

Biblical Archaeology

Kerby Anderson provides an update on recent archaeological finds that corroborate the historicity of the Bible.

One of the most important proofs for the historical accuracy of the Bible can be found in archaeology. Ancient history and archaeology should confirm the accuracy of this record. That is what we find when comparing these finds with the written record of Scripture.

My focus will be to summarize a few of the past archaeological finds that confirm the Bible and then provide an update on some of the newest archaeological discoveries made in just the last few years that are very significant. On the Probe website, we have an excellent summary done twenty years ago of archaeology and the Old Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/) and archaeology and the New Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament/).



Archaeology not only has confirmed the historical record found in the Bible, but it also provides additional details not found in the original writings of the biblical authors. Archaeology also helps explain Bible passages by providing context of the surrounding culture as well as the social and political circumstances.

We must also admit the limitations of archaeology. Although these archaeological finds can establish the historical accuracy of the record, they cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. Also, we must admit that even when we have an archaeological find, it still must be interpreted. Those interpretations are obviously affected by the worldview perspective and even bias of the historians and archaeologists.

Even granting the skeptical bias that can be found in this

field, it is still amazing that many archaeologists acknowledge the biblical confirmation that has come from significant archaeological finds.

Dr. William Albright observed, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."[^{1}](#)

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck and president of Hebrew Union College concluded, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries."[^{2}](#)

Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, remarked that "On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine."[^{3}](#)

Old Testament Archaeology

There are so many significant archaeological finds that confirm the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous and most significant find is the Dead Sea scrolls. A young shepherd boy found the first of them in a cave in 1947. Eventually over 800 fragments were found. This includes a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah.

Many of these scrolls are from before the time of Jesus Christ. That is important because it provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament. The earliest copies of the Old Testament that we had before this discovery were a thousand years later. When we compare the

Dead Sea scrolls to these later manuscripts, we can see that there were very few variations (mostly due to changes in spelling or grammar). The transmission through the scribe was very accurate.

Another significant find was archaeological documentation of King David. Archaeologists working at one site uncovered an inscription that means "house of David" that dates to the ninth century BC.

Another important archaeological find was the Hittite nation. The Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament, but there was no solid archaeological evidence they existed until the 20th century. Some argued that the Bible must be wrong since it mentions this nation but archaeological evidence was lacking.

The Hittites were a major force against the Jews. Israel needed to conquer them in order to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). King David had Uriah the Hittite killed because of his adultery with his wife, Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:3-21). Fortunately, archaeologists did uncover abundant evidence of the Hittites in Turkey. They found a temple, sculptures, a storeroom with 10,000 clay tablets. Later they even uncovered the Hittite capital city of Hattusha.

Archaeologists with the Israel Antiquities Authority digging at Tel Lachish found an ancient toilet that confirms Old Testament history. To understand its significance, we need to look at the record of King Hezekiah. We read in 2 Kings that he removed the Asherah poles from the high places and smashed the sacred stones that were used in the Canaanite cultic worship.

Archaeologists discovered large rooms that appear to be a shrine where four-horned altars were destroyed. They also found a seat carved in stone with the hole in it that was used as a toilet. It was mostly likely placed there as a form of

desecration for the whole room.[\[4\]](#) This correlates with the biblical description in 2 Kings 10:27 that Jehu and his followers “demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.”

New Testament Archaeology

Jesus spent much of his time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the fishing industry there (anchors, fishhooks), which would have been used by many of the disciples. The houses were one-story buildings, with roofs of wooden beams or branches. This explains how men carried a man to the roof and let him down in front of Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-22, Luke 4:31-36). The remains of a synagogue built in the 4th century sits atop the black basalt foundations of this synagogue that existed at the time of Jesus.

In Jerusalem are many archaeological discoveries from the time of Jesus. That includes the remains of the temple as well as the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

Archaeology (as well as history) verifies the existence of many political leaders mentioned in the New Testament. A Denarius coin shows a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. This is also significant because Jesus asked the people whose likeness was on the coin (Mark 12:17). The name Pontius Pilate was found in an inscription at Caesarea Maritima.

Sometimes archaeology can shed light on what seems like a sharp disagreement in the Bible. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he recounts what he said to Peter who stopped eating meals with gentile Christians. He argued that Peter lived like a Gentile even though he was a Jew.

The answer lies in the fact that Paul was a devout Pharisee,

who took kosher food laws and purity very seriously. Peter, though Jewish, was not a Pharisee and grew up in Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological excavations uncovered some non-kosher evidence. Some were eating wild boar and catfish, which were considered unclean and not to be eaten by Jew following the Torah.{5}

Archaeological finds at Corinth include the city's *bema* seat, where Paul stood trial (Acts 18:12-17) and an inscription with the name Erastus, a city administrator who was an associate of Paul (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20; Romans 16:23).

Critics have challenged the historical record of Luke because of alleged inaccuracies. Classical scholar Colin Hemer documents that Luke is a very accurate historian.{6} He identifies 84 facts in the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

These are just a few of the archaeological discoveries in the past that have confirmed the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the next section we will look at some of the most recent archaeological discoveries.

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Within the last few years, there have been major archaeological discoveries that further confirm biblical history. An article in *Christianity Today* provides a list of the top ten archaeological discoveries.{7} Here are just a few of these important discoveries.

The Israel Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of a limestone column on which the word "Jerusalem" was spelled out in Aramaic. This is the oldest inscription of this nature found so far. You might expect that there would be lots of such inscriptions, but that turn out to be very rare.

The inscription was found in an ancient potter's village that must have served pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. A potter's field calls to mind the one bought by the priests (Matthew 27:7) with the money Judas returned.

The Jewish tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located for a time in Shiloh. Excavation there produced a clay pomegranate. In the Bible, the pomegranate was a common temple decoration (1 Kings 7:18; 2 Kings 25:17). Small pomegranates embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet yarns hung from the hems of the priestly robes (Exodus 28:33). This discovery affirms the sacredness of Shiloh.

Scientists and archaeologists believe they made have found the site of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They found evidence that a "high-heat" explosive event north of the Dead Sea wiped out all civilization in the affected area. It killed all the people within a 25-kilometer circular area. The fertile soil would have been stripped of nutrients by the high heat. Waves of briny salt would have washed over the surrounding area and spread through hot winds.

The scientists suggest that a cosmic airburst event from a meteor was the reason for the disappearance from the site. It apparently took 600 years for the region to recover before it could once again be inhabited. This fits with the description in Genesis 19, which says that burning sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and killed all the people and all the vegetation of the land.

Archaeologist Dr. Stephen Collins says that there was a violent conflagration that ended occupation at the site. There is "melted pottery, scorched foundation stones, and several feet of ash and destruction debris churned into a dark gray matrix as if in a Cuisinart." He and another author in a joint paper conclude that all of this provides "signs of a highly destructive and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19."[\[8\]](#)

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Above we looked at a few of the most recent archaeological discoveries that confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible. Most of them were found in an article in *Christianity Today*. Here are a few more significant discoveries.

An inscribed piece of limestone discovered in a tomb along the west bank of the Nile was revealed to be a Semitic abecedary (alphabet in ABC order). It dates back to the time of Moses and fits with the statement that “Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said” (Exodus 24:4). It turns out he wasn’t the only one writing in a Semitic script in Egypt at that time.

When ISIS terrorists captured Mosul, they blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. This uncovered the remains of a palace of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon. Previous archaeological teams stopped digging in certain sites in Iraq for fear of destroying them. That was a case of the traditional tomb of Jonah, until ISIS started digging beneath it to find artifacts to sell. As one article put it, “ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible.”[\[9\]](#) The tunnels they dug revealed a previously untouched Assyrian palace in the ancient city of Ninevah. Inscriptions found in the old city of Nineveh give an order of Assyrian kings that matches perfectly with the biblical order.

Extra careful processing of dirt from an archaeological dig in the southwest corner of the Temple Mount provided a *beka* weight. This was used (Exodus 38:6) to measure the silver in the half-shekel temple tax that was collected from each member of the Jewish community.

Another seal impression seems to be (a letter is missing) the name “Isaiah the prophet.” It was found near the Temple Mount near another seal impression that says “King Hezekiah of Judah” that was uncovered two years earlier. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah are mentioned in the same verse 17 times. This

clay seal gives the impression that Isaiah had access to the king's palace as his adviser.

A ring with the name "Pontius Pilate" on it was excavated decades ago but only could be read recently due to advanced photographic techniques. Of course, this is not the first time that his name has surfaced in archaeology, but it is still a significant find. The ring is not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate. It was probably worn by someone authorized to act on his authority and would use it to seal official communications.

This is an exciting time for archaeological investigation. New finds provide even more evidence of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Archaeology has provided abundant confirmation of the Bible.

Notes

1. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religions of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 176.
2. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136.
3. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 1.
4. Richard Gray, "The wrong kind throne: Toilet discovered 2-800-year-old shrine," *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2016.
5. Craig A. Evans, "Why Archaeology Matters for Bible Study," *Bible Study Magazine*, March/April 2019, 18-19.
6. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
7. Gordon Govier, "Biblical Archaeology's Top 10 Discoveries of 2018," *Christianity Today*, December 27, 2018.
8. Amanda Borschel-Dan, "Evidence of Sodom? Meteor blast cause of biblical destruction, say scientists," *Times of Israel*, 22 November 2018.
9. "ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible," *Facts and Trends*, March 19, 2018.

Acorns, Oak Trees, and Our Son's Grave

While visiting their son's grave, Sue Bohlin meditated on the glory of the '2.0 resurrection body' that we look forward to.

On the one-year anniversary of [our son's death](#), my husband and I drove out to the DFW National Cemetery to find Curt's grave.

I have never been one to visit loved ones' gravesites. I always thought, "Why? They're not there. They're not in the ground, they're in heaven."

But lately I've been thinking differently about our bodies. They are more than just physical cases for who we are inside. We ARE our bodies, as well as our souls. Human beings are a unified creation of the material and the immaterial.

So I stood on the ground, thinking about this, above Curt's body. A precious body, the body I carried inside mine for nine months, and then carried in my arms until he learned to walk. The body of the boy I loved, and still do. The body of the man who looked so handsome in his Air Force uniform. The body that was placed in a casket to be buried a year ago while we honored him at his memorial service.

As I reminded myself that Curt's "body 1.0" is precious and dear, I thought back to the great privilege of teaching 1 Corinthians 15 and the "2.0 resurrection bodies" that await us.



When I taught that day, I held up an acorn from our front yard.

“An acorn is an oak seed,” I said. “It has the same DNA as an oak tree. Is the acorn the same as the oak tree? Yes . . . and no.

“They are stages of the same plant, they’re the same genetically, but of course they are different.

“What happens to an acorn? It gets planted in the ground, it falls apart and dies, then it sprouts new life . . . and eventually it is transformed into an oak tree.”

The buried acorn absorbs moisture from the soil and rain, and the outer husk softens. The bare seed inside is exposed, and things change. Little tendrils shoot out and start to grow down into the soil. The acorn falls apart, and that first stage basically dies, but the oak tree can’t come to life unless the seed dies. But a little acorn can become a HUGE tree!

The acorn can’t even begin to imagine the **size** and **power** and **majesty** and **beauty** of the oak tree. It can’t fathom becoming something big enough and strong enough for someone to build a treehouse in its branches, where kids can play. Mind blowing!

Our bodies are like the acorn planted in the ground. They get sick, weak, and they die. But that’s not the end, like the acorn falling apart in the ground isn’t the end.

We have the hope of experiencing a **new form of physical bodily existence** that is as different from our earthly bodies as the oak tree is different from an acorn.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says,

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Our natural body, our “Earth suit,” is subject to aging, disease and death. Like an acorn.

What a contrast with our spiritual body—our “New Earth suit”—which will be strong, vibrant, and glorious. Like a big, beautiful, glorious oak tree.

