

Astrology: Do the Heavens Declare the Destiny of Man?

Dr. Michael Gleghorn critically examines the claim of astrology that the heavenly bodies somehow influence, or even determine, events on earth.



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

A Brief Historical Introduction

Astrology is based on the notion that the heavenly bodies somehow influence, or even determine, events on earth. It is believed that an accurate understanding of these heavenly influences, especially at the time of one's birth, can give us insight into a person's character and destiny. Although belief in astrology is very ancient, it continues to have many adherents even in our own day. One writer estimates that as many as one quarter of the world's population "believe in and follow astrology to some extent."[\[1\]](#) Unfortunately, Christians are not exempt from such beliefs. Estimates indicate that anywhere from ten to thirty percent of those claiming to be "born again" Christians entertain some belief that astrology is true.[\[2\]](#)

Although there is some scholarly disagreement over when the western system of astrology originated, astrologer Robert Parry observes, "Conventional scholarship leans toward the view that astrology began in the old Mesopotamian civilizations of the Middle-East sometime around the second millennium B.C."[\[3\]](#) At this time there was no distinction between astrology and astronomy. However, "because centers of learning were also . . . centers of religion, natural astrology soon became corrupted by pagan myths, deities, and magic. As a result, two forms of astrology began to coexist: natural astrology ([or] astronomy) and religious

astrology.”{4} It was “the Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy . . . [who] refined astrology to its present form in the second century A.D.”{5} It is this brand of astrology that has most influenced the West. But it is by no means the only form in existence.

Ancient astrological systems differing from our western variety were developed both in China and India—as well as elsewhere. But not only do these systems differ from ours, they also differ from each other. Furthermore, within each of these three major systems, we also find many contradictory subsystems.{6} For example, “Not all western astrologers agree that there are 12 zodiacal signs. Steven Schmidt in his book *Astrology 14* claims . . . a total of 14 signs. But some argue for only 8, others for 10, and a few for 24.”{7} It was doubtless these many differences that led astrologer Richard Nolle to admit that there are nearly as many astrological systems as there are astrologers!{8}

But don't all these differences affect astrology's reliability? After all, won't different systems give different results? Indeed they will. For instance, one astrologer may predict that you'll have a wonderful marriage; another that you'll never marry—you might easily receive contradictory readings from different astrologers! And the law of non-contradiction says they can't both be right (though they could both be wrong). It is for reasons such as these that we should be hesitant about placing our faith in astrology.

Difficulties in Chart Interpretation

“The basis of all astrological work is the Birth Chart. This is an accurate map of the sky for the exact date, time and place of birth. . . . [T]his can be the birth of a person . . . a nation . . . or even of an idea or question.”{9} Once the astrologer has such information, he is ready to begin interpreting the chart. But what sort of information is most relevant to chart interpretation?

Although we cannot cover all the details, the astrologer is primarily concerned with examining the planets, houses, and signs—and how these are related to one another. Thus, astrologer Robert Parry writes, “[E]ach planet has a distinct and definite character which is modified by the sign and house in which it is placed. Mars, for example, is the planet of aggression, extraversion, self-confidence and sexuality.”[{10}](#) The “signs” are the twelve signs of the zodiac. “Everyone is . . . born under one of these . . . signs (Pisces the fish, and so on).”[{11}](#) Finally, “the *houses* are the 12 divisions of the zodiac that are said to correspond symbolically to every area of life . . . the planets are said to travel through the houses, influencing each area of life as they do.”[{12}](#)

But the astrologer must not only pay attention to the planets, houses and signs, he must also note their relationships to one another. For instance, “Angular relationships between planets are . . . very important. These relationships are called ‘aspects’ . . . a Square (90-degree) aspect between two planets indicates tension or disagreement . . . whereas a Trine (120-degree) aspect indicates sympathy and cooperation.”[{13}](#)

Interpreting a birth chart is thus a very complex affair. Indeed, one astrologer “calculated the *least* possible number of different combinations resulting from the most basic . . . chart . . . [as] roughly equivalent to the estimated number of atoms in the known universe!”[{14}](#) And such complexity is just one of many difficulties.

Another is that not all astrologers agree on the number of signs that need to be considered in interpreting a chart. While most acknowledge twelve, some think there are *less* and others *more* than this. There are also differences regarding where the various houses should be placed on a chart. And clearly such differences will lead to conflicting interpretations.

Finally, there is the problem of *authority*.[{15}](#) What factual basis do astrologers have for asserting that the Square aspect indicates disagreement, while a Trine indicates cooperation? Why do some astrologers consider Saturn a “bad” planet and Jupiter a “good” planet? How does the astrologer know “that the first house represents personality, the second . . . money [and] . . . the eighth . . . death?”[{16}](#) Since such assertions appear to be arbitrary, it follows that results will be arbitrary as well. One should, therefore, be wary about accepting the advice of astrologers—at least when they’re speaking *as astrologers*!

The Problem of Twins

In his book, *In Defense of Astrology*, Robert Parry attempts to defend astrology against the twelve most common objections that are usually raised against it. Let’s consider just one of these: the problem of twins.

Some twins are born within minutes of each other, yet they may lead very different lives. But if one’s character and destiny are largely determined by the positions of the heavenly bodies at the time of birth, we would expect twins to be remarkably similar in these respects. Clearly, however, this is not always the case. Even Parry admits that one twin may die quite young while “the other lives on to a ripe old age.”[{17}](#) As an astrologer, how does he deal with this difficulty?

He begins by observing, “Even a few minutes can make a lot of difference to a birth chart.”[{18}](#) He then argues that even when one twin dies while the other lives, “the same event, namely death, has entered both lives at the same time. One twin dies . . . the other is touched radically by the sorrow . . . of . . . death.”[{19}](#) He concludes, “Surely this is an argument for, rather than against astrology.”[{20}](#) But how convincing is this argument, really?

While it may be true that a few minutes can occasionally make a big difference to a birth chart, this is clearly not always the case. Indeed, some scholars state that even “a birth interval of several minutes would make no real difference.”[\[21\]](#) Second, there is surely a very big difference indeed between someone actually dying on the one hand, and someone losing a loved one to death on the other. It seems undeniable that the destinies of two such people are radically different. Surely this constitutes a legitimate objection to the ability of astrology to predict a person’s destiny.

Additionally, for those of us who accept the authority of the Bible, it’s instructive to contemplate the lives of Jacob and Esau, twins born so close to one another in time that Jacob came out of the womb “with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel.”[\[22\]](#) Astrology would expect these two men to have very similar personalities and destinies. But did they?

The Bible records, “When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man living in tents.”[\[23\]](#) In addition to being quite different in personality and temperament, they were different physically as well. Esau was a hairy man, but Jacob a smooth man.[\[24\]](#) But most importantly, the destinies of both men, as well as their descendents, were drastically different. God bestowed His special favor on Jacob, but rejected Esau declaring, “I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau.”[\[25\]](#) Surely if astrology were true, one would not expect twins born at virtually the same time to be so thoroughly different in both their character and destiny.

Astrology and Science

Numerous studies have attempted to test the claims of astrology. The scientist most often cited by astrologers as having furnished “proof” for some of its ideas is the late French psychologist Michel Gauquelin. Astrologer Robert Parry writes:

Gauquelin's results are remarkable. For instance, the traditionally energetic and aggressive planet Mars is shown quite conclusively to be more frequently strong in the charts of sportsmen than chance would normally allow. . . . These professional attributes tend, moreover, to be in line with traditional astrological law, which has always associated Mars with competitive spirit.{26}

Gauquelin's results are known as the "Mars effect." He claimed to have found evidence for this effect in "a study that attempted to test whether or not the birth dates of 2088 sports champions were 'statistically significant' according to the position of Mars." {27} Ironically, although some slight evidence for this effect was indeed noted, Gauquelin "did not consider it an astrological effect." {28} Moreover, although frequently cited as lending validity to the subject, he "never claimed to validate traditional astrology in any sense." {29}

Still, he did claim to find some evidence for the "Mars effect." Doesn't this lend some credibility to astrology? Not necessarily. "The problem for astrologers is that the 'Mars effect' has never been confirmed in 30 years of subsequent studies." {30} One of the most damaging studies in this regard was published in 1995 by a team of French scientists. After an exhaustive twelve-year study, the team's "attempt to independently replicate Gauquelin's findings failed; it offered 'no evidence for the Mars effect.'" {31} Since this "effect" is generally considered strong confirmation for the truth of astrology, it seems that scientific support for the subject is quite hard to come by.

But aren't there other tests for the validity of astrology? For instance, don't all the predictions made by astrologers offer a means of testing the subject's accuracy? Indeed they do, but the results are usually quite unconvincing. While successful predictions may sometimes occur, as a general rule, "published predictions . . . seem to have a worse record than client self-disclosures." {32}

In a study conducted between 1974-79, over 3,000 predictions by such alleged astrologers as Jeane Dixon and Carroll Righter were examined. The number of failures was 2673—almost 90 percent! Moreover, “the astrologers . . . were given the benefit of the doubt for any prediction that could have been attributed to shrewd guessing, vague wording, or inside information.”[\[33\]](#) Without such benefits, the failure rate would have been almost 100 percent! The authors of the study concluded, “The results . . . paint a dismal picture . . . for the . . . claim that ‘astrology works’.”[\[34\]](#)

Astrology and the Bible

What does the Bible say about astrology? According to one astrologer, “The Bible is full of the philosophy of astrology.”[\[35\]](#) But when one carefully examines the passages thought to speak favorably of astrology, one is bound to conclude with Drs. Bjornstad and Johnson: “Absolutely NO scriptural passage supports astrology . . . not a single reference even indicates tolerance of this art.”[\[36\]](#)

The Bible condemns faith in astrology as futile and misplaced. In Jeremiah 10, God issues this warning: “Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them; for the customs of the peoples are vanity.”[\[37\]](#) God is both the Creator and sovereign Ruler of the heavens; people are therefore to trust and fear Him—not what He has made.

Unlike God, astrology is powerless to deliver those who trust in it. In Isaiah 47, “God condemns Babylon and tells of its impending judgment.”[\[38\]](#) In verse 13 He says, “Let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you.” But that their efforts would be in vain is clearly seen in the concluding words of the chapter, “There is none to save you.”[\[39\]](#) Whatever predictive power astrology has, it is utterly eclipsed by the power of the sovereign Lord

who created and rules all things!

Finally, in Deuteronomy 18:10-12, astrology comes under the same condemnation as all other forms of divination. There are likely many reasons for this, but let me mention just one. If the ideas of astrology are largely discredited, what accounts for its sometimes-remarkable predictive power? The Bible, as well as the frank admissions of some astrologers, indicates supernatural, or spiritual, involvement. But if God condemns astrology, what sort of spirits are we talking about? Though it may be unpopular to say so, the Bible suggests they are demons.[{40}](#) And it's eerie how many astrologers actually attribute their predictive powers to the wisdom of their spirit guides. One professional astrologer of twelve years confessed: "I never met a really successful astrologer . . . who did not admit . . . that spiritism was the power behind the craft."[{41}](#) Could it be that astrology works (when it works) not because of its discredited and contradictory ideas, but because of the unseen power of the spirit world? If so, God's condemnation of astrology may be partially motivated by a concern to protect people from the influence of such evil spirits.

