, and translated more because they are the greatest words ever spoken. And where is their greatness? Their greatness lies in the pure, lucid spirituality in dealing clearly, definitively, and authoritatively with the greatest problems that throb in the human breast; namely, Who is God? Does history have meaning? Does He love me? Does He care for me? What should I do to please Him? How does He look at my sin? How can I be forgiven? Where will I go when I die? How must I treat others?

This amazing purity of the words of Christ became more real to

me in a forceful way while I was studying the Greek language in graduate school. The New Testament is written in Greek. I was taking a course called Rapid Greek Reading in which we did nothing but read the Greek New Testament and recite in class. We read about eight pages of Greek a week or about the equivalent timewise of 600 pages of English. We struggled night and day while reading the Gospels in order to be able to read them out loud in class directly from the Greek text to our professor. It was sometimes humorous to hear one another struggle with the text of Matthew or Luke. The interesting thing was that when reading one of the Gospels aloud, we would stumble and toil with the sections where Matthew was simply recounting narrative, but as soon as Matthew began to quote the words of Christ the struggle ceased. His words were the easiest to translate. They were so simple and yet profound. To labor with the narrative portions and then come to the words of Christ was like moving from the intensity of the hurricane to the calm serenity of the eye of the storm. It was the difference between sailing on rough tempestuous seas and on a glassy lake at eventide.

Certainly, no mere man could impregnate such simple words with such sublime thoughts. Consider the volumes of truth stored up in the phrase, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"^{2}, and "Whosoever would find his life, must lose it"^{3}. Libraries could be filled with works which simply develop those concepts.

No other man's words have the appeal of Jesus' words. They are the kind of words we would expect God to utter if God were a man.

The second line of evidence is:

If God were a man, we would expect Him to exert a profound power over human personality.

One of the greatest impacts among human beings is the impact

of personality upon personality. Most human beings are rather ordinary in their impact upon other human beings. I can't think of anyone in my life whose personality has made an impact upon me; strong influence, yes, but impact, no. Periodically in history a Churchill, Hitler, or a Caesar comes along and impact is made. Certainly, if God were a man, His personality would be so dynamic it would have unprecedented impact on His contemporaries. Is this the case with Jesus of Nazareth? We find most emphatically that it is. Whether Jesus be man or God, whether the Gospels be mainly fiction or fancy, certainly a historic person named Jesus made such an impact on a small band of men as to be unequalled by far in the entire annals of the human race. Consider for a moment the historic nucleus from which Christianity sprang: Peter, a weak-willed fisherman; John, a gentle dreamer; Thomas, who had a question mark for a brain; Matthew, a tax collector; a few peasants and a small cluster of emotional women. Now I don't want to minimize the character of these men, but seriously, does this rather heterogeneous group of simple folk look like the driving force that could turn the Roman Empire upside down, so that by 312 A.D., Christianity was the official religion of the Empire? Frankly they do not. The impact of the personality of Christ upon these people turned them into flaming revolutionaries who launched a movement that has changed the history of Western Civilization.

The amazing thing is that these men were the very ones who ate with Him, slept with Him, and lived with Him for over three years and still concluded that He was God. How could a person live with someone for that period of time and come to that conclusion unless it were a valid conclusion? You could spend less than an hour with the greatest saint mankind has ever produced and be thoroughly convinced that he was not God. How could you spend three years with a mere man and become absolutely convinced that He was God, in fact, be so convinced that you would be willing to die a martyr's death to punctuate your belief? Listen for a moment to the traditional deaths of

the apostles: Matthew, martyred by the sword in Ethiopia; Mark, dragged through the streets of Alexandria until dead; Luke, hanged on an olive tree in Greece; John, put in a caldron of boiling oil but escaped death and died in exile on the island of Patmos; Peter, crucified upside down (he said he wasn't worthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord); James, beheaded in Jerusalem; Philip, hanged against a pillar in Phrygia; James the Less, thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death down below; Bartholomew, flayed alive; Andrew, bound to a cross where he preached to his persecutors till he died; Thomas, run through by a spear in India; Jude, shot to death with arrows; Barnabas, stoned to death by Jews in Salonica; and Paul, beheaded at Rome by Nero. Even more incredible is the fact that James and Jude, our Lord's own brothers, believed that He was God. You may for a time, be able to pull the wool over the eyes of those outside your own family, but certainly your own brothers would not swallow such an unbelievable claim unless there were unimpeachable reasons to do so.

Christ's personality had a tremendous impact upon these men. And after nearly two thousand years the impact is not at all spent. Daily there are people who have tremendous revolutionary experiences which they attribute to personal encounters with Jesus Christ.