I love to meditate on the resurrection body, our spiritual body. We can see from the gospel records what Jesus’ resurrection body was like:

- Jesus’ body still had His wounds.
- It was physical. The disciples could touch Him; in fact He commanded that Thomas reach out and touch His wrist, and put his hand in Jesus’ side where the spear had pierced His chest.
- He could travel effortlessly and instantly, appearing and disappearing at will.
- He was able to pass through walls and doors.
- He could-and did-eat, drink, and talk.
- He handled material things (He wasn’t a ghost or an illusion).
- His resurrected body was more real, of more substance, than ours is.

His resurrected body was the oak tree compared to the acorn.

According to Randy Alcorn’s wonderful book *Heaven*, Curt is experiencing the intermediate heaven today. It’s unimaginably beautiful and glorious, but it’s not the still-future unification of heaven and earth where we will receive our resurrection bodies—and things will get even better.

Our “oak tree bodies” still lie ahead. And that sure makes me smile.

This blog post originally appeared at [Acorns, Oak Trees, and Our Son's Grave](#) on July 10, 2025.

The Biology of Human Uniqueness

Dr. Ray Bohlin demonstrates unique biological attributes that set humans apart because we are made in the image of God.

What's So Special About Humans?

As humans we tend to think of ourselves as rather unique in the created order of things. As Christians, we understand ourselves to be created in the image and likeness of God as we learn in Genesis 1:26. But what does this really mean? Certainly being made in God's image does not refer to our physical construction; God is spirit and therefore does not have a physical body. But God's plan from the beginning was to rescue us from our sin through the incarnation, God becoming man. Jesus was and is the Son of God, Messiah, the God-Man. Therefore it is not a stretch to suggest that our bodily make-up is meant to be the unique earthly home of Jesus and His Spirit within us. Therefore, I suggest that our biological make-up is unique in the animal kingdom since no other animal is made in His image.

But what does this really mean? I am going to borrow from several sources, principally Michael Denton's *Nature's Destiny*[\[1\]](#), to discuss the biological uniqueness of humans. The [Discovery Institute](#) is also in the process of producing a film series based on Denton's work, titled *Privileged Species: How the Cosmos is Designed for Human Life*.



We are able to point out numerous qualitative abilities in the human species found nowhere else in the animal kingdom. I will discuss these in detail below, but I'll provide a brief overview now to whet your appetite.

First, I'll be discussing our unique intelligence. Humans' ability to think abstract thoughts appears to be absolutely unique. It is difficult to arrive at a selective advantage in an evolutionary sense to this type of thinking, so where did it come from?

Second, and related to our intelligence, is our unique language capability. Most animals communicate with their own species, but no other species, including primates, actually use *language*. As toddlers we accumulate language by simply being around it. Chimps and gorillas have to go through painstaking trial and error and still can't communicate as a three-year-old does.

Third, our excellent vision allows us to use our intelligence, language and other capabilities to manipulate our surroundings in precise and advantageous ways.

Fourth, our excellent manipulative tool, the hand, is unsurpassed in other primates. We have both strength and fine motor control in our hands, allowing us to combine a strong grip and delicate finger movements that allow a wide range of movements. This, combined with our upright stance, provides an ability to restructure our immediate surroundings as no other species can.

We are also a highly social species which allows for quick distribution of ideas to everyone's benefit. And all these combine to allow us to be the only species to use and manipulate fire, which brings a host of unique abilities.

Human Intelligence and Language

As I mentioned above, our intelligence separates us from any other primate species. Our brain is three times the size of the brain of a chimp. But beyond that, the number of neurons and connections between neurons far surpasses any other mammal. Michael Denton cites that in each cubic millimeter of the human cortex, are 100,000 cells, about 4 kilometers of axonal wiring and 500 meters of dendrites, and around 1 billion synapse connections between neurons. We have 10 million more of these synapses than a rat brain.

The size and scope is one thing, but our mental capabilities are indeed unique. As mentioned above, humans are capable of abstract and conceptual thought. No other primate exhibits any signs of this capacity. In addition, our mathematical reasoning is completely *other* compared to other animals. You might suspect that some animals can count. But it is a learned response attached to reward. We don't really suspect the rat/horse/chimp knows what they are doing. Comparing calculus to simply counting bananas is just no comparison at all.

When you stop to consider our appreciation of the arts, there is no place to go but humans. James Trefil is a physicist fascinated by biology and evolution. But when considering the arts he says, "No matter how hard I try, I can't think of a single evolutionary pressure that would drive the ability of humans to produce and enjoy music and dance. . . . This has always seemed like a serious problem to me—perhaps even a more serious problem than that perceived by most of my colleagues."

When we turn to language, our uniqueness is informed even

further. Plants and animals all communicate in one form or another, but not by language as humans communicate. We communicate both new information and abstract concepts, something other species don't even approach. We possess the proper equipment to both produce and receive language and speech. And by proper equipment I mean both the brain processes and the anatomical necessities for actual speech (e.g., teeth, tongue, voice box, etc.). There is also a social ability that can utilize these upper levels of communication.

But we've heard about chimps and gorillas learning language. Kanzi, a bonobo chimpanzee, learned words and even symbolic use of a keyboard. Kanzi also learned through hearing the use of new words. But that is where it stopped.

To quote James Trefil again, "If we take the claims being advanced for Kanzi at face value, where are we? We have a member of the most intelligent primate species, a veritable Shakespeare of non-human animals, raised under special and unusual conditions, performing at the level of a human child of two and a half. But remember that in humans, real language begins just after this age. . . . Then we have to conclude that even in this optimal case, animals other than humans cannot learn real human language."

Human Vision and the Hand

Now I'd like to introduce two features we can easily take for granted, our hands and our eyes.

Ordinarily we don't think of our hands as being anything special. But just try to think of any other creature that can do the many and diverse things we can do with our hands. The closest match is the hand of a chimp. But chimp hands are larger, stronger, and even clumsy. Simple things like using all ten fingers to type, peel an apple, or tie a knot are beyond what chimps can do.

The strength in our fingers comes from larger muscles in the forearm and the fine manipulative control comes from much smaller muscles in the hand itself. Our ability to manipulate our environment with our hands is unparalleled. Using our intelligence we even devise additional tools for our hands to further extend our mastery of the world around us. Full use of our hands comes about from our upright and bipedal gait, allowing our hands the freedom not found in any other mammal.

In his book *Nature's Destiny* Michael Denton asks about the human hand "whether any other species possesses an organ approaching its capabilities. The answer simply must be that no other species possesses a manipulative organ remotely approaching the universal utility of the human hand. Even in the field of robotics, nothing has been built which even remotely equals the all-around manipulative capacity of the hand."

But in order to even use our hands well, we need exceptional vision to be able to detect all the little things our minds notice to manipulate. Given the physics of visible light and the dimensions and molecular process of detecting light in our eyes, the resolving power of the human eye is close to the optimum for a camera-type eye using biological cells and processes.

Some animals such as high-flying hawks and eagles detect motion from far greater distances that we can, and some organisms see much better in the dark than we do, but for all-around color vision, detail and resolution, our eyes seem to be the best there is. Combined with our highly interconnected brain, our upright gait for easily seeing straight ahead, a swiveling neck to see side to side, and our overall size, our eyes open the world to us as for no other species.

Developing science and technology, communicating to thousands and even millions through the written word, and simply exploring the world around us, are only possible through an

integrated use of our unique intelligence, social structure and speech, hands and vision.

The Use of Fire

As I have explored the biology of human uniqueness, I have focused on some of our individual capacities such as our intelligence, speech, our marvelous hands, and our unique all-around color vision. I have used throughout, the wonderful book by Michael Denton, *Nature's Destiny*. Now I'm looking at one of our key distinguishing characteristics which combine all of these. Humans are the only biological creatures that have mastered the use of fire. If you think for a minute, every other animal has nothing but fear when it comes to fire. We are also fearful of fire and the damage it can do, but we have also managed to harness it and use it.

There are a couple of obvious advantages for the use of fire. First it provides additional light after sundown that extends our activity into the evening. Second, fire provides additional warmth in the evening and allows us to venture into colder climates. Third, fire allows us to cook food, particularly meat which is a very significant source of fat calories and protein. Cooking our food certainly distinguishes us from any other creature and has allowed us to add the necessary energy to fully use that big brain of ours which is a major drain on our energy stores, even at night.

But beyond these, if we never harnessed the energy and power of fire, we would not have been able to develop tools involving metal. Using heat to forge ever more powerful hand tools and weapons revolutionized human culture. Without fire we could not have developed any form of chemistry and especially the use of electricity. Electricity has revolutionized human existence in the last 100 years. Fire is an influential and powerful tool indeed.

But how have we been able to do this? First, we need to take advantage of our intelligent capability for abstract thought and reasoning. As I said earlier, we too fear fire, but we need to be able to think about it and be curious enough to not only rationalize that we might be able to harness its power, but that it would also be useful. This ability to deduce the control and use of fire requires high-level reasoning.

Denton also points out that for a fire to be sustainable it needs to be at least 50 centimeters across (or about a foot and a half). To create a fire of this size we need our upright stance to walk the distance to gather the right amount and size of branches. That means that our upright stance, free arms, the manipulative tools of our hands, and our discerning vision work together to allow us to create a sustainable fire.

Therefore, the control and manipulation of fire requires a combined use of most of our unique biological capacities. Think about this the next time you sit around a campfire or grill your supper on a warm summer day. It's part of what makes us human!

Human Anatomy and Genome

In this article I have been focusing on aspects of human biology that make us unique in the universe of living organisms. I discussed in some detail our unique intelligence, allowing us complex and abstract thought. We have a unique ability to communicate audibly and through a symbolic written word. These combine with our stereo vision and unique manipulative tool the hand, to allow us sole possession of the ability to use and manipulate fire. All of these capabilities are made possible by several unique aspects of our anatomy.

Humans have the largest brain of any primate species. Whales, dolphins, and elephants have larger brains, but size is not the main distinctive. Our human brain is structured like no

other. If you were to open up just one cubic millimeter of our brain you would find over 100,000 cells with 4 kilometers of cell wiring and 1 billion connections between neurons. The structure and organization of our brain is definitely without parallel. Studies of our entire genome compared to chimpanzees indicate vast differences in non-coding sequences that influence the production of brain proteins. These changes are in the thousands.

In 1999, famous MIT linguist Noam Chomsky, reflected that "Thus, in the case of language, . . . (new research) is providing interesting grounds for taking seriously an idea that a few years ago would have seemed outlandish: that the language organ of the brain approaches a kind of optimal design, that it is in some interesting sense an optimal solution to the minimal design specifications the language organ must meet to be usable at all." Without our unique brain structure, our language ability would not be forthcoming.

When comparing our skeletal structure to those of our supposed closest ancestors according to an evolutionary explanation, there are major changes that would have been needed to be accomplished in a relatively short time. Casey Luskin from the Discovery Institute does an admirable job digging into these differences and makes some sweeping conclusions. Numerous studies indicate that between the lineage of *Australopithecus* and *Homo* there would need to be significant changes in shoulders, rib cage, spine, pelvis, hip, legs, arms, hands and feet. But of these major transitions, the fossil record is silent.

Luskin also refers to a study by Durrett and Schmidt in 2007 that estimates that a single-nucleotide mutation in a primate species would take 6 million years to become fixed. But what is needed are multiple mutations in multiple segments of the skeletal system and in the physiology of the brain. *Homo sapiens* are far more unique than many have suspected. The more we learn, the more unique we become.

Since humans are created in the image of God, we expect human biological uniqueness. Even more significantly, bearing His image indicates an affinity for humans by the Creator we cannot fully comprehend.

Notes

1. Michael Denton, *Nature's Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose in the Universe* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).

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How Contagious Are You?

When someone shared their cold with Sue Bohlin on a recent cruise, it made her think about how contagious we can be in different ways, for good and for bad.