In conclusion, the heavens do not declare the destiny of man, but the glory of the God who made them.[{42}](#) It is God, not the heavens, "who works all things after the counsel of His will."[{43}](#)

Notes

1. Lawrence E. Jerome, *Astrology Disproved* (Prometheus Books: Buffalo, NY, 1977), 1, cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 1996), 54.
2. For instance, Ankerberg and Weldon mention a Gallup poll cited by the National and International Religion Report for July 4, 1988, which "estimated that ten percent of evangelical Christians believe in astrology" (Ibid., 54). Additionally,

Chuck Colson cites a figure from Wade Clark Roof's book, *Spiritual Marketplace*, indicating that a third of "born again" Christians believe in astrology ("The Feng Shui Way: The Paganization of Our Culture," *Jubilee Extra* [October 2001]: 7).

3. Robert Parry, *In Defense of Astrology: Astrology's Answers to its Critics* (Llewellyn Publications: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1991), 37.

4. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Victor Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 1990), 152.

5. *Ibid.*, 154.

6. Ankerberg and Weldon, 58.

7. Boa, 158.

8. Richard Nolle, *Critical Astrology: Investigating the Cosmic Connection* (American Federation of Astrologers: Tempe, AZ, 1980), 22, referenced in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 58.

9. Parry, 24.

10. *Ibid.*, 31.

11. Ankerberg and Weldon, 55.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Parry, 31-32.

14. Ankerberg and Weldon, 57.

15. Boa, 158.

16. Ankerberg and Weldon, 56.

17. Parry, 88.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. Boa, 160.

22. Genesis 25:26.

23. Genesis 25:27.

24. Genesis 27:11.

25. Malachi 1:2-3; see also Romans 9:10-13.

26. Parry, 188.

27. Ankerberg and Weldon, 60.

28. Patrick Grim, ed., *Philosophy of Science and the Occult*

(State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, 1982), 33-46; cf. pp. 55-60, referenced in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 60.

29. Ankerberg and Weldon, 60.

30. Ibid.

31. "French Committee Announces Results of Test of So-Called Mars Effect," *Skeptical Inquirer* (January-February, 1995), 62, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 60.

32. Ankerberg and Weldon, 63.

33. Ibid.

34. R.B. Culver and P.A. Ianna, *The Gemini Syndrome: A Scientific Evaluation of Astrology* (Prometheus Books: Buffalo, NY, 1984 Rev.), 169-70, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 63.

35. Joseph F. Goodavage, *Astrology: The Space Age Science* (Signet: New York, 1967), XI, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 64.

36. James Bjornstad and Shildes Johnson, *Stars, Signs and Salvation in the Age of Aquarius* (Bethany House: Minneapolis, MN, 1976), 43, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 67.

37. Jeremiah 10:2-3a.

38. Boa, 161.

39. Isaiah 47:15

40. See in particular Acts 16:16-18.

41. Personal correspondence from Karen Winterburn to John Ankerberg and John Weldon, cited in *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 71.

42. See Psalms 19:1 and 8:3, as well as Genesis 1:16.

43. Ephesians 1:11.

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“Is There a Version of the Bible that Agrees with the Chester Beatty Manuscripts?”

I read your article on early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Someday I would like to make my own translation of the Bible using these early manuscripts. God willing I hope to someday attend Dallas Theological Seminary. Since p45 p46 p47 p66 p75 [of the Chester Beatty Papyrus group] contain almost all of the New Testament, is there a version/translation of the Bible that agrees with these manuscripts?

Thank you for your e-mail. And thank you for informing me you have read my essay, [“Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?”](#)

I commend you on your desire to learn the Koine Greek of the New Testament so that you may be able to translate it in the original language. I myself attended Dallas Theological Seminary (1960-64) and received my Th.M. degree. I have never regretted that I went there.

I believe that at DTS you are given the largest “shovel” with which to dig into the Scriptures. I have continued to study Old and New Testaments in the original languages now for forty years. I never fail to see something that blesses me and gives richer clarity and meaning to my understanding of the text.

Now let me respond to your question about the Chester Beatty Papyrus group.

P 45 was originally a codex which contained all Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. Unfortunately, what we HAVE are two leaves of Matthew, seven of Luke, two of John, and thirteen of Acts.

P 46 consists of eighty-six nearly perfect leaves, out of a

total of 104, which contain Paul's epistles. Philemon and the Pastoral Epistles (I & II Timothy, Titus are missing, but Hebrews is included.

P 47 contains Revelation 9:10 to 17:2, except one or more lines is missing from the top of each page. So this is a little under half of the book of Revelation.

These three volumes are dated at the early 200s A.D. Mr. Beatty found these papyrus leaves in Egypt in 1930 and bought them from an antiques dealer.

There are also portions of seven manuscripts of the Old Testament as well as some extra-canonical writings.

Photographic facsimiles have been created for each page and are available for study. All of the verses which we have from them have been edited by Frederic Kenyon. They have also been made available in the critical text of Erwin Nestle's translation of the New Testament (title: *Novum Testamentum Graece*).

Most modern versions/translations of the New Testament in English are based upon this text, so the Chester Beatty Material is imbedded within the translation wherever extant material was available to impact or contribute to the text.

This entire work is based on a compilation mostly of the Chester Beatty material, but also includes the other ancient Greek documents of the New Testament.

I would recommend that you buy Nestle's Greek Text of the New Testament, start learning Greek, and you will be reaching your stated objective, since the Chester Beatty material is there. You could check with the American Bible Society (the actual publisher is Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, Germany). Or, contact the nearest theological seminary to your home, and go to their bookstore. They will have it or they can order it. I do not think you will find it in a Christian bookstore

(although they may be able to find and order it for you.)

I believe this is a good first step. Looking at the Cheaster Beatty facsimilies would be a daunting and discouraging venture unless you were well versed in the Greek of the Bible.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Christian Science: Mary Baker Eddy and the Bible

Introduction

The First Church of Christ, Scientist is a towering presence in the city of Boston. It owes its centrally located architecture and nationwide Christian Science “reading rooms” to the ingenuity of Mary Baker Eddy. She’s credited with being an entrepreneur in religion, journalism, education, and women’s rights. Her innovation as a religious leader remains impressive to this day, being that she began such a large movement before women were even allowed to vote. But what of this faith she’s so known for?

Mary Baker Eddy grew up in 19th century New England, a time and place that saw tremendous religious dissatisfaction. Out of this same time and locale Joseph Smith started Mormonism and Charles Russell founded the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Eddy was a sickly woman from early on. She was well versed in general Bible knowledge. At the age of seventeen she joined the Congregational Church. She had somewhat of a rocky social life. She had three husbands by the time she was in her fifties. In her early forties, after her second marriage, Eddy met a man named Phineas P. Quimby.[\[1\]](#) She seems to have learned at least some of her healing concepts from Mr. Quimby.

Her adult life appears to have been characterized by great paranoia and outrageous allegations. She even blamed her third husband's death from heart disease on poisoning from enemies of the Eddy's.[\[2\]](#) She also related to one of her associates just before her death that she wished to be remembered as being "mentally murdered."[\[3\]](#)

The followers of Mary Baker Eddy say she loved God and His word so vastly that she was given revelation about the truths of scientific healing hidden beneath the surface of the Bible. She recorded these truths in her *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. With this newfound ability to heal came the birth of Christian Science. Christian Scientists claim to possess basic spiritual methods for healing and comfort for participants of any and all religions.

Eddy founded the Church of Christ, Scientist in 1879. She established such periodicals as *The Christian Science Journal*, *The Christian Science Sentinel*, and the Pulitzer Prize winning *Christian Science Monitor*. By the time of her death in 1910, she had even founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College. Her amazing initiative in the face of poor health for most of her life is not to be questioned. However, what ought to be challenged are the conclusions she arrived at due to such extreme initiative Eddy claimed that "the Bible was her sole teacher" for developing the methodical treatments for sickness as well as sin.[\[4\]](#) If this is so, then it's appropriate to use that same source as a measure of her claims. Here we will examine the claims of Christian Science and weigh them with the established standard of God's word. We will see that

Christian Science is neither Christian nor science. Let's see how Christian Science measures up to biblical Christianity.

Prayer

Mary Baker Eddy founded the First Church of Christ, Scientist upon the notion that everything she taught came from her examination of the Scriptures. Today we'll begin evaluating her assertions according to the standard of those same Scriptures. Let's first look at the subject of her first chapter in *Science and Health*: prayer.

She deduces from Scripture that audible prayer is a meaningless attempt to draw attention to one's pretentiousness. Prayer changes nothing. True change comes from putting Truth into practice. Eddy robs prayer of its true effectiveness in communicating with God. For instance, Eddy says that prayer for the sick is not what will lead to one's healing, only enlightened understanding heals.[{5}](#) Otherwise, why would some people remain sick after prayer and others get well? Surely if God is consistent and willing to heal He wouldn't withhold healing from one and grant it to another.

But God's wisdom is infinitely beyond our attempts to understand why He heals some and doesn't heal others. Paul pleaded for God to take the thorn in his flesh from him and Christ responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). God allows us to experience difficulty in order to fulfill His grander purposes, of which we often know very little (1 Peter 4:19).

Mary Eddy accentuated Jesus' call to "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."[{6}](#) To her, this was not a simple command to be humble in prayer. She believed this statement communicated that true prayer is not to be spoken or have anything to do with the physical senses. She said,

In order to pray aright, we must enter into the closet and shut the door. We must close the lips and silence the material senses. . . . Practice not profession, understanding not belief, gain the ear and right hand of omnipotence and they assuredly call down infinite blessings.[\[7\]](#)

Not only does prayer become suspect in Christian Science, but so do the orthodox concepts of belief and confession, which are necessary components of prayer and the Christian faith. Eddy misses the point of prayer altogether. Christians don't pray to manipulate fate. We pray in order to verbally express our hearts to God and communicate our concerns. Jesus said that our Father already knows our needs before we ask of Him, but we are to pray nonetheless (Matthew 7:8-9). Eddy's Christian Science has its roots in Gnosticism, saying that salvation is obtained through some sort of secret knowledge. That flies in the face of the historic Christian truth that simple belief in Christ as Lord and confession of faith in Him leads to justification (Romans 10:9). This issue, of faith versus understanding, is what we will address in the next section of this article.

Belief and Disbelief

Basic to Christian Science is belief and disbelief in error. Once again, like the Gnostics the Christian Scientists see all things in the physical world as an evil opposition to the virtue of the spiritual world. So error comes from an infiltration in the mind by the material. Eddy wrote, "We treat error through the understanding of Truth, because Truth is error's antidote."[\[8\]](#) If one denies the reality of pain, due to its material nature, one may be delivered from such pain. We read in Science and Health, "The dream that matter and error are something must yield to reason and revelation. Then mortals will behold the nothingness of sickness and sin, and sin and sickness will disappear from consciousness."[\[9\]](#) Basically, Christian Scientists believe that pain is an

illusion. If you deny the existence of this deception, it will go away.