The personality of Jesus, then, is without parallel. It is unique and incomparable. Wherever He is, He is the Master. When surrounded by hungry multitudes or by hating Pharisees, when questioned by clever theologians or besought by stricken sinners, whether examined by stupid disciples or by a Roman governor, He is the Master.

If God were robed in human flesh, then He would possess a personality that would have revolutionary impact, indeed, unique impact, upon His contemporaries. Like no other man in history, Jesus made that kind of unique and revolutionary impact.

If God were a man, we would expect supernatural acts.

If God were a man, not only would we expect His words to be the greatest ever spoken, and the impact of His personality to be unique, but we would also expect that His life would be characterized by wonderful deeds. We would expect Him to do the things that only God could do. Now obviously the very act of God becoming a man involves something supernatural. But if God became a man, it makes sense that He was going to convince men that He was indeed who He claimed to be, that men deserved to see Him do things that only God could do—namely miracles, suspensions of natural law. Everything about the life of Jesus Christ confronts us with the miraculous. At the outset of His ministry He appeared at a wedding feast and turned water into wine. He demonstrated His power over disease by healing the nobleman's son and the lame man at the pool of Bethesda and many more. He fed 5000 people and said, "I am the bread of life." He walked on the water. He claimed to be the light of the world; then He healed a man who had been blind since birth. One of His most startling claims was made to the despondent sister of Lazarus (Lazarus had been dead for four days) when He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Then He said, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man came out of the tomb. Someone has noted it was a good thing Jesus called Lazarus by name or all the dead since the dawn of time would have come forth. When Christ made these astounding claims, more than ordinary means were necessary to impress men with their truthfulness.

Now there's a funny kind of thinking going on today concerning miracles. It all started with a fellow by the name of Hume. Paradoxically, this may surprise you, Hume was an orthodox Christian. But, Hume said some things about miracles that have been used as an attack on miracles. Hume argued that miracles are the most improbable of all events. Ever since Hume's essay, it has been believed that historical statements about miracles are the most intrinsically improbable of all

historical statements. Now, what then is the basis of probability? What makes a miracle a more probable or a less probable event? Hume says, and so do other secular critics today, that *probability rests upon what may be called the majority vote of our past experiences*. The more often a thing is known to happen, the more probable it is that it should happen again; and the less often, the less probable. He goes on to say, the majority vote of our past experience is firmly against miracles. There is in fact, "uniform experience" against miracles. A miracle is, therefore, the most improbable of all events. It is always more probable that the witnesses were lying or mistaken than that a miracle occurred.

Now here is the foolishness in Hume's whole argument. We must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if they have *never* occurred, then there is no such thing as a miracle. But, that is exactly the point in question. Is there absolute uniform experience against miracles? We only know that the majority vote of past experience is against miracles if we know that all reports of miracles are false. And, we can know all the reports to be false *only* if we know already that miracles have never occurred. This is a circular argument. Let me repeat it again. The critic of miracles today says with Hume, "We know that all historical reports of miracles are false because miracles never happen, and we know that miracles never happen because all historical reports of them are false." Get that? We know that miracles have never happened, because all reported instances of them are false, and we know that all reported instances of them are false (such as the Bible) because we know that miracles never happen.

Very frequently today we hear or get the impression that brilliant scholars, after examining all the evidence, have scientifically proven that miracles never happen. This is totally untrue. The rejection of the miraculous is not their conclusion; it is their starting point, their presupposition.

It's interesting to note that as you study the literature of the first and second century, even some of the literature of the critics of Christianity grant the miracles. In fact, it was not until the 19th century that the major attacks against the miracles began when the omniscient modern critics got on the scene and began to look back 2,000 years and say miracles never happened. But, the attackers of the first century generally grant them. In *Jesus and His Story* by Ethelbert Stauffer, a professor of New Testament at the University of Erlangen—and not an evangelical scholar—cites the following: “In 95 A.D. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus of Lydda speaks of Jesus’ magic arts.”{4} “In 100 A.D.—Jewish ritual denunciation—’Jesus practiced magic and led Israel astray.’”{5}

In the second century (according to F. F. Bruce) Celsus, a philosophic critic of Christianity, acknowledged his miracles but attributed them to sorcery.{6}

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, also acknowledges the fact that Jesus performed miracles in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. A basic principle of evaluation of evidence states that when enemies agree on a common point, it may be regarded as certain that the point is commonly accepted. Stauffer states this with clarity in *Jesus and His Story*:

The sharper the clash, the wider the gulf, the more vital does this alteration of testimony and counter-testimony become to the historical investigator. For if a confrontation of witnesses yields statements that agree on some points, then these points must represent facts accepted by both sides.{7}

In addition to the testimony of the secular historians, we have in the four gospel documents themselves, the personal testimony of hundreds of eyewitnesses that the miracles of Christ are true events. All of the evidence we have indicates that He is indeed God manifest in the flesh.