Halfway through my last cruise, I suddenly became aware of my throat. That's always my first sign of a cold, so I started popping zinc tablets every few hours to fight back. People share their germs on cruise ships, especially those with thousands of passengers; contagion is just a fact of life. I wasn't surprised.

Many people are now more aware of social contagion. Just like colds and flu, we can easily "catch" other people's feelings and behaviors and beliefs.

Like anger. Proverbs 22:24-25 warns us, "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared."

Like entitlement. The proliferation of short “Karen” videos putting self-centered entitlement on full display seems to have made this obnoxiousness multiply.

While these two rotten character traits have proven to be socially contagious, what is deeply heartbreaking to me is the social contagion of teens (and even younger) identifying as transgender. Adolescence is hard and awkward for just about anyone, but when kids are addicted to social media and never put their phones down, the “trans disease” (for lack of a better term) sweeps through schools and classes and friend groups, picking up steam as it picks off youth struggling with who they are and afraid of who they are supposed to become.

Recently, when reading in 1 Samuel. I was struck by the people of Israel telling the last judge, Samuel, “Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.” (8:5)

Well, what do you know? Social contagion in the Old Testament!

I have been especially aware of the power of contagion ever since our family doctor asked me once, “You live with two depressed men (my husband and our son), and depression is contagious. What are you doing to protect yourself?”

I laughed, “As it happens, I just got off a short cruise with my sister. Four solid days of joy and laughter and fun with no depression in sight.” She said, “You need to do that regularly.” (And I do. Which is one reason I am “the cruise queen.”)

I didn’t realize depression could be contagious, but it makes sense. Because a number of negative things can be quite contagious. As my other son, who owns several specialty coffee cafés in San Francisco assures me, critical speech and gossip can be contagious. Some of his baristas had absorbed bad habits from each other and it’s heartbreaking.

Negativity is contagious. Like wearing sunglasses indoors, a

negative mindset can manifest in someone's words and even micro-expressions, coloring the thinking and reactions of those around them.

But you know what?

Gratitude can also be contagious.

Lightheartedness can be contagious.

Courtesy can be contagious.

Complimenting and affirming others can be contagious.

Generosity. Enthusiasm. Vulnerability, Laughter.

Even faith.

Contagion, it seems, can be bad . . . or beautiful.

George Washington and Religion

Kerby Anderson presents a compelling argument for the view that George Washington was a devoted Christian rather than a deist. He points to Washington's insistence on the importance of services for his soldiers, his personal church attendance, his prayer life and his commitment to the spiritual upbringing of his godchildren.

Background

What was George Washington's view of religion and in particular of Christianity? The historical perspective used to be that Washington was a Christian and orthodox in most of his beliefs. But the modern view has been that he was either a lukewarm Anglican or more likely a Deist.



I want to look at some new research that argues for the traditional view and against the modern view of George Washington's religion. One book is *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country*.[\[1\]](#) It is written by Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute and winner of the Templeton Award) and Jana Novak. Another book, written by Peter Lillback with Jerry Newcombe, is *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.[\[2\]](#)

George Washington was born into a Virginia family of moderate wealth and was exposed to various religious activities: lessons in religion, regular prayer, Sunday school attendance, and reverence for God. His mother had a daily ritual of retiring with a book of religious readings.

By the time he was a teenager, Washington had already assumed serious responsibilities as a professional surveyor and then as a major in the Virginia militia. His adventures in the wild lands gave him invaluable lessons about the military, Indians, and the British. Years later in a speech to the Delaware chiefs, Washington said, "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are."[\[3\]](#)

He studied the Bible as well as the writings of ancient heroes. The busts and portraits at Mount Vernon demonstrate this. There are busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick II of Prussia. In the dining room are portraits of the Virgin Mary and St. John.

Washington's own stepgranddaughter "Nelly" Custis saw him as a religious man. She wrote this to one of Washington's early biographers:

It was his custom to retire to his library at nine or ten o'clock, where he remained an hour before he went to his chamber. He always rose before the sun, and remained in his library until called to breakfast. I never witnessed his private devotions. I never inquired about them. I should have thought it the greatest heresy to doubt his firm belief in Christianity. His life, his writings, prove that he was a Christian. He was not one of those who act or pray, "that they may be seen of men." He communed with his God in secret.{4}

In what follows we will look at the evidence for George Washington's faith as it surfaced in his letters and actions as general and president.

Deism vs. Christianity

Pick up a book about George Washington written during the nineteenth century, and you will probably see that he is described as being a Christian. However, if you pick up a book written in the last seventy years, it will describe him as a Deist. Why the change?

The turning point seems to be a study by historian Paul F. Boller, Jr. entitled *George Washington and Religion*. His conclusion can be summarized in a single sentence: To the "unbiased observer" George Washington appears as a Deist, not a devout Christian.{5} Most historians since Boller accepted this idea and were less likely to assert that Washington was a Christian.

What do we mean by "Deism"? Deism is the belief that God is merely a watchmaker God who started the universe but is not involved in the affairs of humans and human history. One

definition of Deism is that “There is no special providence; no miracles or other divine interventions intrude upon the lawful natural order.”{6}

Was George Washington a Deist? He was not. It is worth noting that even historian Paul Boller admitted that religion was important to Washington as a leader. Boller writes, “he saw to it that divine services were performed by the chaplains as regularly as possible on the Sabbath for the soldiers under his command.”{7} We might reasonably ask, Why would chaplains be important to a Deist?

Boller even admits there are testimonials of Washington’s church attendance. This is important since many historians even go further than Boller and assert that Washington did not even attend church as a mature adult.

Michael Novak admits that some of the names Washington often used for God *sound* Deist, but that does not mean that he was a Deist. In fact, his prayers for God’s action were just the opposite of what you might hear from a Deist. Washington believed God favored the cause of liberty and should be beseeched to “interpose” his action on behalf of the Americans. He called for public thanksgiving for the many ways in which Americans experienced God’s hand in key events in our history.

Washington used more than eighty terms to refer to God, among them: Almighty God, Creator, Divine Goodness, Father of all mercies, and Lord of Hosts. The most common term he used in his writings and speeches was “Providence.” When he did so, he used the masculine personal pronoun “he.” Washington never refers directly to God as an “it,” as he does occasionally with Providence. God is personal.{8}

If we look at the history of the eighteenth century, there were many with orthodox religious beliefs who sometimes used the philosophical language of the enlightenment. Washington

was a Christian, even though he often used terms for God associated with Deists.

A Religious Nation Goes to War

There has been some dispute about how religious America was during the Revolutionary War. There was a shortage of churches and clergy (especially along the paths of westward migration). But we should also remember that this War of Independence followed the First Great Awakening.

At the first meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia (September 1774), the first motion from the floor was for prayer to seek guidance from God. But there was resistance, not because of the prayer, but because of the theological disagreements among the members (Anabaptist, Quakers, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians). Sam Adams settled the dispute by saying he was no bigot and could pray along with any minister as long as he was a patriot.[\[9\]](#) I have in my office a picture of a painting showing George Washington praying with men like Patrick Henry, John Jay, and Richard Henry Lee.

At the second meeting, they proposed that Washington be appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army. He did not think he was equal to the command but accepted it. He wrote his wife, "I shall rely, therefore, confidently on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall."[\[10\]](#) At the time, Washington was the only man on the continent in uniform since no Continental Army yet existed. To the British, he was the supreme traitor, in open rebellion to the King. His neck was at risk, and the American independence depended on him.

One event that George Washington believed showed God's providence was the Battle of Long Island in 1776. Washington

and his men were trapped on Brooklyn Heights, Long Island. The British were poised to crush the American army the next day and that would have been the end of the rebellion. Washington planned a bold move and began evacuating his troops under the cover of darkness using everything from fishing vessels to rowboats. But there was not enough time to accomplish the task. When morning came, the fog of night remained and only lifted in time for the British to see the last American boat crossing the East River beyond the reach of their guns. You can read more about this miraculous event in Michael Novak's book, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*.[\[11\]](#)

Washington also required chaplains for the Continental Army, and personally took time for prayer. He forbade his troops under pain of death from uttering blasphemies, even profanity. He called upon them to conduct themselves as Christian soldiers because the people demanded it.[\[12\]](#)

Washington's actions during the Revolutionary War demonstrate his Christian character.

First in War and First in Peace

In his eulogy for George Washington, Henry Lee said he was "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." We could also say the Washington demonstrated Christian character both in war and in peace.

While fulfilling his duties as general, he came to be known as a "nursing father." This is a biblical phrase (Num. 11:12, Is. 49:23 KJV) that appears in many of the tributes to Washington after his death. He brought together very diverse groups to fight the Revolutionary War by bridging ethnic and social divisions. This ranged from the regiment from Marblehead, Massachusetts (that included men of mixed race, blacks, and Indians), to the Virginian and southern aristocrats to the

yeomen in hunting shirts from western Virginia.

One of his orders stated that "All chaplains are to perform divine service tomorrow, and on every succeeding Sunday. . . . The commander in chief expects an exact compliance with this order, and that it be observed in future as an invariable rule of practice—and every neglect will be consider not only a breach of orders, but a disregard to decency, virtue and religion." [\[13\]](#)

Washington grew even more explicit as the war dragged on: "While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of a Christian." [\[14\]](#)

Washington lost a great deal of money during the war by paying for things out of his own pocket and by refusing a salary. He happily returned to Mount Vernon and spent happy years with his wife. But the constitutional convention in 1787 brought him to elective office. He was elected as president by unanimous vote in 1789.

In his inaugural address, Washington said, "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

He issued a thanksgiving proclamation in 1789 in which he asserted "the duty of all nations" in regard to God. His thanksgiving proclamation of 1795 proclaims there are signs of "Divine beneficence" in the world. And in his farewell address, he reminded Americans that "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Washington demonstrated Christian character in war and in peace.

Washington as Christian: Pro and Con

Let's summarize the arguments historians make about Washington's religious faith. Those who believe that George Washington was a Deist and not a Christian usually make the following observations.

First, Washington never took communion at Sunday services. Second, he refused to declare his specific beliefs in public. Third, he rarely used the name of Jesus Christ in private correspondence and in public utterances. Finally, while he believed in God and had an awareness of Providence in his life, it all seems more like a Greek or Roman view of fate.

Michael Novak's response to these observations is helpful. "All these objections have a grain of truth in them. Still, they are consistent with Washington's being a serious Christian who believed that he had a public vocation that required some tact regarding his private confessional life."[\[15\]](#) Novak adds:

It is not at all unusual for public men in pluralistic American life to maintain a notable reserve about their private convictions. They do not burden the public with declarations of their deepest beliefs, whose general force they trust their actions will sufficiently reveal. In the public forum, they happily give to Caesar what is Caesar's and in the private forum, to God what is God's.[\[16\]](#)

What are some of the reasons to believe Washington was a Christian? First, he religiously observed the Sabbath as a day of rest and frequently attended church services on that day. Second, many report that Washington reserved time for private prayer. Third, Washington saved many of the dozens of sermons sent to him by clergymen, and read some of them aloud to his

wife.

Fourth, Washington hung paintings of the Virgin Mary and St. John in places of honor in his dining room in Mount Vernon. Fifth, the chaplains who served under him during the long years of the Revolutionary War believed Washington was a Christian. Sixth, Washington (unlike Thomas Jefferson) was never accused by the press or his opponents of not being a Christian.

It is also worth noting that, unlike Jefferson, Washington agreed to be a godparent for at least eight children. This was far from a casual commitment since it required the godparents to agree to help insure that a child was raised in the Christian faith. Washington not only agreed to be a godparent, but presented his godsons and goddaughters with Bibles and prayer books.

George Washington was not a Deist who believed in a “watchmaker God.” He was a Christian and demonstrated that Christian character throughout his life.