As a matter of fact, material things are evil, because they don't really exist. Remember, to a Christian Scientist error is the embodiment of evil. To think something exists that doesn't is error. So anything resulting from the physical is also evil. This is the context for understanding sickness and death from a Christian Science perspective. It's inaccurate to Christian Scientists to say only that sin, death, and sickness are results of a fallen world. They believe sickness and death are intrinsically evil themselves. This explains why Christian Scientists reject drugs and human medicine. Drugs are a material attempt at curing what only the spiritual can heal.[{10}](#)

Christian Scientists oversimplify sickness and death. Regardless of whether we like to admit it, death, brought on by sickness or suffering of some sort, is inevitable (Hebrews 9:27). Wouldn't belief in spirituality or "disbelief in error" have rescued at least some from such human suffering? From what I can gather, even Christian Scientists still suffer and die. What about Eddy herself? If she was right, then why did she die?

Sickness and death result from the sin that we all answer for in Adam (Romans 5:12). Therefore, God has opted to rescue us from this fallen world through the means of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge does not relieve one's sinful predicament. Faith in Christ is the sole deliverer from this condemnation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Even deliverance does not always come in this life, but we have a hope that in the life to come there will be no sickness, no pain, and no death (Revelation 21:4). We have this hope because of that one event in history to which all Christians ought to find unity, the death of Christ. Next, let's look at the Christian Scientist's perspective of the atonement.

The Atonement

As we look at Christian Science we are measuring it according to the standard of God's Word, which it claims to use as the source for its beliefs. In this section, we will discuss Christian Science's perspective on the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Mary Baker Eddy's unique view of the atonement of Christ has supreme bearing on the supposedly biblical nature of Christian Science. To Eddy, the cross of Christ was not meant to save sinful people from death by Christ's death in their place. She stated "The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon 'the accursed tree,' than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father's business."[\[11\]](#) Instead, Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection was a sign to His followers that the type of life He lived was effective in overcoming death.

To Eddy death is an enemy to Truth, another deception. Jesus was not subject to death, nor are we. She writes, "To him, therefore, death was not the threshold over which he must pass into living glory."[\[12\]](#) Jesus is alleged to have survived the cross through the mastery of mind over matter.[\[13\]](#) This was the ultimate example of Christian Science in practice. Jesus healed Himself with no medicine, bandages, or surgery. Only the disciples thought that Jesus was dead.[\[14\]](#) But Jesus overcame all laws of matter in healing Himself from a near-death experience and He shed His material existence to reveal only the "Soul."

Eddy contends that the disciples originally misunderstood Jesus' appearance after the crucifixion by calling Him a ghost. But soon after they realized that He never died at all. If this is so then why is the tradition passed on to Paul by those same apostles in a sequence of events detailed here in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day. . . .

In that same chapter Paul defends the idea that Christ was raised *from the dead*, and that if this were not so then we're all still in our sins and of all people most to be pitied (15:17,19). Hebrews 8:12 says of Jesus "he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." To imagine that Jesus did not die, but simply healed Himself, is biblically and historically preposterous.

To Mary Baker Eddy, Jesus' death is no longer the redemptive sacrifice that gives life to all who believe. Instead, she establishes Jesus as the first Christian Scientist, a sort of "way-shower," leaving a prime example of how we *all* can conquer sin, suffering, and death.[{15}](#)

Human Suffering

As we've been discussing the biblical nature of Christian Science, we conclude with some final thoughts. The central issue in Christian Science seems to be human suffering. Sin, sickness, and death are real threats to the human condition. Mary Baker Eddy was truly bothered by this. Instead of leaning on the God of the Bible for His comfort in times of crisis (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), Eddy devised her own plan to serve as an immediate solution to the burdens she carried.

Contrary to Eddy's charges, Christianity does *not* deny the reality of Jesus' healing ministry. In fact, healing is *still* a valid way for God to show Himself to a generation of hurting people. Nevertheless, healing, even in Jesus' ministry was never intended to be the end all. It was a means for all who

witnessed the event to credit Jesus with the Father's seal of approval. The kingdom of God had come. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 11:4 when He sent John's messengers back to him to respond to the question of whether He was the Messiah with the message, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

Healing of suffering, as well as sin must be recognized for what it truly is: God bringing glory to God. When we put humans and their suffering at the center of Jesus' ministry or even our own ministries we are doomed to misunderstand God's mercy and compassion in relation to human suffering. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). The Master Architect who is also orchestrating all of history to end the way He planned it has to have latitude in bringing this about. That means many of the problems that may not make sense to us will go unanswered until He has the final word.

Compassion is an essential requirement of the Christian message. But too many, like Mary Baker Eddy, have confused godly compassion for humanistic ideology. We ought to pray that none of us are found guilty of imposing our own circumstances upon the Word of God, in order for it to better address our perceived problems. God is faithful. He won't do anything without purpose. But His purpose in our suffering cannot always be obvious. Remember, He loves His creation and will do all that's necessary to bring about "good, for those who are called to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Often pain, suffering, and death are a means of God's character development in His children. "[H]e disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). It takes eyes of faith to see His good in our difficulties. He who has eyes to see, let him see.

Notes

1. She credited Quimby with healing her. She became a huge proponent of Quimby's abilities. Quimby claimed to have rediscovered Jesus' very own methods for healing. Later this relationship went sour. There is a great deal of controversy over whether Eddy taught the same things as Quimby or not. Both Quimby and Eddy claimed originality and that the other was borrowing his or her ideas. Hoekema, Anthony A., *Christian Science*. (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 10-11.
2. Hoekema, 16.
3. Hoekema, 17.
4. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, viii.
5. Ibid., 12.
6. Matthew 6:6.
7. *Science and Health*, 15.
8. Ibid., 346.
9. Ibid., 347.
10. Ibid., 345.
11. Ibid., 25.
12. Ibid., 39.
13. Ibid., 44.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 26.

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See Also *Probe Answers Our Email:*

["You Got Christian Science Wrong"](#)

“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”

My wife says that if you go to hell, you will be alone and not able to talk to anyone else. We tried to find an answer in the Bible, but we could not find a scripture that said that. I have also heard this from different people. Where is the proof?

Thanks for your question. I have also heard this many times myself. It's interesting to note that C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist, once wrote something to the effect that “Hell is no one but yourself, forever and ever.” On the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French atheistic existentialist philosopher, once wrote that “Hell is other people.” But what does the Bible actually say?

Here are just a few passages to consider:

1. Isaiah 14:3-21: This passage is a taunt against the king of Babylon. What's interesting is the description of the king's reception in Sheol, the place of the dead. Notice such verses as 9-10: “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; it arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; it raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones. They will all respond and say to you, ‘Even you have been made weak as we, you have become like us.’” Thus, this passage seems to indicate some sort of communication between departed spirits in Sheol. How literally this should be taken is, of course, quite difficult to say. Additionally, it must be remembered that, strictly speaking, Sheol is not the same as Hell. In the Old Testament all the dead were believed to reside in Sheol, both the righteous and the wicked. Hell, on the other hand, is a place of eternal punishment only for the wicked. God could redeem a righteous man from the power of Sheol (Ps. 49:15), but there is “No

Exit" from Hell.

2. Luke 16:19-31: In this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we learn that Lazarus is received into "Abraham's bosom" at death whereas the rich man goes to Hades. "Abraham's bosom" is pictured as a place of both comfort and honor; Hades is pictured as a place of fire and torment. Strictly speaking, "Abraham's bosom" is not Heaven and Hades is not Hell, but each does seem to be a precursor of the other (i.e. Hades is a sort of pre-hell Hell—see Rev. 20:14). Although the rich man is not said to converse with anyone else in Hades, he does converse with Abraham! In the parable, the two men are able to speak with one another even though a great chasm prevents them from crossing over to one another. Again, it is difficult to know how literally such a parable should be read. Is it an actual description of the afterlife prior to one's final judgment? I'll let you come to your own conclusion on that one!

3. Revelation 20:10-15: This passage does actually deal with the eternal destiny of the unsaved in Hell. In v. 10, we see that Satan, the beast and the false prophet will all be there. In vv. 14-15 we learn that "death" and "Hades" (and presumably all their inhabitants), along with everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into "the lake of fire" (i.e. Hell). Thus, all the unsaved, along with Satan and his demons, appear to be ultimately consigned to the same place of punishment (see Matt. 25:41). But nothing is said about whether these lost souls will have any communication with one another, or even whether they will be able to see one another. In other words, just because they are consigned to the same place of punishment, it does not necessarily follow that they will have any opportunity to communicate with one another. It could be that Hell is analogous to a large number of prisoners, all at the same prison, but all separated from one another in something like solitary confinement! But I honestly don't know.

Thus, to answer your question (which is a good one!), I do not personally think there is enough scriptural evidence to reach a firm conclusion concerning whether or not those in Hell will be utterly alone and unable to communicate or not. I'm sorry I can't answer your question any better, but at least my answer is an honest one!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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Looking for God

Looking for God

*If God had a name, what would it be?
And would you call it to His face?
If you were faced with Him in all His glory,
What would you ask if you had just one question?
Yeah, yeah, God is great.
Yeah, yeah, God is good.*

God has made a comeback in pop music in recent years. In her song "One of Us," Joan Osborne wonders what we might ask God if we stood face-to-face with Him.[\[1\]](#) Writer Tom Beaudoin sees a spilled pitcher of milk in the music video for R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion" as a symbol of the loss of religious authority in the lives of Gen-Xers.[\[2\]](#) Madonna's video for the song "Like a Prayer" is full of religious symbolism: an altar, a crucifix, candles, and other icons.[\[3\]](#)

Tom Beaudoin, a member of Generation X himself, says his generation is "strikingly religious." They express their spirituality through pop culture rather than through institutional religion.^[4] The shift from the word *religion* to *spirituality* is significant here. Having lost confidence in institutional religion to provide satisfactory answers to important issues, Xers look elsewhere; often mixing ideas and religious expressions from a variety of sources as each person chooses for him or herself what to believe.

Beaudoin says Xers are on an "irreverent spiritual quest." Feeling abandoned by parents, churches, politicians, and even technology, they seek their own path in finding meaning for their lives. Campus minister Jimmy Long writes, "Xers are twice as likely as people in [the Boomer] generation to be children of divorce. Between 1960 and 1979 the American divorce rate tripled." He continues, "Fifty percent of today's teenagers are not living with both birth parents."^[5]

Looking outside the home, Xers feel let down as they look at what the Boomer generation left them.^[6] They were alarmed by the TV movie *The Day After* that was about the results of nuclear war. The spaceship Challenger blew up shortly after takeoff; Watergate was fresh in our cultural memory; environmentalists were pointing to the severe damage to nature caused by technology. Xers thus see themselves as fixers, as those who have to clean up the mess preceding generations made. But since their own backgrounds were often so difficult, many simply hope to take charge of their own lives.