If God were a man, we would expect Him to be sinless and incomparably holy and divine.

Here lies, perhaps, one of the most convincing evidences for the deity of Christ. No man has ever lived such a noble, pure, and sinless life. Those who knew Him for three years, said "He was without sin." {8} The Roman centurion commented as Christ hung on the cross, "Surely, this was the Son of God." {9} Paul, the brilliant intellect of the first century, perceived, "He knew no sin." {10} Pilate called Him, "that just man," and said, "I find no fault in Him." {11} He Himself claimed to be sinless and challenged the religious leaders of His day to find fault in Him. {12}

There is no comparison between the person of Christ and the most saintly of the saints of the human race. To them confession of sin and painfully laborious efforts toward saintliness were daily fare. In fact, the closer they came to God, the more vivid became their consciousness of their sinfulness.

But Jesus never appears to us as One who struggled to obtain saintliness. He never felt the need to confess a sin, and yet He pointed out the sin in others and urged them to confess. Christ never admitted a need of repentance. We can't even imagine Him dying the death of saintly Augustine of daily confession and repentance. Jesus possessed perfect sinlessness and purity, not by struggle, privation, asceticism, or pilgrimage. It was by His birth and nature.

The greatest saints of other religions are not even in the same category as Christ. Mohammed, for instance, was apparently a neurotic. Gandhi, whom many have acclaimed as the most saintly man of the century, does not even compare with Jesus Christ. Gandhi himself claimed that he didn't even know God and that the reason for it was his own sinfulness. He said, "It is a constant source of sorrow to me that I am so far separated from the one whom I know to be my very life and

being; and it is my own wretchedness and sin that separates me from him.”{13} How different this is from the words of Jesus, “I and the Father are one,”{14} or “He who has seen me has seen the Father,”{15} or even more direct, “All men should honour me, even as they honour the Father. He that does not honour me does not honour the Father which sent me.”{16} Can you even imagine Calvin, Luther, Paul, or any other great saint making a claim such as this? Frankly, I cannot.

Jesus Christ is not a great man among great men. He is uniquely the greatest man of all history. His divine quality of life can be verified from the mouth of the atheist, infidel, and unbeliever, not to mention the enormous testimony from the Christian Church. Thinking men the world over who have examined the evidence will all agree that Jesus of Nazareth is the greatest personality of the centuries. He is the greatest teacher, leader, and influence for good in the history of the human race.

Rousseau, the French Deist said of him,

If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God. Shall we say the Gospel history is mere invention. My friend, it is not such that men invent. And the facts concerning Socrates, of which no one entertains any doubt, are less attested than those concerning Jesus Christ.{17}

He goes on to say a little later that “the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth are so striking, so amazing, so utterly inimitable, that the invention of them would be more astonishing than the hero.”{18}

Byron, the profligate poet, whose philosophy of life was eat, drink, and be merry said, “If ever a man were God, or God were man, Jesus was both.”{19}

Renan, the skeptic, who wrote a classic life of Christ in which he tried to prove the myth of the Gospels, nevertheless

concluded with this last line: "Whatever surprises the future may bring, one thing is certain, Jesus will never be surpassed." {20}

When exiled on the lonely isle of St. Helena, the emperor Napoleon was once discussing Christ with General Bertrand, a faithful officer who had followed him into banishment and who did not believe in the deity of Jesus. Napoleon said,

I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions, the distance of infinity. Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and His will confounds me. Between Him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by Himself. {21}

If God were a man, we would expect Him to be sinless and incomparably Holy and Divine. We see that the hypothesis fits the facts of the life of Jesus Christ. Should we now conclude something other than Jesus is God? The Apostle John said, "No man has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known." {22} Jesus is the Divine Xerox of the invisible God. The Original is invisible, but His earthly Reproduction is visible for all to behold in the unprecedented life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Notes

1. Author unknown, although a portion of this essay is attributed to Dr. James Allan Francis.
2. Matt. 7:12.
3. Luke 9:24.
4. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1959), p. 9.
5. Ibid., p. 10.

6. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents; Are They Reliable?* (5th ed. rev.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 68.
7. Stauffer, p.x.
8. 1 Pet. 2:22.
9. Matt. 27:54.
10. 2 Cor. 5:21.
11. Luke 23:14.
12. John 8:45-47; 10:37-39.
13. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Glendale, California: G.L. Publications, 1967).
14. John 10:30.
15. John 14:9.
16. John 5:23.
17. John Ballard, *The Miracles of Unbelief* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908), p. 251.
18. Ibid.
19. Lord Byron.
20. Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (New York: Carolton Publishers, 1863).
21. Frank Mead, *Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revelle, 1965), p. 56.
22. John 1:18.