Notes

1. Michael Novak and Jana Novak, *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country* (NY: Basic Books, 2006).
2. Peter Lillback, with Jerry Newcombe, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006).
3. Novak, *Washington's God*, 93.
4. Ibid., 136.
5. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.
6. Novak, *Washington's God*, 110.
7. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.
8. Ibid., 577.
9. Novak, *Washington's God*, 123.
10. Ibid, 64.
11. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense*

at the American Founding (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002).

12. Novak, *Washington's God*, 30-31.

13. Ibid., 90.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 219.

16. Ibid., 219-220.

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Abusive Churches

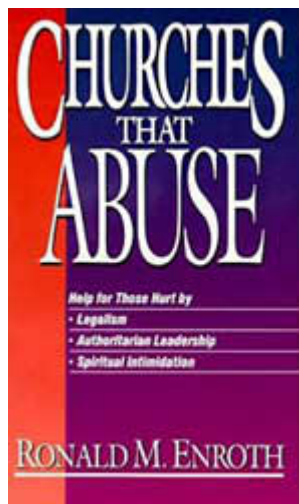
What characterizes abusive churches is their cultic method of ministry. Although outwardly orthodox in their theology, these churches use abusive and mind control methods to get their followers to submit to the organization. In this article Dr. Pat Zukeran covers eight characteristics of abusive churches.

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



We are all familiar with traditional cults such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. There are, however, other groups with cultic characteristics that do not fit the same profile as the traditional cults. Sometimes called "abusive churches" or even "Bible-based cults," they appear outwardly orthodox in their doctrinal beliefs. What distinguishes these groups or churches from genuine orthodox Christianity is their abusive, cultic-like methodology and philosophy of ministry.





In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ronald Enroth carefully examines several of these churches throughout the United States. He reveals the cultic methods these groups use and points out several distinguishing marks of abusive churches. At this point I will briefly introduce each of these characteristics and some of my own. Later, I'll discuss all these characteristics in detail.

First, abusive churches have a control-oriented style of leadership. Second, the leaders of such churches often use manipulation to gain complete submission from their members. Third, there is a rigid, legalistic lifestyle involving numerous requirements and minute details for daily life. Fourth, these churches tend to change their names often, especially once they are exposed by the media. Fifth, denouncing other churches is common because they see themselves as superior to all other churches. Sixth, these churches have a persecution complex and view themselves as being persecuted by the world, the media, and other Christian churches. Seventh, abusive churches specifically target young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. The eighth and final mark of abusive churches is the great difficulty members have in getting out of or leaving these churches, a process often marked by social, psychological, or emotional pain.

Those involved in a church that seems to reflect these characteristics would be wise to evaluate the situation thoroughly and leave the church if it is appropriate. Staying may increase the risks of damaging your family relationships and multiplies the likelihood of losing your perspective. Members of such churches often develop a distorted view of reality, distrust everyone, and suffer from stress, fear, and depression. Some former members even continue to experience

these things after escaping from an abusing church. There are also several documented cases in which associating with an abusive church has led to the deaths of individuals or their relatives.

Some of these groups have networks of many sister churches. In some cases these groups have split off from more mainstream denominations. Occasionally the new groups have even been denounced by the founding denomination. Such groups often disguise themselves by frequently changing the name of their organization, especially following adverse publicity. This practice makes the true nature of these organizations more difficult to determine for the unsuspecting individual. Some abusive churches have college ministries all across the country. On some university campuses such student movements are among the largest groups on their respective campuses.

It is important that Christians today know the Bible and know how to recognize such churches so as not to fall into their traps. In order to help people become more aware of churches which may be abusing their members, I now want to go through in more detail the eight characteristics I mentioned earlier.

Control-Oriented Leadership

A central feature of an abusive church is control-oriented leadership. The leader in an abusive church is dogmatic, self-confident, arrogant, and the spiritual focal point in the lives of his followers. The leader assumes he is more spiritually in tune with God than anyone else. He claims insight into Scripture that no one else has. Or, he may state that he receives personal revelations from God. Because of such claims, the leader's position and beliefs cannot be questioned; his statements are final. To members of this type of church or group, questioning the leader is the equivalent of questioning God. Although the leader may not come out and state this fact, this attitude is clearly seen by the treatment of those who dare to question or challenge the

leader. The leader of the movement often makes personal decisions for his followers. Individual thinking is prohibited; thus the followers become dependent on the leader.

In the hierarchy of such a church, the leader is, or tends to be, accountable to no one. Even if there is an elder board, it is usually made up of men who are loyal to, and will never disagree with, the leader. This style of leadership is not one endorsed in the Bible. According to Scripture all believers have equal access to God and are equal before Him because we are made in His image, and we are all under the authority of the Word of God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 believers are directed to measure all teachings against the Word of God. Acts 17:11 states that even the apostle Paul was under the authority of the Bible, and the Bereans were commended because they tested Paul's teachings with the Scriptures. Leaders and laity alike are to live according to Scripture.

Manipulation of Members

Abusive churches are characterized by the manipulation of their members. Manipulation is the use of external forces to get others to do what someone else wants them to do. Here manipulation is used to get people to submit to the leadership of the church. The tactics of manipulation include the use of guilt, peer pressure, intimidation, and threats of divine judgment from God for disobedience. Often harsh discipline is carried out publicly to promote ridicule and humiliation.

Another tactic is the "shepherding" philosophy. As practiced in many abusive churches this philosophy requires every member to be personally accountable to another more experienced person. To this person, one must reveal all personal thoughts, feelings, and discuss future decisions. This personal information, is not used to *help* the member, but to *control* the member.

Another means of control is isolation. Abusive churches may

cut off contact between a new member and his family, friends, and anyone else not associated with the church.

How different this style of leadership is from the leadership of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lovingly, gently, humbly, and sacrificially leads His sheep.

Rigid, Legalistic Lifestyle

The third characteristic of abusive churches is the rigid, legalistic lifestyle of their members. This rigidity is a natural result of the leadership style. Abusive churches require unwavering devotion to the church from their followers. Allegiance to the church has priority over allegiance to God, family, or anything else.

Often members are required or pressured to attend Bible studies five, six, or seven days a week. There is a requirement to do evangelism; a certain quota of contacts must be met, and some churches even require members to fill out time cards recording how many hours they spent in evangelism, etc. Daily schedules are made for the person; thus he is endlessly doing the church's ministry. Former members of one church told me they were working for their church from 5:00 am to 12:00 midnight five days a week.

Members of such churches frequently drop out of school, quit working, or even neglect their families to do the work required by the church. There are also guidelines for dress, dating, finances, and so on. Such details are held to be of major importance in these churches.

In churches like these, people begin to lose their personal identity and start acting like programmed robots. Many times, the pressure and demands of the church will cause a member to have a nervous breakdown or fall into severe depression. As I reflect on these characteristics I think of Jesus' words concerning the Pharisees who "tie up heavy loads and put them

on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger" (Matt. 23: 4). What a contrast from the leadership style of Jesus who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. . . .For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Frequent Changing of Group/Church Name

A fourth characteristic of abusive churches is a pattern of constantly changing the name of the church or campus ministry. Often a name change is a response to unfavorable publicity by the media. Some abusive churches have changed their name several times in the course of a few years.

If you are in such a church, one that has changed its name several times because of bad publicity, or if you feel unceasing pressure to live up to its demands, it is probably time to carefully evaluate the ministry of the church and your participation in it.

Denouncing All Other Churches

Let us now take a look at the fifth characteristic: abusive churches usually denounce all other Christian churches. They see themselves as spiritually elite. They feel that they alone have the truth and all other churches are corrupt. Therefore, they do not associate with other Christian churches. They often refer to themselves as some special group such as, "God's Green Berets," "The faithful remnant," or "God's end-time army." There is a sense of pride in abusive churches because members feel they have a special relationship with God and His movement in the world. In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ron Enroth quotes a former member of one such group who states, "Although we didn't come right out and say it, in our innermost hearts we really felt that there was no place in the world like our assembly. We thought the rest of Christianity was out to lunch." However the Bible makes it

clear, that there are no spiritually elite groups or churches. Ephesians 4:36 states, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope, when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all."

The Christian church universal is united by the same God, the same Holy Spirit, and the fundamental beliefs of the Bible which include such things as the Trinity, authority of the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and so on. In these central truths we stand united. A church which believes itself to be elite and does not associate with other Christian churches is not motivated by the spirit of God but by divisive pride.

Persecution Complex

The sixth characteristic follows naturally. Because abusive churches see themselves as elite, they expect persecution in the world and even feed on it. Criticism and exposure by the media are seen as proof that they are the true church being persecuted by Satan. However, the persecution received by abusive churches is different from the persecution received by Jesus and the Apostles.

Jesus and the Apostles were persecuted for preaching the truth. Abusive churches bring on much of their negative press because of their own actions. Yet, any criticism received, no matter what the source—whether Christian or secular—is always viewed as an attack from Satan, even if the criticisms are based on the Bible. This makes it difficult to witness to a person in such a church for he will see your attempt to share the gospel with him as persecution. Often in cases like these, when I am accused of persecuting, I simply reply, "I am here talking to you with the Word of God which you say you believe. How can this be persecution?" This approach often helps in

continuing the dialogue with a member of an abusive church who has been brainwashed to believe that all opposition is persecution.

Targeting Young Adults

The seventh characteristic of abusive churches is that they tend to target young adults ages 18-25 who are in the middle class, well educated, idealistic, and often immature Christians. Young adults are the perfect age group to focus on because they are often looking for a cause to give their lives to, and they need love, affirmation, and acceptance. Often these churches will provide this, and the leaders frequently take the role of surrogate parents.

Painful Exit Process

The eighth characteristic is a painful and difficult exit process. Members in many such churches are afraid to leave because of intimidation, pressure, and threats of divine judgment. Sometimes members who exit are harassed and pursued by church leaders. The majority of the time, former members are publicly ridiculed and humiliated before the church, and members are told not to associate in any way with any former members. This practice is called shunning.

Many who leave abusive churches because of the intimidation and brainwashing, actually feel they have left God Himself. None of their former associates will fellowship with them, and they feel isolated, abused, and fearful of the world. One former member of a particular campus ministry said, "If you leave without the leadership's approval, condemnation and guilt are heaped upon you. My pastor told me he thought it was satanic for me to leave and wondered if I could continue my salvation experience."

Let me conclude this discussion by sharing some practical ways of reaching those who are involved in abusive churches. First,

we must begin with prayer. Witnessing to those brainwashed in abusive churches is often intimidating and difficult. Often leaders will not allow an individual member to meet with an outsider unless accompanied by an older, more experienced person who is trained in debating and/or intimidation. Therefore, we must pray (1) for a chance to speak with the individual{1} and that he would be open to what we have to share.{2}

Second, lovingly confront the person and surface some biblical issues. Often, abusive churches have a bizarre teaching or a theological error that can be pointed out. In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ron Enroth documents several examples of this. For instance, the leader of one church had strange teachings based on his claims of extra-biblical revelations from God.{3} These included dietary laws, sexual behavior, home decorations, and others. The leader of another group called doctors “medical deities.” He also claimed medicines had demonic names and if taken, opened a person up to demonic influence.{4} Pointing out errors, inconsistencies, and bizarre beliefs may open the individual’s mind and prompt him to begin asking questions.

Third, share articles you may find in the newspaper or in magazines on the particular church under discussion. The book that I have often quoted from, *Churches That Abuse*, is an excellent resource. The key is to get the individual to start asking questions and research answers for himself. Tell him to test everything with the Scriptures and not to be afraid to ask questions. If the leader is afraid or hesitant to answer a member’s honest questions, the maturity of that leadership may be suspect.

Jesus, however, said that truth is a means of freedom, not bondage. He said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Notes

1. Ronald Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), p. 118.
2. Ibid., p. 181.
3. Ibid., p. 128.
4. Ibid., p. 170.

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God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally

Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an introduction and overview of Doug Pollock's book by the same title. Those who want to learn more about how to have natural and effective spiritual conversations are encouraged to read (and apply) Pollock's book for themselves.