Finding little stability around them to give them any confidence that there is such a thing as an objective truth which remains the same, and thus no ultimate truth which makes sense of everything, they feel the burden of providing their own meaning of life and establishing their own moral standards. Jimmy Long quotes Eric, a Gen-Xer who speaks of the stress this puts on him. "There's too much pressure from outside," he says.

"Life gets pretty complicated when you have to think carefully about everything you do, deciding for yourself whether it's right or wrong. In the end there can be so many conflicts going on inside of you that you can't do anything, it becomes impossible to be happy with what you think at any point."[{7}](#)

As a result of all this, when they want to find their place in this world, Xers turn to friends. Their small communities of friends provide a structure for truth and meaning. Consensus means more with respect to "truth" than logic and facts.[{8}](#) "Busters process truth relationally rather than propositionally," say Celek and Zander.[{9}](#) The emphasis on community in Xer culture reveals their desire to get along, not get ahead; to connect, not conquer.[{10}](#)

The modernistic search for utopia without invoking God has been turned on its head with the Buster generation. Their horizons and ambitions might be smaller than those of their parents, but they have an openness to the transcendent that their parents didn't have. Spirituality is now an accepted aspect of life; Xers are open to a sense of fellowship with something bigger than themselves.

In his collection of short stories, *Life After God*, Doug Coupland allows a man he calls Scout to tell about himself and his small group of friends. Scout tells about the early, carefree days of fun and camaraderie, a time of living in paradise in which "any discussion of transcendental ideas [was] pointless."[{11}](#) As time went by, however, they all saw their dreams fade in the realities of everyday life. Scout had this to say about his life:

Sometimes I want to go to sleep and merge with the foggy world of dreams and not return to this, our real world. Sometimes I look back on my life and am surprised at the lack of kind things I have done. Sometimes I just feel that there

*must be another road that can be walked—away from this person
I became—either against my will or by default. . . .*

He continues:

*Now—here is my secret: I tell it to you with the openness of
heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that
you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is
that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it
alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem
to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer
seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond
being able to love. {12}*

This first fully postmodern generation needs to understand that they aren't alone: we *all* need God. The good news is that God has not left us wandering in a dark place but has come looking for us. He is not aloof, off making other worlds, or too busy gussying up heaven to notice us down here. He has taken on our flesh and become one of us. What if God was one of us, Joan Osborne? He was! He looked like us, hurt like us, laughed like us. In this article I'm going to look at some of the characteristics of this God who became like us, to show how He has the answers Xers need.

God: A Person Who Sees and Feels

*If God had a face, what would it look like?
And would you want to see,
If seeing meant that you would have to believe,
In things like Heaven and in Jesus and the Saints,
And all the Prophets and . . .
Yeah, yeah, God is great.
Yeah, yeah, God is good.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah" {13}*

What *does* God look like? He doesn't have a physical body. But what does He "look" like character-wise? Those of us born before Gen-X have a hard time understanding that many in this generation have no real understanding of the God of the Bible, the one in whom we ask them to commit their very souls. Who *is* this God, anyway? Let's consider some of His characteristics.

A Person, Not a Force

First of all God is a *Person*, not some Star Wars "force." Because we're created in His image we can learn some things about Him from looking at ourselves. As we are persons, He is a Person. "He possesses life, self-consciousness, freedom, purpose, intelligence, and emotion,"[\[14\]](#) just like us. Thus it could rightly be said that the Old Testament patriarch Abraham could be called "the friend of God" (James 2:23). One cannot be a friend with a "force." Because God is a Person He can be involved in our lives, unlike a force, which cannot relate to us on a personal level.

One Who Sees . . .

Furthermore, this is a God who sees. The Bible teaches, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good." (Prov. 15:3) We're told that He knows completely. God knows when the sparrow falls from the sky; He even knows the number of hairs on our heads! (Matt. 10:29-31)

More importantly, God knows our hearts (Acts 1:24). Those who recognize their need see this as great news. If, on the other hand, this makes us fearful because we know the badness in our hearts, we're also told that "He knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust" (Psa. 103:14). God doesn't look for those who meet His standard, for none of us can. He looks for the one who will believe and then obey. In fact, it's at

the place of our greatest need that He meets us.

. . . With a Father's Eyes

Beyond that, God presents Himself to us as a father, as *the* Father. Unlike many fathers today, God takes His fatherhood seriously. He provides for our needs (Matt. 7:11). Like a shepherd looking for a lost sheep, God looks for the one who strayed away; not wishing that any should remain lost. There's a story in the New Testament about a father whose younger son asks for his inheritance only to squander it on wild living. He winds up feeding pigs to earn his food. Finally, he comes to his senses and returns home, prepared to be as one of the hired men, to give up his rights as a son. As he is approaching his home, his father sees him coming down the road. In his joy, the father gathers up his robe and runs down the road to embrace the son (and in those days men didn't typically act in such an undignified way), and he welcomes his son home. The father in the story represents God the Father.

One Who Feels

Even more than seeing, God *feels*. He truly "knows our pain." In Jesus, we see a God who weeps over the hardness of His people, who has compassion on those who are sick and on those caught in sin. He knows the feeling of rejection, having been rejected even by those who were close to him. When he was put to death by crucifixion he felt the weight of sin even though he had never sinned. And while bearing our sin, he felt forsaken by God, alienated, as it were, from his own Father.

In short, God is a Person who reveals Himself as the Father who knows all about us, as one who understands our hurts and who cares. This is a God who is in touch. This is a God to believe in.

The God Who Reaches Out

Loves and Cares

The character Scout in Doug Coupland's book, *Life Without God*, says he needs God. One reason, he says, is "to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love."[\[15\]](#) The implication, of course, is that God has the capacity to help people love. To do this He must be a God of love Himself.

The Bible says that God *is* love (I John 4:8,16). It is a part of His very *nature* to love. This love is shown throughout Scripture in God's dealings with His people. Some critics see God in the Old Testament as angry and vengeful. But they are selectively focusing on the actions of a just and holy God in responding to wrongdoing. They overlook the love of God poured out on His people as He cared for them, protected them, and provided for their needs. *Lovingkindness* is a word used many times in descriptions of God. "But You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness," (Ps. 86:15).

This love isn't just for the elite, for "super people." God cares for the "regular people." "For there is no partiality with God," the Bible says (Rom. 2:11; Acts 10:34). In fact, He chastises His people for treating the influential differently than others (James 2:1-7), and for attending to all their religious duties, but not demonstrating true love to those in need. "Learn to do right!" He says. "Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isa. 1:17). The second greatest commandment, in fact, is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27-37), and our neighbor is anyone who is in need. Jesus reached out to the outsiders: the prostitutes, the lepers, and the poor. Those who knew their problems were the one's most drawn to him.

Reaches Out by Identifying and Drawing Near

What this reveals is a God that doesn't stand aloof, but who draws near. From the beginning of the human race, He has been reaching out to us. When the first people sinned, God took the initiative to repair the breach. He established the people of Israel, and constantly sought after them, even when they were in open rebellion. This was all a precursor to God's most astonishing move. His love for us was so great that He chose to become one of us; He didn't stay apart from us, but rather He identified with us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Although he was God, He emptied Himself, and was "made in human likeness," and became a servant (Phil. 2:7).

As the shepherd searches for his sheep, God came looking for us. "Being in very nature God," the Bible says, Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus became a man so he could bring mankind to Himself. And He did it by becoming one of us. This is a God to believe in.

The God Who Receives, Redeems, Reconciles, and Restores

Receives

One of the problems many Gen-Xers have is the feeling that they aren't acceptable. The child saw the departure of a parent through divorce as a personal rejection. Such familial rejection, whether real or just perceived, colors a child's attitude about himself and his acceptability. Sadly enough, many Gen-Xers deal with feelings of shame, thinking they aren't good enough. "If Dad or Mom left, I must not be worth

much," they think.

Even in cases where both parents were present, children were often left to raise themselves because of their parents' jobs. "They were the first full-blown 'latchkey children,'" say Celek and Zander, "coming home to a house where nobody was home." [\[16\]](#) What might at first seem like wonderful freedom often resulted in fear and a sense of aloneness. Even day care wasn't always enough to relieve the sense of being alone. Again, this felt like abandonment to many kids.

God isn't like fallen people, however. He receives anyone who will come to Him. He never turns anyone away, and He never leaves. We need not fear enemies from without, difficult tasks ahead, or the lack of provision for our needs (Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5). "I will never fail you or forsake you," is His promise, a promise that has been affirmed by His people for centuries.

Redeems

The value God places on us is revealed by the fact of Jesus' death by crucifixion. By His death He *redeemed* us; He bought us out of slavery only to make us children of God. We are no longer "owned" by our old way of life. The slave standing on the block has been bought and paid for—not to remain as a slave but to become a child! The price we couldn't pay, Jesus did.

Reconciles

Gen Xers can have problems getting close to people because of the rejection they have felt. After all, for many, even parents were aloof from them; why should they get close to others? They may not feel like they *can* get close to others.

We're told in the book of Romans that God has taken the initiative to bring us close to Him, to reconcile us to Himself. Whereas formerly we were alienated from Him, now we

can come near to Him in open communication. "We have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ," the apostle Paul wrote (Rom. 5:1). God breaks down the walls for us.

Restores

Once our sin is taken care of through faith in Christ and we are reconciled with God we begin the process of being restored in the image of Christ. There is a fundamental change in us when our spirits are made alive through Christ. Building upon that, the Spirit of God begins slowly changing us from the inside out, conforming us to the image of Jesus, and making us like Him. This restoration will be complete when we are with Him.

Summed Up in the Cross and Resurrection

All this is summed up in the work of Jesus on the cross. He paid the ultimate price for us, and enabled us to be reconciled to the Father. And we're told that in His death He called all people to Himself (John 12:32). Furthermore, when He rose from the grave, coming to life never to die again, He showed us what our hope is: our own resurrection, revealing our full restoration in His image. This restoration begins here on earth through the work of God's Spirit in us. It will be made complete when we are raised up, never to die again.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see God receiving, redeeming, reconciling, and restoring. God has done the work. This is a God to believe in.

The God Who Can be Trusted

When those who are the most important to them have lied to people, they become distrustful. David Hocking tells of a woman who, after her parents had divorced, had been put in a special institution. Her parents rarely visited. When she was old enough to be on her own she began wandering from town to town, experiencing abuse and broken promises. As a result she

didn't trust anyone. Rev. Hocking says, "As I began telling her of God's love for her, she asked, 'Can He be trusted?' I answered, 'Of course. He's God!' She countered, 'Why should I trust Him? Everyone else has let me down!'" [\[17\]](#)

What does it take to build trust in a person? Hocking gives three factors: telling the truth, doing what is right and fair, and being reliable. Do these characteristics describe God?

Tells the Truth

Because God is holy or separate from all that is sinful, He is morally pure. As such He cannot lie. "It is *impossible* for God to lie," says the New Testament (Heb. 6:18). If He says He will do something, He will do it (Num. 23:19). The people of Israel discovered that God was true to His word in fulfilling His promises. He gave them the land He had promised them, and over and over He spared them when they turned away from Him because of the covenant He had made with their forefathers. And because He cannot lie, those who believe can rest in the promises of His constant presence and of eternity with Him (Titus 1:2; Matt. 28:20).

Does What is Right and Fair

We also can count on God to do what is fair or just. If He couldn't be depended on to do that, we would have no reason to trust Him. What if He arbitrarily changed the rules on us and judged us by a different standard? A student complains that his teacher grades inconsistently. She seems to be arbitrary in assigning values to projects, and often gives no clear word on what she expects. He says she isn't being fair. A boss shows favoritism among his employees, advancing those who are his friends, while leaving the truly worthy behind. Not fair, we say.

God is not like this. He plays straight. He tells us what He expects, and He shows no partiality in His judgments.

“Righteous are You, O Lord,” says the Psalmist, “and Your laws are right,” (Ps. 119:137). Likewise, He demands justice of us: “How blessed are those who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right,” (Ps. 106:3).

Can Be Depended Upon

Finally, God can be counted on. He is faithful to His word and His character. Knowing what He is like teaches us what He does. And one of His characteristics is being always the same: “For I, the Lord, do not change,” He says (Mal. 3:6). He is the one “who does not change like shifting shadows” (James. 1:17). God is faithful forever to his own nature.

He is also faithful to his decrees and his promises. “I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known;” He said. “[T]hen suddenly I acted, and they came to pass,” (Isa. 48:3). He promised Sarah a child in her old age, and He gave her one (Gen. 21:1). King Solomon said, “not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through His servant Moses,” (1 Kings 8:56).

God can be trusted. He tells the truth, He does what is fair, and He can be counted on. This is a God you can believe in.

Notes

1. Joan Osborne, “One of Us,” on the album *Relish*, Uni/Mercury, 1995. Downloaded from http://lyrics.astraweb.com:2000/display.cgi?joan_osborne%2E%2Erelish%2E%2Eone_of_us, Feb. 17, 2001.

2. Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Question of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 53.

3. Cf. Beaudoin, 74-75.

4. Beaudoin, xiii-xiv.

5. Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching The Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 43.
6. See Jerry Solomon, "[Generation X](#)", an overview of this generation.
7. Long, 48, quoting Andrew Smith, "Talking About My Generation," *The Face*, July 1994, p. 82.
8. Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation: Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 46.
9. Celek and Zander, 51.
10. Celek and Zander, 31-32.
11. Douglas Coupland, *Life After God* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 273.
12. Coupland, 310, 313, 359.
13. Osborne, *One of Us*.
14. David Hocking, *The Nature of God in Plain Language* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984), 65.
15. Coupland, 359.
16. Celek and Zander, 55.
17. Hocking, 145. I am indebted to the author for the outline of this section.

Civility

We are living in the midst of an epidemic of rudeness and desperately need civility. Kerby Anderson looks at the rise of incivility and documents its effects in society, education, and politics. He concludes by providing a biblical framework for civility.

The Rise of Incivility

We seem to be living in the midst of an epidemic of rudeness. Articles in the newspaper document the number of incidents of road rage. And if you doubt that, just try to merge onto a busy freeway and see how many drivers honk their horn or try to cut you off.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. A 1997 American Automobile Association report documents a sharp rise in the use of cars as weapons (people trying to run over other people on purpose). A Colorado funeral director complains about impatient drivers darting in and out of funeral processions. Instead of waiting for the procession to pass, they threaten life and limb while ignoring both law and tradition in their rush to get somewhere.

Rudeness seems to be at an all-time high in airports. There is the story of the man who was angry at missing a flight connection and threw his suitcase at an eight-month pregnant airline employee. Or there is the story of the woman who learned that there were no sandwiches on her flight and punched the flight attendant and pushed her to the floor. And there is the tragic story of the man who rushed the cockpit and had to be restrained. In the process of stopping him, the passengers apparently used too much force and killed him.

Cursing and vulgar language are on the increase. Character assassination and negative political advertisements are up. Meanwhile, charitable giving seems to be on the decline along with volunteerism.

No wonder so many are talking about the need for civility. George W. Bush's inaugural speech talked about "a new commitment to live out our nation's promise through civility, courage, compassion and character. America, at its best, matches a commitment to principle with a concern for civility."

Commentators are wringing their hands over our social distress. Former education secretary and virtues guru William Bennett has addressed the issue of civility. Gertrude Himmelfarb has written about *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, has devoted a book to the problem, as has Yale Law professor Stephen Carter.

Newspapers are running stories asking, "Why are we so rude?" *U.S. News and World Report* talks about "The American Uncivil Wars." [\[1\]](#) They conclude that "Crude, Rude and Obnoxious Behavior Has Replaced Good Manners."

So in this article I will be addressing this very important concept of civility. In a sense, it is a second installment on a previous article I wrote on [integrity](#). If integrity is the standard we use to judge our own moral development, then civility is the standard we use to judge our moral interaction with others.

As we will see, the rules of civility are ultimately the rules of morality, which are rooted in biblical morality.

The Moral Basis of Civility

The word *civilité* shares the same etymology with words like *civilized* and *civilization*. Quite simply, the root word means

to be “a member of the household.” Just as there are certain rules that allow family members to live peacefully within a household, so there are rules of civility that allow us to live peacefully within a society. We have certain moral responsibilities to one another.

While there have been many philosophical discussions on what civility is and how it should be practiced, I believe Jesus simply expressed the goal of civility when he taught that, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). If we truly love our neighbors, then we should be governed by moral standards that express concern for others and limit our own freedom.

Perhaps that is why civility is on the decline. More and more people live for themselves and do not feel they are morally accountable to anyone (even God) for their actions or behavior. We are told to “Look Out for #1,” and not to let anyone limit our freedom to be ourselves.

Civility also acknowledges the value of another person. Politeness and manners are not merely to make social life easier. Stephen Carter, in his book on *Civility*, says that our actions and sacrifice are a

. . .[S]ignal of respect for our fellow citizens, marking them as full equals, both before the law and before God. Rules of civility are thus also rules of morality; it is morally proper to treat our fellow citizens with respect, and morally improper not to. Our crisis of civility is part of a larger crisis of morality.[\[2\]](#)

Again, this may help answer why civility is on the decline. An increasing majority in our society no longer believes in moral absolutes. These deny that absolutes of any kind exist, much less moral absolutes. So as our crisis of morality unfolds, so does barbarism and decadence. Civility is what is lost from society.

If this is so, then the rise of rudeness and incivility cannot be easily altered. Miss Manners and others have written books about how our nation can regain its civility. But if the crisis is greater than a lack of manners (and I believe that it is), its solution must be found in a greater social change than merely teaching manners or character. Ultimately, an increase in civility must flow out of a moral and religious change. Spiritual revival and reformation are the ultimate solutions to the current problem of incivility. And I believe Christians should lead the way by exemplary behavior. In essence, Christians must be the best citizens and the best examples of civility in society.

Civility in the Schools

We have documented the rising incivility in our society. What is so tragic is to find that our children are mimicking the incivility of the adult world. A poll conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that 89 percent of grade school teachers and principals reported that they “regularly” face abusive language from students.[\[3\]](#)

Contrast this situation with the nature of public education just a few decades ago. It is likely that when you grew up, you were instructed in manners and etiquette. The day began with the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and throughout the day you were instructed to show respect to your country and to your teachers.

Today when schools try to teach manners, parents and civil libertarians often thwart those plans. And when a school does succeed in teaching civility, the story becomes headline news; as it was when *U.S. News and World Report* opened its account on “The American Uncivil Wars” with a story of a school that was actually trying to teach manners.[\[4\]](#)

Consider what would have happened a few decades ago if you misbehaved at school. Your teacher or your principal would

have disciplined you. And when you arrived home, your parents would have assumed you were disciplined for good reason. They probably would have punished you again. Now contrast that with today's parents who are quick to challenge the teacher or principal and are often quick to threaten with a lawsuit.

When I was growing up there seemed to be a conspiracy of the adults against the kids. Every parent and every teacher had the same set of moral values. So if I misbehaved at Johnny's house, I knew that Johnny's mother had the same set of rules as my mother. If I misbehaved at school, I knew my teachers had the same set of rules as my parents.

Today that moral consensus is gone. If anything, we have a conspiracy of the kids against the adults. Most kids spend lots of time telling their parents what *other* parents let their kids do. We have sunk to the least common denominator in our morality.

To rebuild civility in our society, we need to begin with the next generation. Sadly they are not learning to respect authority. They are learning to disrespect authority and to play one set of parental values against another. And parents must begin to trust a teacher's authority. My parents trusted the teachers and the school to enforce the rules appropriately. Trust and respect are two essential ingredients in rebuilding a foundation of civility.

Civility in Politics

Often when we talk about the need for civility, we focus on the political arena. Character assassination and negative political advertisements are on the increase. Many commentators lament what they call the "politics of personal destruction." And savvy candidates have tried to tap into this growing concern by calling for greater civility in our public discourse.

At the outset, we should acknowledge that politics has always been a dirty business. More than two centuries ago, the founders of this country often had harsh and critical things to say about each other during political campaigns. Yet we also have some very positive examples of civil discussions of major social ills.

According to Stephen Carter in his book *Civility*, one shining example of this is the Civil Rights Movement. "The leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) knew that the protests would be met with violence, because they were challenging a violently oppressive system. But they also knew that success would be found not through incivility, but through the display of moral courage."

Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders trained their protestors to remain civil and even loving in the face of repression. He called this the "process of purification," and it "involved both prayer and repeated reminders that the Biblical injunction to love our neighbors is not a command to love only the nice ones." It's instructive to remember that the stated purpose of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was "to save the soul of the nation."

Those of us involved in social action today should be mindful of this as we fight against social ills in our society. I firmly believe that Christians should be good citizens and models of civility. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be passionate about trying to rectify social problems. And we can disagree with those who do not hold to a biblical view of morality. But we should learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We should make our case with logic and compassion. And I believe we will be more successful if we do so.

Consider the abortion debate. A majority of citizens have a great deal of ambivalence about abortion. They do not feel good about abortion on demand, but they also fear what might

happen if abortion was totally banned in this country. Will we attract these millions of people by being angry, vociferous Bible-thumpers? Or will we attract them by being thoughtful, compassionate Christians who demonstrate our love for both mother and child at crisis pregnancy centers? I think the answer should be obvious, and that is the power of civility in the public arena.

Civility: A Biblical Framework

At the heart of civility is the biblical command to love your neighbor as yourself. While it is relatively easy to love people who are your friends or people who are nice to you, the real test of Christian love comes when we are with strangers or with people who are not civil to you. When we find ourselves in the presence of strangers, we should treat them with dignity and respect even if they are not civil to us. Even if they are not gracious toward us, we should not repay them with incivility. Romans 12:21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Our duty to be civil to others should not depend on whether we like them or agree with their moral or political perspectives. They may be disagreeable, and we are free to disagree with them, but we should do so by giving grace. Often such a gentle response can change a discussion or dialogue. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that, "A gentle answer turns away wrath."