Creating God Space

If you're a Christian, you probably wrestle from time to time with how best to share your faith with non-Christian friends and family. I mean, let's face it. We often *want* to share our faith. But we're a bit confused (maybe even overwhelmed) with how to go about it in a natural and non-threatening way. *Is there a way to have spiritual conversations naturally?*



According to Doug Pollock, the answer is “Yes”—and it all begins with something he calls “God Space.” “I often wonder,” he says, “what would happen if . . . the body of Christ could create low-risk, high-grace places for people to pursue their need to have spiritual conversations.”[\[1\]](#) But Doug not only wonders about it, he’s also spent the better part of his adult life actually doing it—and training others to do it too. Although he’s had many roles, he’s probably best known for his work as an author, speaker, and evangelism trainer for Athletes in Action.[\[2\]](#) His passion, however, is pointing people to Christ through spiritual conversations in which people have the freedom to simply be themselves.

You see, Doug believes that people actually want (and even need) to have such conversations. Moreover, they’re often even willing to have them. The problem, of course, is that such conversations can often seem intimidating—even threatening—to both Christian and non-Christian alike. So Doug advocates creating a “safe space” in which to have such conversations. But he warns us that for many non-Christians in our world today, the church is often *not* perceived as safe.[\[3\]](#) Hence, he says, if we want to reach people for Christ, then we’ve got to go to *them*—and help create a “safe space” for spiritual conversations right where they are.

Doug calls it “God Space” —a space where “God is . . . encountered in . . . ways that address the longings and cries of the heart.” In God Space “the ‘unworthy’ feel safe enough to bring their real selves . . . into the light, and to journey, one step at a time, toward the magnetic pull they sense deep in their souls.” It’s a space where “spiritual curiosity is aroused, and the message of Christianity becomes plausible.”[\[4\]](#)

Does this sound like something you’d be interested in learning more about? Then keep reading as we consider Doug’s book in more detail.

Spiritual Conversation-Killers

Doug Pollock offers some great advice about how to have natural, non-threatening spiritual conversations with those who don't know Christ. Before discussing this advice in more detail, however, we first need to pause and consider some of the ways in which we might unintentionally shut-down, or "kill," a spiritual conversation before it even has a chance to get going.

Doug describes ten "spiritual conversation-killers" in his book. Although we can't discuss them all, we'll at least mention a few of them. To get started, think of the non-Christian people you know and interact with on a somewhat regular basis. How many of them would be interested in having a "low-risk, high-grace" spiritual conversation with you? If your answer is few to none of them, then you might be guilty of the most basic spiritual conversation-killer of them all: "an unbelieving heart."[\[5\]](#) If we assume that the non-Christians we know aren't interested in talking about spiritual things, then we probably won't have many spiritual conversations with them.

And Doug says this is a big mistake. "I've had spiritual conversations with people all over the world," he writes, "including the supposed 'tough places.' I think it's because the Holy Spirit has given me a conviction that if God has put eternity in every person's heart, which is what Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us, then *all* people were made for spiritual conversations."[\[6\]](#) So let's not "kill" an opportunity for spiritual conversations because of unbelief. Instead, let's assume that if we approach such conversations wisely, we'll find people eager to talk with us.

Okay, so how do we approach such conversations wisely? In my opinion, the best way to have good *spiritual* conversations is simply to apply some of the very same principles that go into having good conversations of any sort.[\[7\]](#) For example,

how well would my conversation go if I was disrespectful of the other person's beliefs or opinions? Or what if I came across as harsh, combative, or domineering? Would such conversations be successful? Probably not. And if that's the case with everyday conversations, then it's probably the case with spiritual conversations too. So if we want to have good spiritual conversations, we need to be humble, gracious, kind and polite. If not, we'll probably "kill" whatever spiritual conversations we might otherwise have had. And when that happens, no one wins.

Wondering Your Way Into Spiritual Conversations

In God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally, Doug has four great chapters on *noticing*, *serving*, *listening*, and *wondering* your way into spiritual conversations. For our purposes, let's direct our attention to that final chapter, which involves "wondering" our way into spiritual conversations. "Of all the things you'll read in this book," Doug tells us, "this chapter holds the most promise if you truly want to see the quality and quantity of your spiritual conversations increase."[\[8\]](#)

So how does it work? How do we *wonder* our way into spiritual conversations? As Doug lays it out for us, there are essentially two steps. First, we have to be really good listeners.[\[9\]](#) If we're not actively listening to what people are telling us, then we're not going to have much to wonder about. That's because we *wonder* our way into spiritual conversations by asking good questions about what another person is telling us. That's step two. After listening carefully to what the other person is saying, we begin to wonder "out loud" by asking questions that are relevant to the conversation we're having.[\[10\]](#)

According to Doug, "good wondering questions" will

“flow naturally out of your context and . . . conversations.” They reveal “that you have listened thoughtfully.” They “are open-ended and promote more dialogue and reflection.” They “probe sensitively and reflectively into someone’s belief systems.” And finally, such questions encourage “others to investigate the Christian life” for themselves.[{11}](#)

So by listening carefully and asking good “wondering” questions about what you’re being told, you can open the door to all sorts of spiritual conversations. Doug even offers some examples of “good ways to start wondering.”[{12}](#) Suppose your conversation partner has made an interesting claim or expressed an intriguing perspective on some issue. You might respond by saying, “That’s an interesting perspective; I’m wondering how you arrived at that conclusion?”[{13}](#) Notice how such a question not only demonstrates an interest in, and respect for, the other person and their views—it also serves to keep the conversation moving forward in a positive direction. Indeed, once you get a knack for listening carefully and asking good wondering questions, who knows how many spiritual conversations you might find yourself having!

Bringing the Bible Into Your Conversations

Let’s now discuss Doug’s advice about bringing the Bible into our conversations.[{15}](#)

The word of God is powerful. Paul describes it as “the sword of the Spirit.”[{16}](#) And the author of Hebrews tells us it can “judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” [{17}](#) Indeed, it’s partly because the Bible is so powerful, that we need to be careful about the way in which we bring it into our conversations.

As Doug reminds us, “If people sense you’re trying to use the Bible as an authoritative ‘crowbar’ to beat them into

submitting to your viewpoint, your conversation is likely over. However, if you humbly ask for permission to introduce the Scriptures into your dialogue, ‘deep spiritual magic’ begins to happen.”{18} The key point here, of course, is *asking for permission*. This is important and Doug encourages us to always make a habit of it.{19} After all, if the person has given you permission to share something from the Bible, then they won’t feel awkward or threatened when you do so. And if they *haven’t* given you permission, then it’s probably better just to wait and pray for a more opportune time.

Okay, that sounds good. But how can we know when it’s right to ask for permission? Here we need a measure of wisdom and even plain common sense. In general, however, when the person expresses an *interest* in some issue about which the Bible speaks, it might be a good time to ask for *permission* to share what the Bible says. Doug gives the example of talking with some non-Christian college students about the meaning of love.{20} The students were intensely interested in this topic, but they were having a hard time defining what the word even meant. After discussing the issue for a bit, Doug asked for permission to share what the Bible has to say about love. Having gotten their permission, he directed them to the famous love passage in 1 Corinthians 13. Primed and ready, the students eagerly listened to what the Bible had to say. Its message had suddenly become relevant to them, for it spoke directly to an issue about which they cared deeply.

If we could learn how to introduce the Bible like *that*, our non-Christian friends might be more eager to hear what it says. In the next section we’ll conclude our discussion of Doug’s book by considering “missed opportunities” and “burned bridges.”{21}

Missed Opportunities and Burned Bridges

We’ve considered several ways to improve our conversations, but it’s easy to make mistakes. So now we’ll

consider Doug's advice about "missed opportunities" and "burned bridges." Can "missed opportunities" be reclaimed and "burned bridges" be rebuilt? And if so, then how do we do it?

Let's first consider missed opportunities. Suppose you had a conversation with a neighbor who made a comment that left a wide-open door for spiritual conversation—and you said . . . nothing. We've probably all had conversations like this. Maybe the comment caught us off guard, and we just weren't sure how to respond. Or maybe we felt too tired, or scared, or something else. Whatever the reason, we can "reclaim" such missed opportunities. It's often not even that hard. Doug tells of missing out on a great opportunity because he just wasn't sure what to say. About a month later, however, he got another opportunity. He told the person that he'd been thinking a lot about a comment which they had previously made. Intrigued, the person asked what it was—and almost immediately they were right back where they had left off a month earlier!{22}

Okay, that's the easy one. But what if we *didn't* remain silent. What if we said the *wrong* thing— and now feel like we've burned our bridges with another person? Granted, this is more difficult. But Doug throws down a challenge. For once we recognize and admit our mistake to ourselves, we can then confess it to God and bring the issue before Him in prayer. After praying about it, Doug says, we can actually go to the person and let them know that we've been thinking about how we "come across" in spiritual conversations. We can even ask if they'd be willing to give us "some honest feedback" about how others might perceive us in this area. And if so, then we can listen carefully and apologize for any mistakes we might have made. Of course, we can't predict how the other person will respond. But by taking this approach, we can go a long way toward restoring the relationship.{23}

If you'd be interested in creating some "God Space" for your own conversations, then I encourage you to get (and read)

Doug's book for yourself. I think you'll be really glad you did.

Notes

1. Doug Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2009), 11-12.
2. For more on Doug, check out his website: www.godsgps.com/
3. Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
4. The citations in this paragraph can be found in Pollock, *God Space*, 20-21.
5. This is "Killer 1" in Doug's view. See Pollock, *God Space*, 24.
6. Ibid., 25.
7. In what follows, I briefly mention several of the spiritual conversation-killers which Doug discusses on pp. 29-32. Specifically, Doug mentions conversation "killers" like disrespect, control, judgment and combativeness.
8. Pollock, *God Space*, 65.
9. See Doug's chapter, "Listening Your Way Into Spiritual Conversations," in Pollock, *God Space*, 53-64.
10. Ibid., 14.
11. All of the quoted material in this paragraph comes from a section on "Good Wondering Questions" in Pollock, *God Space*, 73.
12. See the examples under this section heading in Pollock, *God Space*, 73.
13. Ibid., 73.
14. This is one way in which Doug likes to refer to non-Christians. See Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
15. See Pollock's chapter 9, "Bringing the Bible into your Conversations," in *God Space*, 87-99.
16. Ephesians 6:17.
17. Hebrews 4:12 (NASB).
18. Pollock, *God Space*, 95.
19. Ibid., 93.
20. See the discussion in Pollock, *God Space*, 90-94.

21. Doug discusses this topic in chapter 10, "Reclaiming Missed Opportunities and Rebuilding Burned Bridges," 100-106.
22. Doug shares this story on pp. 101-103.
23. The citations in this paragraph come from Doug's discussion on p. 106.

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Will Everyone Be Saved? A Look at Universalism

Rick Wade covers some of the pros and cons in the universalism controversy. Bottom line? No.

In the spring of 2011, Pastor Rob Bell's book *Love Wins* hit the book stores, but the furor over the book started even before that. The charge was heresy. Bell appeared to be teaching Universalism, the belief that everyone will be saved in the end. In fact, Bell *doesn't* make a case for Universalism in the book, although his rejection of the traditional view of hell makes it seem so at first.

This will not be [a review of Love Wins](#) but rather a look at Universalism itself. It won't do to simply label Universalism as heresy and be done with it. The way people responded to Bell's book illustrates the problem.^[1] It's better to understand *why* this teaching has been and should be rejected.



It is important to try to represent others' views fairly. This article, which is what aired on Probe's radio program, is too short to do Universalism justice; there is way too much involved in it. Here I'll confine myself to introducing some

of the important issues involved. However, a longer article in PDF form is available [here](#) to fill out the issue some more.{2}

Universalism has been believed by some Christians since the early centuries of the church. What makes it attractive? For one thing, Universalists wonder how a loving God could send people to hell—a place of conscious torment—forever. Furthermore, God is a God of justice, and a punishment of eternal torment seems incommensurate with our finite sins, as bad as they may be.