Civility also requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, one should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right and that he is wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

Civility also requires that we watch what we say. The Bible clearly warns us of the danger of the tongue (James 3:5-8). We

should work to cleanse our language of harsh, critical, and condemning words. We should rid ourselves of nasty and vulgar language. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

If Christians want to reform society and return to civility, one excellent model is William Wilberforce (1759-1833). Most people know Wilberforce as the man who brought an end to the British slave trade. He served for half a century in the House of Commons. And led by his Christian faith, he tirelessly worked for the abolition of slavery. But that was only one of the "two great objects" of his life. The other, even more daunting was his attempt to transform the civil and moral climate of his times. Although he is known as an abolitionist, the other great accomplishment of his life was in the reformation of manners.

I believe he provides a positive example of how Christians should engage the world. We should do so with courage, compassion, character, and civility.

Notes

1. John Marks, "The American Uncivil Wars: How Crude, Ruse and Obnoxious Behavior Has Replaced Good Manners and Why That Hurts Our Politics and Culture," *U.S. News and World Report*, 22 April 1996, 66-72.
2. Stephen Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 11.
3. Antonia Barber, "Rough Language Plagues Schools, Educators Say," *USA Today*, 11 March 1997, 6D.
4. Marks, "The American Uncivil Wars," 66.
5. Carter, *Civility*, 28.

A Biblical View of Economics – A Christian Life Perspective

Kerby Anderson shows that economics is an important part of one's Christian worldview. Our view of economics is where many of Christ's teachings find their daily application.

In this article we are going to be developing a Christian view of economics. Although most of us do not think of economics in moral terms, there has (until the last century) always been a strong connection between economics and Christian thought.

✖ If you look at the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, you find whole sections of his theological work devoted to economic issues. He asked such questions as: "What is a just price?" or "How should we deal with poverty?"

Today, these questions, if they are even discussed at all, would be discussed in a class on economic theory. But in his time, these were theological questions that were a critical and integral part of the educational curricula.

In the Protestant Reformation, we find the same thing. In John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, whole sections are devoted to government and economics. So Christians should not feel that economics is outside the domain of Christian thinking. If anything, we need to recapture this arena and bring a strong biblical message to it.

In reality, the Bible speaks to economic issues more than any

other issue. Whole sections of the book of Proverbs and many of the parables of Jesus deal with economic matters. They tell us what our attitude should be toward wealth and how a Christian should handle his or her finances. The Bible also provides a description of human nature, which helps us evaluate the possible success of an economic system in society.

The Bible teaches that there are two aspects to human nature. First, we are created in the image of God and thus able to control the economic system. But second, human beings are sinful and thus tend towards greed and exploitation. This points to the need to protect individuals from human sinfulness in the economic system. So Christians have a much more balanced view of economics and can therefore construct economic theories and analyze existing economic systems.

Christians should see the fallacy of such utopian economic theories because they fail to take seriously human sinfulness. Instead of changing people from the inside out as the gospel does, Marxists believe that people will be changed from the outside in. Change the economic base, they say, and you will change human beings. This is one of the reasons that Marxism was doomed to failure, because it did not take into account human sinfulness and our need for spiritual redemption.

It is important for Christians to think about the economic arena. It is a place where much of everyday life takes place, and we can evaluate economics from a biblical perspective. When we use the Bible as our framework, we can begin to construct a government and an economy that liberates human potentiality and limits human sinfulness.

Many Christians are surprised to find out how much the Bible says about economic issues. And one of the most important aspects of the biblical teaching is not the specific economic matters it explores, but the more general description of human nature.

Economics and Human Nature

When we are looking at either theories of government or theories of economics, an important starting point is our view of human nature. This helps us analyze these theories and predict their possible success in society. Therefore, we must go to the Scriptures to evaluate the very foundation of each economic theory.

First, the Bible says that human beings are created in the image of God. This implies that we have rationality and responsibility. Because we have rationality and volition, we can choose between various competing products and services. Furthermore, we can function within a market system in which people can exercise their power of choice. We are not like the animals that are governed by instinct. We are governed by rationality and can make meaningful choices within a market system.

We can also assume that private property can exist within this system because of the biblical idea of dominion. In Genesis 1:28, God says we are to subdue the earth and have dominion over the creation. Certainly one aspect of this is that humans can own property in which they can exercise their dominion.

Since we have both volition and private property rights, we can then assume that we should have the freedom to exchange these private property rights in a free market where goods and services can be exchanged.

The second part of human nature is also important. The Bible describes the fall of the world and the fall of mankind. We are fallen creatures with a sin nature. This sinfulness manifests itself in selfishness, greed, and exploitation. Thus, we need some protection in an economic system from the sinful effects of human interaction.

Since the Bible teaches about the effects of sinful behavior

on the world, we should be concerned about any system that would concentrate economic power and thereby unleash the ravages of sinful behavior on the society. Christians, therefore, should reject state-controlled or centrally controlled economies, which would concentrate power in the hands of a few sinful individuals. Instead, we should support an economic system that would disperse that power and protect us from greed and exploitation.

Finally, we should also recognize that not only is human nature fallen, but the world is fallen. The world has become a place of decay and scarcity. In a fallen world, we have to be good managers of the limited resources that can be made available in a market economy. God has given us dominion over His creation, and we must be good stewards of the resources at our disposal.

The free enterprise system has provided the greatest amount of freedom and the most effective economic gains of any economic system ever devised. Nevertheless, Christians often wonder if they can support capitalism. So the rest of this article, we are going to take a closer look at the free enterprise system.

Capitalism: Foundations

Capitalism had its beginning with the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, written by Adam Smith in 1776. He argued that the mercantile economic system working at that time in Great Britain was not the best economic foundation. Instead, he argued that the wealth of nations could be increased by allowing the individual to seek his own self-interest and by removing governmental control over the economy.

His theory rested on three major premises. First, his system was based upon the observation that people are motivated by self-interest. He said, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." Smith went on to

say that “neither intends to promote the public interest,” yet each is “led by an invisible hand to promote an end that was not part of [his] intention.”

A second premise of Adam Smith was the acceptance of private property. Property was not to be held in common but owned and freely traded in a market system. Profits generated from the use and exchange of private property rights provided incentive and became the mechanism that drives the capitalist system.

From a Christian perspective we can see that the basis of private property rests in our being created in God’s image. We can make choices over property that we can exchange in a market system. The need for private property grows out of our sinfulness. Our sinful nature produces laziness, neglect, and slothfulness. Economic justice can best be achieved if each person is accountable for his own productivity.

A third premise of Adam Smith’s theory was the minimization of the role of government. Borrowing a phrase from the French physiocrats, he called this *laissez-faire*. Smith argued that we should decrease the role of government and increase the role of a free market.

Historically, capitalism has had a number of advantages. It has liberated economic potential. It has also provided the foundation for a great deal of political and economic freedom. When government is not controlling markets, then there is economic freedom to be involved in a whole array of entrepreneurial activities.

Capitalism has also led to a great deal of political freedom, because once you limit the role of government in economics, you limit the scope of government in other areas. It is no accident that most of the countries with the greatest political freedom usually have a great deal of economic freedom.

At the outset, let me say that Christians cannot and should

not endorse every aspect of capitalism. For example, many proponents of capitalism hold a view known as utilitarianism, which is opposed to the notion of biblical absolutes. Certainly we must reject this philosophy. But here I would like to provide an economic critique.

Capitalism: Economic Criticisms

The first economic criticism is that capitalism leads to monopolies. These develop for two reasons: too little government and too much government. Monopolies have occurred in the past because government has not been willing to exercise its God-given authority. Government finally stepped in and broke up the big trusts that were not allowing the free enterprise system to function correctly.

But in recent decades, the reason for monopolies has often been too much government. Many of the largest monopolies today are government sanctioned or sponsored monopolies that prevent true competition from taking place. The solution is for government to allow a freer market where competition can take place.

Let me add that many people often call markets with limited competition monopolies when the term is not appropriate. For example, the three major U.S. car companies may seem like a monopoly or oligopoly until you realize that in the market of consumer durables the true market is the entire western world.

The second criticism of capitalism is that it leads to pollution. In a capitalistic system, pollutants are considered externalities. The producer will incur costs that are external to the firm so often there is no incentive to clean up the pollution. Instead, it is dumped into areas held in common such as the air or water.

The solution in this case is governmental intervention. But I don't believe that this should be a justification for building

a massive bureaucracy. We need to find creative ways to direct self-interest so that people work towards the common good.

For example, most communities use the water supply from a river and dump treated waste back into the water to flow downstream. Often there is a tendency to cut corners and leave the waste treatment problem for those downstream. But if you required that the water intake pipe be downstream and the waste pipe be upstream you could insure less pollution problems. It is now in the self-interest of the community to clean the wastewater being pumped back into the river. So while there is a need for governmental action, much less might be needed if we think of creative ways to constrain self-interest and make it work for the common good.

We can acknowledge that although there are some valid economic criticisms of capitalism, these can be controlled by limited governmental control. And when capitalism is wisely controlled, it generates significant economic prosperity and economic freedom for its citizens. Next, let us discuss some of the moral problems of capitalism.

Capitalism: Moral Critiques

One of the first moral arguments against capitalism involves the issue of greed. And this is why many Christians feel ambivalent towards the free enterprise system. After all, some critics of capitalism contend that this economic system makes people greedy.

To answer this question we need to resolve the following question. Does capitalism make people greedy or do we already have greedy people who use the economic freedom of the capitalistic system to achieve their ends? In light of the biblical description of human nature, the latter seems more likely.

Because people are sinful and selfish, some are going to use

the capitalist system to feed their greed. But that is not so much a criticism of capitalism as it is a realization of the human condition. The goal of capitalism is not to change people but to protect us from human sinfulness.

Capitalism is a system in which bad people can do the least harm, and good people have the freedom to do good works. Capitalism works well if you have completely moral individuals. But it also functions adequately when you have selfish and greedy people.

Important to this discussion is the realization that there is a difference between self-interest and selfishness. All people have self-interest and that can operate in ways that are not selfish. For example, it is in my self-interest to get a job and earn an income so that I can support my family. I can do that in ways that are not selfish.

Adam Smith recognized that every one of us have self-interest and rather than trying to change that, he made self-interest the motor of the capitalist system. And before you react to that, consider the fact that even the gospel appeals to our self-interest. It is in our self-interest to accept Jesus Christ as our savior so that our eternal destiny will be assured.

By contrast, other economic systems like socialism ignore the biblical definitions of human nature. Thus, they allow economic power to be centralized and concentrate power in the hands of a few greedy people. Those who complain of the influence major corporations have on our lives should consider the socialist alternative of how a few governmental bureaucrats control every aspect of their lives.

Greed certainly occurs in the capitalist system. But it does not surface just in this economic system. It is part of our sinfulness. The solution is not to change the economic system, but to change human nature with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, we may readily acknowledge that capitalism has its flaws as an economic system, but it can be controlled to give us a great deal of economic prosperity and economic freedom.

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Archaeology and the New Testament

Dr. Patrick Zukeran shows that numerous people, places and events described in the New Testament have been verified by archeology.