Universalists find scriptural support primarily in Paul's writings where he declares, for example, that "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Rom 5:18).

Before digging in, I need to make an important distinction. I'll be talking about *Christian* Universalism, not *pluralistic* Universalism. Pluralistic Universalism is the belief that everyone in the world will be "saved" by some almighty being or force that the various religions understand in different ways. *Christian* Universalism, by contrast, is the belief that Christianity holds the truth about God, man, and salvation, and that, contrary to the traditional belief, *everyone* will be saved through faith in Christ, even if on the other side of the grave.

The Love and Justice in God

Universalists take the traditional view of hell as being completely out of keeping with the loving character of God.{3} Philosopher Thomas Talbott believes that, because love is basic to the nature of God, everything God does has a loving aspect. Thus, there can be no eternal judgment against a person.

Because of this, Talbott sees God's justice primarily as *remedial* or *restorative*, not as *retributive* or *punitive*.

Speaking of Israel, for example, he points out that God “did not spare the natural branches” (Romans 11:21), yet eventually God will have mercy on them. Couldn’t it be the same for the Gentiles, too? God’s grand project since the Fall has been to save people. If He doesn’t save all, hasn’t He failed?[\[4\]](#)

Scripture claims both that God is just and that God is love (see Deut. 32:41 and John 4:8). It’s also clear that God administers retributive justice. This is seen in Isaiah 3:11 where God says that what the wicked “have dealt out shall be done to him.” Consider, too, God’s judgment against the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deut. 20:16-17). There is no mention of restoration.

For Universalists, love is supreme; justice serves love. Why not the other way around? Why shouldn’t love serve justice? N. T. Wright asks why *either* love or justice ought to be seen as the highest expression of God’s nature. Perhaps, he says, both are expressions of God’s *holiness*.[\[5\]](#)

The cross work of Christ is instructive here. Our hope for salvation rests on the fact that on the cross “He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf” (2 Cor. 5:21; see also Rom. 3:25; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 10:10,12,14; Isa. 53:5). What kind of judgment fell on Christ? It was *punitive*, not *restorative*, and it was properly ours.

Still, even with all this, how can we possibly regard *everlasting* punishment as just? It’s important to understand that judgment isn’t merely a reflection of a sin:punishment ratio. Believing in God in the biblical sense involves both our acceptance of God in all His glory and our submission to Him whatever He may command or promise. Thus, to *not* believe in God in this full sense is to reject God. So when people will be punished in hell, it won’t be simply a matter of paybacks for individual sins. It will be because they rejected God.

Paul and Universalism

In addition to the appeal to the love of God, Universalists often look to the letters of Paul for support. Writes Thomas Talbott, "Unlike most conservatives, I see no way to escape the conclusion that St. Paul was an obvious Universalist." [\[6\]](#)

Where does he find this in Paul's letters? Romans 5 and 11 are key passages. In Romans 5, Paul compares the first Adam with the second Adam, Christ. In verse 18 he writes, "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." In Romans 11:32 he writes, "For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all." "All" is taken quite literally to mean everyone tainted by sin. [\[7\]](#) What can we say in response?

Paul's main point in Romans, with respect to the issue at hand, is that salvation is not just for Jews but for all people, and it comes through faith in Jesus. In chapters 1 through 4, Paul argues that everyone knows God exists but sins anyway and is deserving of punishment. Furthermore, the Jews had no safety net because they possessed the law; they broke the law themselves. Salvation has come through faith in Christ alone. In fact, faith has always been the basis of salvation. Paul sums up in chapter 5: through Adam everyone is tainted by sin; through Christ alone is found salvation for everyone. That he doesn't mean every single person *will* necessarily be saved is clear in Romans 11:22. The Jews who will be grafted back in are those who "do not continue in their unbelief."

Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 is an important passage for understanding Paul's teaching on eternal punishment. There Paul says that those who do not obey the gospel "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Gregory

MacDonald, a Universalist, acknowledges that this is an especially problematic passage for Universalists.[{8}](#)

Jesus and Universalism

It's often been noted that Jesus makes the strongest statements on hell in Scripture. Universalists believe they have been misunderstood.

Given that Paul clearly taught Universalism, Thomas Talbott believes, passages such as Matthew 25, where Jesus spoke of separating the sheep from the goats, must be interpreted in that light. Talbott characterizes Jesus' prophetic teachings as "hyperbole, metaphor, and riddle . . . parable and colorful stories."[{9}](#) He says that "Had it been Jesus' intention to address the question of universal salvation . . . in a clear and systematic way, I'm sure he was capable of doing so."[{10}](#) Jesus is simply teaching what would have been our fate were it not for the atonement.[{11}](#)

Did Jesus make any clear statements about the finality of judgment? I'll mention just three passages.

In Matthew chapter 7 we read the severe warning from Jesus that in the end not everyone who claims Jesus as Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. "I declare to them," Jesus said, "'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (vv. 21-23). There is no mention of a second chance later.

In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), when those who weren't prepared knocked on the door and asked to be let in, the bridegroom refused, saying he didn't know them. One must be prepared or be locked out. There's no hint of a later unlocking of the door.

In Matthew 25:46, Jesus speaks of "everlasting punishment." "Everlasting" is the English translation of the Greek word

aiōnion. Universalists argue that this word refers to an age of punishment because the root word, *aiōn*, means just that—an age with a beginning and an end. But *aiōnion* isn't just a form of *aiōn*; it is a form of the word *aiōnios* which means “eternal.”

According to the standard Greek lexicon of our day, *aiōnios* can mean, among other things, with a beginning but without an end.[{12}](#) One example is when Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:2,3). Paul says that this new home is “eternal in the heavens” (Romans 5:1).[{13}](#)

When Jesus speaks of punishment in Matt. 25:46 as everlasting, He means just that. Everlasting life or everlasting punishment; it's one or the other.

Postmortem Salvation

Because obviously not everyone dies in Christ, postmortem salvation is an essential component of Universalism. There must be people saved after death.

There is no direct scriptural teaching about postmortem salvation. The closest is the much disputed passage in 1 Peter 3 where Peter speaks of Jesus making proclamation to the spirits in prison (vv. 19-20). It is not at all clear that the event spoken of in 1 Peter refers to the evangelization of all the lost after death. Theologian and New Testament scholar Wayne Grudem names five possible interpretations of this passage in an article, and says that even more are possible.[{14}](#)

Gregory MacDonald believes that Rev. 21:25, which says that the gates to the New Jerusalem will never be closed, indicates that unbelievers can exercise faith after death and come in. Verse 24 speaks of the kings of the earth entering the city along with the glory and honor of the nations. MacDonald identifies these with the kings defeated earlier with the

beast (19:19). They had been enemies; now they are not.

In response, we note that “kings of the earth” is a common designation in Scripture for earthly rulers.[{15}](#) It is entirely reasonable to see John, in Revelation, as talking about one group of kings who side with the beast and another group who are part of the kingdom and who enter to bring homage to *the* King.

The wall around the city marks a boundary between those who may enter and those outside.[{16}](#) “Outside” doesn’t necessarily mean simply outside spatially but can also mean those not included in the circle or group.[{17}](#) Those who are able to enter the city are those whose names have been written in the Lamb’s book of life (21:27). No promise is given that a person’s name can be entered after death.

There is no clear promise in Scripture that there will be an opportunity for people to be saved after death. Are we willing to risk the eternal damnation of people by presenting the supposition that there will be?[{18}](#) Universalism is conjecture built upon a basic notion of what the love of God must mean. The case built from Scripture, however, is too fragile to sustain it.

This article barely scrapes the surface of this subject. I urge you to look at the longer article, “Universalism: A Biblical and Theological Critique,” also on Probe’s web site.

Notes

1. My comments regarding the hasty reaction to *Love Wins* are given in a short article on Probe’s web site titled [“\(Ir\)Responsible Critique: The Rob Bell Affair.”](#)
2. The longer version, titled [“Universalism: A Biblical and Theological Critique,”](#) is available on Probe’s web site.
3. Gregory MacDonald, a Universalist, states that “The love of

God is very important for the Universalist. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a strong belief in God's love that often drives people towards Universalism." Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006), 100. Note that "Gregory MacDonald" is a pen named used by Robin A. Parry. To reduce the possibility for confusion over book titles and author names, I will refer to him as MacDonald when referencing his book *The Evangelical Universalist*.

4. See for example John A.T. Robinson, *In the End God* (New York: Harper & Row: 1968), 116.

5. N. T. Wright, "Universalism and the World-Wide Community," *Churchman* 89 (1975): 197-212.

6. Thomas Talbott, "A Pauline Interpretation of Divine Judgment," in Parry and Partridge, *Universal Salvation?*, 48.

7. Thomas Talbott, "Christ Victorious," in Parry and Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation?*, 18-19.

8. MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*. 151-54.

9. Talbott, "A Pauline Interpretation of Divine Judgment," in Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge., eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 43.

10. Talbott, "A Pauline Interpretation," 50-51, n. 18.

11. Ibid., 45.

12. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. "????????".

13. Other Scriptures that refer to our future as eternal include Luke 1:33, John 4:14, John 6:51, 58; 8:51; 10:28;

11:26; and Rev. 22:5. Another reason we know eternal life extends into the future in a temporal sense is because it is the life of the Son and he has no end (1 Jn. 5:11; cf. Jn. 1:4). We will have life everlasting because Jesus, to whom we are now connected, has life everlasting.

14. Wayne A. Grudem, "Christ Preaching Through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19-20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature," *Trinity Journal* 7.2 (Fall, 1986): 3-31.

15. See Matt. 17:25; Acts 4:26; Rev. 6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9.

16. Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Wall, Hedge, Palisade," by N. Hillyer, 3:948. Hillyer takes the wall to be symbolic, but the same meaning would apply to a literal interpretation.

17. For other Scriptures on this use of "outside" see Mk. 4:11; 1 Cor. 5:12f; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12.

18. See Jay Wesley Richards, "A Pascalian Argument Against Universalism," in William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards, *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 217-218.

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Socialism and Society

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the popularity of socialist ideas in America from a biblical perspective.

Socialism is more popular today than anyone would have predicted a few years ago. A significant number of socialist

characters can be found in Congress. Universities have many professors who are promoting socialism. And more young people than ever believe socialism is superior to capitalism.



Why is socialism so appealing to so many Americans? Young people are drawn to the siren song of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Part of the reason is that it appeals to their sense of fairness. Another reason is that it promises lots of free stuff.

Free college tuition and student loan forgiveness are examples. The millennial generation (Generation Y) and the iGen generation (Generation Z) have lots of student debt. They see the need but forget that someone would have to pay for this new massive entitlement. And they rarely stop and think about why someone who didn't go to college and took a blue-collar job should pay for their university education. These may be the most educated generations in history, but they don't seem to spend too much time reflecting on what they supposedly learned in economics.

The cost of some of these policies is enormous. Just covering the cost of tuition at public colleges and universities is estimated at \$70 billion a year. One study of the cost of government-run health care (called "Medicare for All") was estimated to cost \$32 trillion during the first ten years. Some estimate the cost of the "Green New Deal" to be \$93 trillion. We can certainly debate how accurate some of those estimates are, but we can't ignore that they would be very expensive once these programs are implemented.

There is some evidence that the popularity of socialism is waning. A post-election survey done by the Cultural Research

Center shows a significant decline in support for socialism. George Barna believes that another reason for this decline is the aggressive marketing of a government-driven culture that show young and old what socialism in America would really be like.

He found that the most precipitous decline in support for socialism was among Americans ages 30 to 49. Just a decade ago, they were the demographic I often pointed to as those who supported socialism more than capitalism. That has changed significantly.

Socialism is less popular even for Americans who are age 50 years or older. In the past, they have been the group most consistent in their support of capitalism. But even in this group, there was an eight percentage-point decline of support for socialism.