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

There is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the historical accuracy of the Bible. Some feel that the Bible is a fictitious work and should be read as a work of literary fiction. Others feel it is an accurate historical work divinely inspired by God. Archaeology has played a major role in determining the trustworthiness of the Bible. In a [previous article](#), we discussed archaeological confirmations of the Old Testament. In this one, we will look at the archaeological discoveries that have confirmed the historical accuracy of the New Testament. There is a great deal of evidence outside of the Bible that confirms the account of Jesus as written in the Gospels.

It is important to realize, however, that it is unrealistic to expect archaeology to back up every event and place in the New Testament. Our perspective is to look for what evidence exists and see whether or not it corresponds with the New Testament.

Historical Confirmation of Jesus

The first evidence comes from the four Gospels which, themselves, are proven to be accurate.^{1} Outside the biblical text are several witnesses as well. Jewish historian Josephus (37 A.D.100 A.D.) recorded the history of the Jewish people in Palestine from 70 A.D. to 100 A.D. In his work *Antiquities*, he states:

Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the gentiles. He was the Christ and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day.^{2}

Although he mentions Jesus in a sarcastic way, Josephus confirms the facts that Jesus did do many great miracles, drew a following, was crucified, and was proclaimed alive on the third day.

Pliny the Younger, Emperor of Bythynia in northwestern Turkey, writing to Emperor Trajan in 112 A.D. writes:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it; after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but ordinary and innocent kind.

One of the most important Romans historians is Tacitus. In 115 A.D. he recorded Nero's persecution of the Christians, in the process of which he wrote the following:

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, . . . but even in Rome.[\[3\]](#)

There are over 39 extra-biblical sources that attest to over one hundred facts regarding the life and teachings of Jesus.

Accuracy of the Gospels

The accuracy of the Gospels has been supported by archaeology. The names of many of the Israelite cities, events, and people described in them have now been located. Here are a few examples.

The Gospels mention four neighboring and well-populated coastal cities along the Sea of Galilee: Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Tiberias. Jesus performed many miracles in the first three cities. Despite this testimony, these cities rejected Jesus and therefore were cursed by Him (Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:12-16). These cities eventually disappeared from history and their locations remained missing for centuries. Their demise fulfills the prophetic condemnation of Jesus.

Only recently has archaeology recovered their possible locations. Tell Hum is believed to be Capernaum. (A "tell" is a mound or elevated land that has arisen by repeated and long-term rebuilding of the same site. Layers of civilizations can be found at different strata). The locations of Bethsaida and Chorazin still remain unconfirmed, but the present site at a tell 1.5 miles north of the Galilean shoreline is believed to be Bethsaida, while Tell Khirbet Kerezah, 2.5 miles northwest

of Capernaum, is thought to be Chorazin.

Matthew 2 states that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod. Upon hearing that a king had been born, the frightened Herod ordered all children under the age of two to be killed. His slaughter of innocents is consistent with the historical facts that describe his character. Herod was suspicious of anyone whom he thought may take his throne. His list of victims included one of his ten wives, who was his favorite, three of his own sons, a high priest, an ex-king, and two of his sister's husbands. Thus, his brutality portrayed in Matthew is consistent with his description in ancient history.

John's accuracy has also been attested to by recent discoveries. In John 5:1-15 Jesus heals a man at the Pool of Bethesda. John describes the pool as having five porticoes. This site had long been in dispute until recently. Forty feet underground, archaeologists discovered a pool with five porticoes, and the description of the surrounding area matches John's description. In 9:7 John mentions another long disputed site, the Pool of Siloam. However, this pool was also discovered in 1897, upholding the accuracy of John.

Evidence for Pontius Pilate, the governor who presided over the trial of Jesus, was discovered in Caesarea Maritima. In 1961, an Italian archaeologist named Antonio Frova uncovered a fragment of a plaque that was used as a section of steps leading to the Caesarea Theater. The inscription, written in Latin, contained the phrase, "Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius." This temple is dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius who reigned from 14-37 A.D. This fits well chronologically with the New Testament which records that Pilate ruled as procurator from 26-36 A.D. Tacitus, a Roman historian of the first century, also confirms the New Testament designation of Pilate. He writes, "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our

procurators, Pontius Pilatus. . . .”

Confirmation Regarding the Crucifixion

All four Gospels give details of the crucifixion of Christ. Their accurate portrayal of this Roman practice has been confirmed by archaeology. In 1968, a gravesite in the city of Jerusalem was uncovered containing thirty-five bodies. Each of the men had died a brutal death which historians believe was the result of their involvement in the Jewish revolt against Rome in 70 A.D.

The inscription identified one individual as Yohan Ben Ha'galgol. Studies of the bones performed by osteologists and doctors from the Hadassah Medical School determined the man was twenty-eight years old, stood five feet six inches, and had some slight facial defects due to a cleft right palate.

What intrigued archaeologists were the evidences that this man had been crucified in a manner resembling the crucifixion of Christ. A seven-inch nail had been driven through both feet, which were turned outward so the nail could be hammered inside the Achilles tendon.

Archaeologists also discovered that nails had been driven through his lower forearms. A victim of a crucifixion would have to raise and lower his body in order to breathe. To do this, he needed to push up on his pierced feet and pull up with his arms. Yohan's upper arms were smoothly worn, indicating this movement.

John records that in order to expedite the death of a prisoner, executioners broke the legs of the victim so that he could not lift himself up by pushing with his feet (19:31-33). Yohan's legs were found crushed by a blow, breaking them below the knee. The Dead Sea Scrolls tell that both Jews and Romans abhorred crucifixion due to its cruelty and humiliation. The scrolls also state it was a punishment reserved for slaves and

any who challenged the ruling powers of Rome. This explains why Pilate chose crucifixion as the penalty for Jesus.

Relating to the crucifixion, in 1878 a stone slab was found in Nazareth with a decree from Emperor Claudius who reigned from 41-54 A.D. It stated that graves must not be disturbed nor bodies to be removed. The punishment on other decrees is a fine but this one threatens death and comes very close to the time of the resurrection. This was probably due to Claudius investigating the riots of 49 A.D. He had certainly heard of the resurrection and did not want any similar incidents. This decree was probably made in connection with the Apostles' preaching of Jesus' resurrection and the Jewish argument that the body had been stolen.

Historian Thallus wrote in 52 A.D. Although none of his texts remain, his work is cited by Julius Africanus' work, *Chronography*. Quoting Thallus on the crucifixion of Christ, Africanus states, "On the whole world, there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down."[\[4\]](#) Thallus calls this darkness, "as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun."[\[5\]](#)

All the discoveries made are consistent with the details in the crucifixion account given by the writers of the Gospels. These facts lend indirect support for the biblical accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and that the tomb was empty.

Historical Accuracy of Luke

At one time, scholars did not view Luke's historical accounts in his Gospel and Acts as accurate. There appeared to be no evidence for several cities, persons, and locations that he named in his works. However, archaeological advances have revealed that Luke was a very accurate historian and the two books he has authored remain accurate documents of history.

One of the greatest archaeologists is the late Sir William Ramsay. He studied under the famous liberal German historical schools in the mid-nineteenth century. Known for its scholarship, this school taught that the New Testament was not a historical document. With this premise, Ramsay investigated biblical claims as he searched through Asia Minor. What he discovered caused him to reverse his initial view. He wrote:

I began with a mind unfavorable to it [Acts], for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself often brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth.{6}

Luke's accuracy is demonstrated by the fact that he names key historical figures in the correct time sequence as well as correct titles to government officials in various areas: Thessalonica, politarchs; Ephesus, temple wardens; Cyprus, proconsul; and Malta, the first man of the island.

In Luke's announcement of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 3:1), he mentions, "Lysanius tetrarch of Abilene." Scholars questioned Luke's credibility since the only Lysanius known for centuries was a ruler of Chalcis who ruled from 4036 B.C. However an inscription dating to be in the time of Tiberius, who ruled from 1437 A.D., was found recording a temple dedication which names Lysanius as the "tetrarch of Abila" near Damascus. This matches well with Luke's account.

In Acts 18:12-17, Paul was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. Once again archaeology confirms this account. At Delphi an inscription of a letter from Emperor Claudius was discovered. In it he states, "Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend, and the proconsul of Achaia . . ."{7}

Historians date the inscription to 52 A.D. which corresponds to the time of the apostle's stay in 51.

In Acts 19:22 and Romans 16:23, Erastus, a coworker of Paul, is named the Corinthian city treasurer. Archaeologists excavating a Corinthian theatre in 1928 discovered an inscription. It reads, "Erastus in return for his aedilship laid the pavement at his own expense." The pavement was laid in 50 A.D. The designation of treasurer describes the work of a Corinthian aedile.

In Acts 28:7, Luke gives Publius, the chief man on the island of Malta, the title, "first man of the island." Scholars questioned this strange title and deemed it unhistorical. Inscriptions have recently been discovered on the island that indeed gives Publius the title of "first man."

"In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without error." [\[8\]](#) A. N. Sherwin-White states, "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted." [\[9\]](#)

The Shroud of Turin

The Gospels record that after His crucifixion Jesus was wrapped in a long linen cloth and placed in the tomb (Matt. 27:59). John records that when Peter investigated the empty tomb, he found the burial cloth folded neatly next to where Christ once laid (20:6-7).

A linen shroud called the Shroud of Turin, on display at the Vatican, has been claimed to be that burial cloth. It is 14.25 feet long and 3.5 feet wide. On it is an image with pierced wrists and ankles believed to be that of Christ.

The shroud first appeared for public display sometime after 1357 in Lirey, France. A knight named Geoffrey de Charny

brought the shroud to France. In 1453 de Charny's granddaughter gave the shroud to the Duke of Savoy who then in 1578 brought it to Turin, Italy. In 1983, it was willed to the Vatican.

In 1898, Secondo Pia photographed the shroud and believed the image was a negative image like that of a photograph. This added to the mystery of the shroud since photography had not been invented during medieval times. In 1973 a group of experts confirmed the fact that no pigment of paint was found even under magnification. For many, this was proof of the shroud's authenticity.

The most extensive study was undertaken in 1977. An international team of Swiss, American, and Italian scientist studied the shroud for five days at the Savoy Royal Palace at Turin. They used six tons of equipment and 2.5 million dollars for their research. It has been one of the most intensely studied artifacts of all time.

The study could not determine the authenticity of the fabric. Experiments that followed proved the image contained blood as well as aragonite, a particular calcium carbonate that is found in Jerusalem's first century tombs. Swiss criminologist Max Frei found forty-eight samples of pollen, of which seven could have come from plants in Palestine. The weave of the cloth was herringbone twill, a style that existed in ancient times.

Although these findings supported the authenticity of the shroud, other findings testified otherwise. In 1987, the shroud was carbon 14 tested to verify its date. Laboratories in Oxford, Zurich, and the University of Arizona tested the cloth. The result indicated a fourteenth century date for the shroud. This conclusion continues to be challenged and future tests are sure to follow. Another problem is that coins minted by Pontius Pilate were placed over the eyes of the figure. This was not a Jewish custom, nor does it seem likely that

Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus would have placed on Jesus' eyes a coin with the image of the leader who condemned him.

Despite the fourteenth century date, scientists are still unable to explain how the negative image was created. The shroud remains a mystery as well as a lesson for us as believers that we should not put our faith in mysterious articles.