The demographic groups with the least support for socialism were Christians who had a biblical worldview and what George Barna calls SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians). But there are still a small percentage of them who support socialism. That is why I also address whether the Bible teaches socialism.

The Promise of Socialism

In order to understand the appeal of socialism, we need to make a clear distinction between capitalism and socialism. *Capitalism* is an economic system in which there is private property and the means of production are privately owned. In capitalism, there is a limited role for government. *Socialism* is an economic system in which there is public or state ownership of the means of production, and the primary focus is on providing an equality of outcomes. In socialism, the state is all-important and involved in central planning.

Often when young people are surveyed about socialism, the

pollster does not provide a definition. If you merely believe socialism means more equality in society, then you can see why so many choose socialism over capitalism. Also, young people under the age of 30 are probably the least likely to associate socialism with Soviet-style repression. Instead, they may have in their minds the current government push toward European socialism and find that more attractive.

There is also an important philosophical reason for the popularity of socialism. When Karl Marx first proposed the concepts of socialism and communism, he enjoyed an intellectual advantage. He could talk about the problems with capitalism the modern world was going through as they were adapting to the difficult process of industrialization. He could contrast the *reality* of capitalism with the *utopian* ideal of socialism.

Utopian visions will always win out over the harsh reality of the world. But we now have the terrible record of socialism. Unfortunately, socialism's death toll never quite gets factored into any equation. The late columnist Joseph Sobran said: "It makes no difference that socialism's actual record is terribly bloody; socialism is forever judged by its promises and supposed possibilities, while capitalism is judged by its worst cases."[\[1\]](#)

Dinesh D'Souza reminds us that many countries have tried socialism and all failed. The first socialist experiment was the Soviet Union, then came lots of countries in eastern Europe (Poland, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and East Germany). Add to that countries in Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, North Korea, and China) and countries in South America (Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Venezuela) and Africa (Angola, Ghana, Tanzania, Benin, Mali, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). By his count, there are 25 failed experiments in socialism.[\[2\]](#)

The typical answer to these failures is that each of these

wasn't done correctly. The failure of these socialist experiments was a failure of implementation. But this time, they say, we will get it right. Believing in socialism apparently mean never having to say you're sorry.

In the next section we will look at the argument that democratic socialism is the ideal we should pursue. We should ignore this list of socialist failures and focus on socialism in the Scandinavian countries.

A Different Kind of Socialism

Proponents of socialism not only argue that it was not implemented correctly in the past but also argue that what they are proposing is "democratic socialism." They usually point to the Scandinavian countries as examples.

Anders Hagstrom in one of his videos asks, "What does socialism mean to [people such as actor and comedian Jim Carrey]?" He says that conversations about socialism often go like this: "A liberal says we should be socialist. A conservative points to Venezuela, and says socialism doesn't work. A liberal says, What about Sweden and Norway? The conservative then points out that those countries aren't actually socialist."[\[3\]](#)

He says that even if we accept the comment by liberals, there is a problem. "Nordic countries have tiny populations of less than 10 million. And copying and pasting their policies to a country of 330 million isn't going to work." These Nordic countries were successful before they adopted the redistributive policies they have now. Here's a reality check: if Sweden were to join the U.S. as a state, Sweden would be poorer than all but 12 states.

Hagstrom also explains that the policies of true socialists like Senator Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez go far beyond what the Nordic countries have. For example, Bernie

Sanders wants a planned economy. None of the Nordic states have this. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wants to abolish profit. None of the Nordic countries have done that. And both of them want a universal minimum wage. None of the Nordic states have that.

There's another problem with the argument. These countries aren't socialist. John Stossel in one of his videos interviewed a prominent Swedish historian.[\[4\]](#) Johan Norberg makes it clear that "Sweden is not socialist—because the government doesn't own the means of production. To see that, you have to go to Venezuela or Cuba or North Korea." He does admit that the country did have something that resembled socialism a few decades ago. The government heavily taxed the citizens and spent heavily. That was not a good period in Swedish history, especially for the economy.

Yet even with the high Swedish taxes, there was simply not enough money to fund Sweden's huge welfare state. Norberg explains that "People couldn't get the pension that they thought they depended on for the future." At this point, the Swedish people had enough and began to reduce the size and scope of the government.

John Stossel says, "They cut public spending, privatized the national rail network, abolished certain government monopolies, eliminated inheritance taxes and sold state-owned businesses like the maker of Absolut vodka." While it is true that Sweden does have a larger welfare state than the US and higher taxes than the US, there are many other areas where Sweden is actually more free market.

Socialism and Equality

One of the moral arguments for socialism is that it creates a society with more social and economic equality. Proponents want us to consider the fairness argument when applied to a

free market. How fair is it that basketball star Lebron James makes more than \$37 million when a social worker starting out only makes about \$30,000? Even more extreme is the estimate that Jeff Bezos makes more than \$320 million a day while the average Amazon salary is around \$35,000 a year.

Of course, this is what happens in a free society where people with different skills, different abilities, and different motivations are allowed to participate in a free market. You will get inequality, but you also have a free society where people can use their gifts to pursue their calling and still receive a good income.

We don't have to guess what will happen in a socialist economy because we have lots of historical examples. In a desire to bring equality, socialism doesn't bring people up out of poverty. Instead, it drives them into poverty. Consider two test cases (Germany and Korea).

After World War II, Germany was divided into two countries: West Germany was capitalist, while East Germany was socialist. Throughout the time they were divided, there was a striking difference between the two countries. When the two countries were reunified, the GDP of East Germany was a third of the GDP of West Germany.

An even better example is North and South Korea, because it lasted longer and continues to this day. South Korea is now more than 20 times richer than North Korea. Of course, people in South Korea are also freer than North Korea. They are also taller and live about 12 years longer than people in North Korea.[\[5\]](#)

By contrast, capitalism provides every person a chance to influence the society. In his book, *United States of Socialism*, Dinesh D'Souza doesn't ignore the issue of justice but actually embraces it. Capitalism, he says, "far more than socialism, reflects the will of the people and expresses

democratic consent.”[\[6\]](#) A consumer is like a voter. As a citizen, we get to vote in an election every two to four years. But a consumer gets to vote every day with his or her dollar bills. That money represents the time and effort put in to get those dollar bills.

The free market provides you a level of popular participation and democratic consent that politics can never provide. You get to vote every day with your dollars and send economic signals to people and companies providing goods and services. Essentially, capitalism, like democracy, is a clear form of social justice.

The Bible and Socialism

Perhaps you have heard some Christians argue that the Bible actually supports socialism. The book of Acts seems to approve of socialism. In Acts 4, we find a statement that the believers in Jerusalem “had all things in common.” It also says that those who possessed land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles’ feet. They distributed these gifts to anyone in need. This looks like socialism to many who are already predisposed to believe it should be the economic system of choice.

First, we need to realize that this practice was only done in Jerusalem. As you read through the rest of the book of Acts and read the letters of Paul and Peter, you see that most believers in other parts of the Roman world had private property and possessions. Paul calls upon them to give voluntarily to the work of ministry.

Second, the word voluntary applies not only to Christians in other parts of the world, but it also was a voluntary act by the believers in Jerusalem to give sacrificially to each other in the midst of persecution. This one passage in the book of Act is not a mandate for socialism.

If you keep reading in the book of Acts, you can also see that the believers in Jerusalem owned the property before they voluntarily gave the proceeds to the apostles. The next chapter (Acts 5) clearly teaches that. When Peter confronted Ananias, he clearly stated that: "While it remained, was it not your own? After it was sold, was it not in your own control?"

Owning property contradicts one of the fundamental principles of socialism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, "the abolition of property" is a major item in the plan for moving from capitalism to socialism and eventually to communism.

By contrast, the Ten Commandments assume private property. The eighth commandment forbidding stealing and the tenth commandment about coveting both assume that people have private property rights.

In fact, we can use biblical principles to evaluate economic systems like capitalism and socialism. Although the Bible does not endorse a particular system, it does have key principles about human nature, private property rights, and the role of government. These can be used to evaluate economic systems like socialism and communism.

Socialism is still a popular idea, especially among young people. Recent polls along with various books about capitalism and socialism illustrate the need for us to discuss and explain the differences between capitalism and socialism. Socialism may sound appealing until you begin to look at the devastating impact it has had on countries that travel down the road of greater governmental control.

Notes

1. Joseph Sobran quoted by Robert Knight, "Bernie's siren song of socialism," *Washington Times*. September 13, 2015, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/sep/13/robert-knight-bernie-sanders-siren-song-of-sociali/

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3. Anders Hagstrom, "When you are forced to argue socialism with a liberal," www.facebook.com/watch/?v=234493017230024.
4. John Stossel, "Sweden is not a socialist success," www.facebook.com/watch/?v=407319650027595.
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He Is Risen: Evidence for the Resurrection of Christ

Tom Davis presents biblical evidence for why believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is reasonable.

One unique thing about the Christian religion is that it is testable. The most important claim the Christian makes is that Jesus rose physically from the dead. Paul taught, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Paul is telling the church at Corinth that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is false. When Jesus cleansed the temple, the Jews asked Him what authority He had to chase the people from the Temple. Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Jesus was saying that the test to authenticate His authority was if He would be raised from the dead. The claim that Jesus was raised from the dead is testable using the same methodology that a historian would use to determine if Alexander the Great invaded India, or if the Roman Senate murdered Julius Caesar.

Early Evidence

To evaluate the truth of historical claims it is important to have accurate historical records. The New Testament contains the historical record of the early church. There are over 5,700 Greek New Testament manuscripts. The earliest manuscript is P52, a papyrus containing part of John chapter 18. This manuscript is dated around A.D. 130. The New Testament was written between the late 40's and the mid 90's. The Gospel of John was written sometime between the late 60's and the mid 90's. This means that there are 40 to 70 years from the time John was written to the time of the first manuscript evidence. The ancient literature with the second most manuscript documentation is the works of Homer. The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* have 643 manuscripts.[\[1\]](#)

When compared to other historical writings, the New Testament manuscript evidence is very good. Only ten manuscripts attest to Caesar's Gallic Wars; the oldest manuscript is dated 900 years after the original writing. What we know of the works of Tacitus comes from two manuscripts. The oldest is 800 years after the original writing.[\[2\]](#) When comparing the manuscript evidence for the New Testament to the rest of the writings of antiquity, the New Testament has more evidence, and the evidence is closer to the dates of the original writings in question. The manuscripts show that what was written by the original authors of the New Testament has been accurately preserved and faithfully passed down through history. There are a few scribal insertions, but today's Bible copies accurately represent what the apostles originally wrote.

Not all the New Testament is relevant to the resurrection of Jesus. The four canonical gospels are relevant to the life of Jesus. Most New Testament scholars agree that Mark was the first gospel and was written in the late 60s. John was the last gospel. He wrote his gospel between A.D. 80 and A.D. 95. Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30 or 33. The gospels were written

between 30 and 65 years after the events they describe.

Virtually all scholars agree that there is earlier evidence that must be considered. Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians in A.D. 55. Paul writes, "For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also" (1 Corinthians. 15:3-8). Paul is claiming that this is something that he "received." This is an early church confession that was given to Paul sometime after his conversion experience.

In Galatians Paul states that after his conversion he went to Arabia, then returned to Damascus. Paul writes, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas" (Galatians 1:18). Paul's conversion was a few years after the death of Jesus. Wolfhart Pannenberg claims that "Paul would have been in Jerusalem six to eight years after the events."^{3} The confession was formulated before Paul visited Peter. N.T. Wright comments, "It was probably formulated within the first two or three years after Easter itself, since it was already in formulaic form when Paul 'received' it."^{4} The confession that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 15 was formulated sometime between two and six years after the death of Jesus. There is no time for legendary embellishment.

The Facts

Several facts can be gleaned from the passage in 1 Corinthians 15:

1. Jesus died.

2. His disciples believed they experienced a resurrected Jesus.

3. Paul had an experience that he thought was the resurrected Jesus.

The gospels and Paul's undisputed letters support these facts.

1. Jesus died

"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3)

Jesus died by crucifixion during the Passover celebration. This is attested by all four Gospels (Matthew 27:32-54, Mark 15:21-39, Luke 23:26-49, John 19:16-30). The Talmud also states that "Jesus of Nazareth was hanged on Passover Eve."[\[5\]](#) At that time, the term "hanged" referred to crucifixion. Jesus' death is well attested in the ancient literature. Michael Licona sums up the evidence: "Jesus' death and/or crucifixion are also abundantly mentioned in non-canonical literature. Moreover, there is no ancient evidence to the contrary."[\[6\]](#)

2. His disciples believed they experienced a resurrected Jesus

"He appeared to Cephas" (1 Corinthians 15:5)

Jesus' disciples had experiences that they interpreted as seeing the resurrected Jesus. The first person Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 15 is Peter. There is no direct evidence that Jesus appeared to Peter individually. Luke also records an early Christian saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:23). We know that Paul met with Peter and James (Galatians 1:18-19; Acts 15:1-21). His knowledge of Jesus' appearance to Peter probably came from them.

"then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5)

Jesus appeared to the twelve (minus Judas). Paul was an associate of the apostles; he would have had knowledge of Jesus appearing to these men. Luke and John record Jesus appearing to the apostles (Luke 24:36-49, John 20:19-20). Together, Paul, Luke, and John give three independent attestations of Jesus appearing to the twelve.

"Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:6-7)

Jesus appeared to 500 brothers and sisters. There is no other attestation of this appearance. It is unlikely that Paul could have made up this appearance. Paul refers to them as "Most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul's statement that most of these people are alive, and that some had died, indicates that he had some knowledge of these individuals. He is saying that these people were available to be questioned about the event.

"Then he appeared to James" (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Jesus' brothers did not believe that He was the Messiah before His death. However, Luke claims that after the ascension, the brothers of Jesus were at the upper room (Acts 1:14). Peter thought that it was important for James to be informed of his escape from prison (Acts 12:17). Later, when Paul visits Jerusalem, Paul gives a report to "James, and all the elders" (Acts 21:18). The book of Acts indicates that James rose to a prominent leadership role in the Jerusalem church. Paul also notes the influence of James. When Paul visited Peter in Jerusalem, he said that he "saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). James is also referred to as a pillar of the church (Galatians 2:9). The Biblical evidence indicates that James was once an unbeliever who became one of the most influential leaders in the early Jerusalem church. An appearance of the risen Jesus would explain the transition from unbeliever to leader of the

church in Jerusalem.

"then to all the apostles." (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Jesus appeared to all the apostles. There are no clues to the nature of this appearance. This may refer to the appearance to the disciples in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20). There is no conclusive way to link that passage to Paul's creedal formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. The reliability of this appearance rests on its early attestation. Paul probably knew the people involved.

3. Jesus appeared to Paul

"Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also." (1 Corinthians 15:8)

Paul rhetorically asks the Corinthians, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). Luke also records Jesus' appearance to Paul (Acts 9, 22, 26). These three passages are consistent in the details of what Paul experienced. However, there are some apparent inconsistencies in the details of what Paul's companions experienced. In Acts 22:9 and 26:13, Paul's companions see the light that blinded Paul. In Acts 9:3-7 there is no mention of them seeing light. Because not mentioning the light does not necessarily contradict the presence of light, it is reasonable to conclude that the men saw the light. There is also a question as to whether Paul's companions heard the voice. The word that Luke uses in Acts 22 is the Greek word *acouo*, which can mean "hearing," "understanding," or "to obey." This means that *acouo* can mean to hear but not understand what a voice is saying. This is why the passage in chapter 22 is translated, "Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice (*acouo*) of the one who was speaking with me" (Acts 22:9). There is also the question of whether the men with Paul were standing (Acts 9:7) or if they were on the ground (Acts 26:14). The Greek word used in Acts 22:9 is *istemi*, which can

mean “stopped,” as in not being able to move. When Luke writes, “The men who were traveling with him stood speechless” (Acts 9:7), this could also be understood as saying that the men did not leave Paul.^{7} Michael Licona addresses the issue of these translation difficulties:

“It is one thing to note a contradiction between two authors. However, it is another thing to claim that an author is contradicting himself, within his same writing no less. Unless Luke was being careless, it seems to me that it is better to be charitable in our interpretations of surface contradictions within the same work if they do not require too much strain.”^{8}

Licona was specifically addressing the issue of whether the men heard the voice, but this same concept also applies to the interpretation and understanding of whether the men were standing or on the ground.

Evaluating Arguments

What can we conclude so far? There are multiple independent attestations that Jesus’ followers experienced Jesus appearing to them after He was buried. These experiences occurred with individuals and groups of people. William Lane Craig concludes, “The evidence makes it certain that on separate occasions different individuals and groups had experiences of seeing Jesus alive from the dead.”^{9}

Marcus Borg (liberal Christian theologian and historian of Jesus and a fellow of the Jesus Seminar) challenges the passage found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 on two points. First, Borg argues, Paul includes himself in the list of people to whom the risen Christ appeared; implicitly, he regards his own experience as similar to the others.^{10} Borg then refers to the record in Acts chapters 9, 22, and 26, claiming that this shows that Paul’s experience was a vision. For Borg, this implies that the experience of the other disciples were

visions.

There is an important distinction that Borg does not address. The book of Acts begins with Jesus' final appearance to the disciples, which is followed by His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9). All the appearances to the other disciples took place between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus occurs well after the ascension of Jesus. This also ignores many details of the appearances recorded in the gospels. Visions do not eat or drink. They cannot be touched. The narratives in the Gospel accounts involve Jesus, in His resurrected body, eating and drinking and being touched. By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he would have been familiar with at least some of these stories. Because the ascension occurs between the appearances to the disciples and the appearance to Paul, it is reasonable to expect some differences in the nature of these appearances.

Borg's second challenge is concerned with the last half of 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul discusses the nature of the resurrected body. According to Borg, Paul "explicitly denies that it is a physical body; instead, it is a spiritual body."[\[11\]](#) In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul writes: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Borg takes the term "natural body" to refer to a physical body, while he takes "spiritual body" to mean a body that is not physical. The Greek word that is translated as natural is *psuchikon*. Licona searched the Greek literature and found that *psuchikon* never means physical or material.[\[12\]](#) *Psuchikon* always refers to something natural or unspiritual. *Pneumatikos* is the Greek word translated as spiritual. This word can mean ethereal or refer to something that is not physical. However, *pneumatikos* is not used in the New Testament to refer to a ghost or something ethereal. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians Paul writes, "But I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as

spiritual (*pneumatikos*) people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1). Paul is not referring to people who do not have spiritual bodies here. In chapter 15 he is not claiming that a resurrected body is not physical. In this chapter, Paul makes a similar kind of comparison to what he wrote in verse 3:1. The people are "of the flesh," but when they become spiritual people, they do not lose their physical body. Just as in verses 15:44-49, people do not lose their natural body when they are raised a spiritual body.

A few verses earlier Paul writes, "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or some other grain" (1 Corinthians 15:36-37). Paul is making an analogy between a seed and the plant that it produces, and a body before and after it has been resurrected. A plant is bigger and more beautiful than the seed that it comes from, but there is continuity between the two. A plant is the same organism that was once a seed. A resurrected body is more glorious than the body was before it died, but both bodies bear the same identity of the person. There is continuity between a natural body and a spiritual body.

The appearances are not the only things to be considered. The tomb Jesus was buried in was found empty by a group of His women followers. John designates that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb (John 20:1). Matthew records that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb" (Matthew 28:1). Mark writes that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb. Luke lists Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women as those who went to the tomb. The genre of the Gospels is ancient biography. The writers of ancient biography were not concerned with explaining all the details. They were not overly concerned with exact details. Ancient authors were more concerned with portraying the nature of events. Matthew, Mark and John do not exclude the possibility that other women were present. At that

time, women were not viewed as being capable of reasoning well. In the first century, women could be legal witnesses, but they were not trusted to be reliable and reasonable witnesses. If you were looking for witnesses, you found a man if you could. If the evangelists were to make up a story to convince people that Jesus' tomb was found empty, they would have said that the discovery was made by men. Claiming that the empty tomb was found by women would not have been convincing to any first-century audience—unless it really happened. It is highly plausible that the tomb was found empty by a group of Jesus' women followers.

Robert J. Miller raises an interesting point in the resurrection debate concerning Jesus' empty tomb: "The reports that his grave was empty would hardly persuade many. Even if it was confirmed that the grave where they claim he was buried was empty, what would that prove? Nothing." [\[13\]](#) Miller is right. An empty tomb alone would not cause anyone to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. An empty tomb was not an unusual occurrence. When explaining the facts surrounding the beginnings of Christianity, the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus to His disciples must be explained. Wright observes, "The empty tomb and the 'meetings' with Jesus, when combined, present us with not only a *sufficient* condition for the rise of early Christian belief, but also, it seems, a *necessary* one." [\[14\]](#) Any explanation of the facts surrounding the death of Jesus and the origins of Christianity must explain both the empty tomb and the appearance of Jesus to His disciples after the resurrection. In current scholarship, there is no natural explanation that can explain both the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus to His apostles.

Eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume raised an objection to the resurrection that is common today. Hume starts by asking that if all the historians and the physicians agreed that Queen Elizabeth died, and was dead for a month, then reappeared and reigned on her throne for three more

years, should someone conclude that she was raised from the dead? Hume answers:

“I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death and those of other public circumstances that followed it; I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be, real.”[\[15\]](#)

Even though all the people who could know agree, and there is no one who disputes the resurrection of the Queen in this hypothetical situation, Hume says that it could not possibly have happened. Hume argues that because all miracle stories are ridiculous, the effect of education on people would “not only . . . make them reject the fact but even reject it without further examination.”[\[16\]](#) Hume argued that resurrections do not conform to our knowledge of past experiences. This is a bad argument for two reasons; first, it is a circular argument. Hume claims that resurrections do not happen; therefore, a resurrection did not happen. Second, it is impossible to gain knowledge based on the conformity of past experiences. Many experiences that lead to more knowledge do not conform to past experiences. History is made up of many unique and unrepeatable events. The origin of the universe only happened once. The origin of life only happened once. The life and death of Alexander the Great only happened once. The only reason to reject the resurrection without a careful investigation of the facts is because of a worldview bias against supernatural events.

Conclusion

A careful examination of the evidence surrounding the claim of the resurrection of Jesus reveals four facts. First, Jesus died of crucifixion under the reign of Pontius Pilot. Second, Jesus’ tomb was found empty by a group of His women followers. Third, Jesus’ disciples had experiences which they interpreted

as seeing a resurrected Jesus. Fourth, Paul had an experience that he interpreted as an encounter with the risen Jesus. Naturalistic explanations have failed to explain these facts. Hallucination hypothesis fails to explain the empty tomb. Stolen body hypothesis fails to explain the appearances. Combining the hypotheses makes the explanation of the facts complex. When formulating historical hypotheses, the simpler explanation is to be preferred. Hallucinations and grave robbers do not provide any illumination for the origins of Christianity. The resurrection provides a simple explanation of the facts and also explains the beginnings of the Christian religion. There are good reasons to believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead.

Notes

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3. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 84.
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6. Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 305.
7. Ibid., 382-394.
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9. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics 3rd ed.* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 381.
10. Marcus Borg, "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb" in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Paul Copan, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 123.
11. Ibid., 123.

12. Licona, op. cit., 407.

13. Robert J. Miller, "What Do Stories about Resurrection(s) Prove?" in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Paul Copan ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 97.

14. N.T. Wright, op. cit., 706.

15. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 138.

Ibid., 139.

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