Notes

1. See "[Authority of the Bible](http://probe.org/authority-of-the-bible-a-strong-argument-for-christianity/)" at probe.org/authority-of-the-bible-a-strong-argument-for-christianity/.
2. Josephus, Book 18, Chapter 3:3
3. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44
4. Julius Africanus, *Chronography*, 18:1.
5. Ibid.
6. William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1982), 8.
7. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1991), 227.
8. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1999), 47.
9. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 189.

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The Uniqueness of Jesus

Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?

A serious study of the Gospels leads a person to one of three conclusions about Jesus: He was (1) an evil lying villain, (2)

a preposterously deluded madman, or (3) the Messiah, the Son of God. It is ludicrous for anyone who has studied His life to take the position that He was simply a good teacher. Only one of the three conclusions is a logical possibility.

Jesus made some outrageous claims no ordinary person would dare to make. First, He claimed to be God. His statements of equality with God meant He believed that He possessed the authority, attributes, and adoration belonging to God. He proclaimed authority over creation, forgiveness of sins, and life and death. He declared to possess the attributes of God. He emphatically stated that He was the source of truth and the only way to eternal life. Only Jesus among the significant leaders of history made such claims.

Here are a few of His outrageous claims. When "Philip said, Lord, show us the Father.' Jesus answered. . . .Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father'" (John 14:8-9). Once, when the Pharisees were disparaging Jesus and challenging Him, Jesus responded, " I and the Father are one.' Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God'" (John 10:30-33). It is clear in these two statements, Jesus claimed to be God. His opponents clearly understood His declaration of equality with God.

When challenged by the scholars on His authority over Abraham, the father of the Jews, Jesus replied, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!' I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am!'" (John 8:56-58). Jesus clearly believed He had existed two thousand years earlier and knew Abraham.

On the issue of life and death Jesus stated, "I am the

resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25). Here He believed He had authority over life and death.

Finally, Jesus accepted and encouraged others to worship Him. Throughout the Gospels the disciples worshiped Jesus as seen in Matthew 14:33 and John 9:38. Jesus states in John 5:22-23, "Moreover, the Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him." Jesus knew the Old Testament command "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matt. 4:10). Despite this, Jesus encouraged others to worship Him. Either He was mad (insane), or He was who He claimed to be and deserves our worship as God incarnate.

After reading such claims, it is impossible for anyone to say He was merely a good teacher. A man making claims like these must either be a diabolical liar, insane, or God incarnate. For the remainder of this essay we will be discussing which of these conclusions is most plausible.

A Villain, A Madman, or God Incarnate?

We have established at this point that Jesus made some astounding claims about himself. He presumed to be God, claimed the authority and attributes of God, and encouraged others to worship Him as God. If, however, Jesus was a liar, then He knew His message was false but was willing to deceive thousands with claims He knew were untrue. That is, Jesus knew that He was not God, He did not know the way to eternal life, and He died and sent thousands to their deaths for a message He knew was a lie. This would make Jesus history's greatest villain (and perhaps, a demon) for teaching this wicked lie. He would have also been history's greatest fool for it was these claims that lead Him to His death.

Few, if any, seriously hold to this position. Even the

skeptics unanimously agree that He was at least a great moral teacher. William Lecky, one of Britain's most respected historians and an opponent of Christianity writes, "It was reserved for Christianity to present the world an ideal character which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love."[\[1\]](#)

However, it would be inconsistent and illogical to believe that Jesus was a great moral teacher if some of those teachings contained immoral lies about himself. He would have to be a stupendous hypocrite to teach others honesty and virtue and all the while preach the lie that He was God. It is inconceivable to think that such deceitful, selfish, and depraved acts could have issued forth from the same being who otherwise maintained from the beginning to the end the purest and noblest character known in history.

Since the liar conclusion is not logical, let us assume He really believed He was God but was mistaken. If He truly believed He had created the world, had seen Abraham two thousand years before, and had authority over death, and yet none of this was true, we can only conclude that He was mad or insane.

However, when you study the life of Jesus, He clearly does not display the characteristics of insanity. The abnormality and imbalance we find in a deranged person are not there. His teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, remain one of the greatest works ever recorded. Jesus was continually challenged by the Pharisees and lawyers, highly educated men whose modern day equivalent would be our university professors. They were fluent in several languages and were known for their scholarship of the Old Testament and Jewish law. They challenged Jesus with some of the most profound questions of their day and Jesus' quick answers amazed and silenced them. In the face of tremendous pressure, we find He exemplified the greatest composure.

For these reasons, the lunatic argument is not consistent. If both the liar and the lunatic options are not consistent with the facts, we must take a serious look at the third option: that Jesus was really God. The next question is, does He prove to have the credentials of God? Let us investigate this possibility.

Messianic Prophecy

Thus far we have learned that Jesus is unique among all men for the profound statements He made about His divinity. We concluded that it is impossible to state He was simply a good moral teacher. From His amazing statements, He must be a liar, a lunatic, or God. Since the first two were not conceivable, we will begin looking at the third alternative, that He really is God. First, we must see if He had the credentials for these claims.

One of the most incredible types of evidence is the testimony of prophecy. The Old Testament contains a number of messianic prophecies made centuries before Christ appeared on the earth. The fact that He fulfilled each one is powerful testimony that He was no ordinary man. Allow me to illustrate this point using eight prophecies.

- *Genesis 12:1-3 states the Messiah would come from the seed of Abraham.*
- *Genesis 49:10 states that He would be of the tribe of Judah.*
- *2 Samuel 7:12 states that Messiah would be of the line of King David.*
- *Micah 5:2 states that He would be born in the city of Bethlehem.*
- *Daniel 9:24 states He would die or be "cut off" exactly 483 years after the declaration to reconstruct the temple in 444*

B.C.

- *Isaiah 53 states that the Messiah would die with thieves, then be buried in a richman's tomb.*
- *Psalms 22:16 states upon His death His hands and His feet would be pierced. This is quite significant since Roman crucifixion had not been invented at the time the Psalmist was writing.*
- *Isaiah 49:7 states that Messiah would be known and hated by the entire nation. Not many men become known by their entire nation, and even less are despised by the entire nation.*

Now calculate the possibility of someone fulfilling these by coincidence. Let us suppose you estimate there is a one in a hundred chance a man could fulfill just one of these prophecies by chance. That would mean when all eight are put together there is a 1/10 to the 16th power probability that they were fulfilled by chance. Mathematician Peter Stoner estimates 1/10 to the 17th power possibility that these prophecies were fulfilled by chance.[\[2\]](#) Mathematicians have estimated that the possibility of sixteen of these prophecies being fulfilled by chance are about 1/10 to the 45th power.[\[3\]](#) That's a decimal point followed by 44 zeroes and a 1! These figures show it is extremely improbable that these prophecies could have been fulfilled by accident. The figures for fulfillment of the 109 major prophecies are staggering.[\[4\]](#)

Skeptics have objected to the testimony of prophecy, stating they were written after the times of Jesus and therefore fulfill themselves. However, the evidence overwhelmingly shows these prophecies were clearly written centuries before Christ. It is an established fact even by liberal scholars that the Old Testament canon was completed by 450 B.C. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was completed in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus in 250 B.C. The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1948 contained the books of the Old

Testament. Prophetic books like Isaiah were dated by paleographers to be written in 100 B.C.{5} Once again, these prophecies were confirmed to have been written centuries before Christ, and no religious leader has fulfilled anything close to the number of prophecies Jesus has fulfilled.

Confirmation of Miracles

Jesus made some profound statements about His divinity. We concluded that it is impossible to state He was simply a good moral teacher. From His amazing statements we must conclude Him to be a liar, a lunatic, or God. Since the first two were not conceivable, we began looking at the third alternative. If this is true, we must see if He has the credentials for His claims.

If a person claimed to be God, we would expect supernatural confirmations. We've already discovered the phenomenal record of prophecy. We would also expect Him to demonstrate authority over nature, sickness, truth, sin, and death. Jesus demonstrated such authority. One line of evidence is seen in His miraculous deeds.

Jesus' miracles demonstrated His power over creation, sickness, and death. He demonstrated His authority over nature in such miracles as walking on water (Matt. 14:25), multiplying bread (Matt. 14:15-21), and calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41). He demonstrated authority over sickness with His instantaneous healings over terminal diseases. His healings did not take weeks or days but were instantaneous. He healed blindness (John 9), paralysis (Mark 2), leprosy (Luke 17), and deafness (Mark 7). Such miracles cannot be attributed to psychosomatic healing but to one who rules over creation. Jesus displayed authority over death by raising the dead as recorded in Luke 7 and Matthew 9.

Some doubt whether these miracles occurred. Several view the miracle accounts as fictitious legends developed after the

death of Christ. Philosopher David Hume argued that human nature tends to gossip and exaggerate the truth. Others argue that the miracle accounts were propagated in distant lands by the followers of Christ well after the events so that the miracle accounts could not have been verified due to distance and time.

There are several arguments against these attacks. First, the Bible has proven to be a historically reliable document. For more information on this, see the [Authority of the Bible](#) article. Second, legends and exaggerations develop when followers travel to distant lands well after the time of the events and tell of stories which cannot be confirmed. Legends usually develop generations after the death of the figure at which time it is impossible to verify any of the accounts since all available witnesses are not available. However, the miracle accounts of Jesus were being told in the very cities in which they occurred during the lifetime of Jesus and to those who witnessed the event(s). Those who witnessed the miracles were followers of Christ and His enemies. These eye witnesses were questioned carefully by those in authority. If any claims were exaggerated or distorted, it could have easily been refuted. The New Testament with its miracle accounts could not have survived had not the accounts been true.

German scholar Dr. Carsten Theide and British scholar Dr. Matthew D'Ancona in their book *Eyewitness to Jesus* state their conclusion after a scientific investigation of a fragment from the Gospel of Matthew. The scientific evidence revealed that the book was written before A.D. 70, possibly as early as A.D. 30.^[6] This reveals the fact that the Gospels were written and circulated during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, who were then able to judge the accuracy of such accounts, and they were unable to refute Jesus' miracles. None of the world's religious leaders performed the miracles Jesus did.

Authority Over Death

A study of the claims of Jesus make it clear that He was professing to be God. It is then impossible to conclude that He was merely a good teacher. In light of these claims, one must conclude that He is a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord. We investigated to see if His claim to be God was substantiated. Clearly the record of prophecy proved there was something unique about Him. The miracles He performed remain unequalled by anyone, but Jesus' greatest demonstration of authority is revealed in His power over sin and death.

There are many religions and religious leaders who claim to know what lies beyond the grave. The problem is, no one has demonstrated authority over the grave or confirmed their belief of what happens after death. Only Jesus demonstrated authority over death. All men have died, but Jesus is alive.

During His three-year ministry, Jesus exercised His authority over death by raising several people from the grave. Most notable is the account of Lazarus found in John 11. Here even in the face of His enemies, Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave. If this were not a historical account, this story would not have survived since it was recorded and propagated in the very city where it occurred, in the lifetime of the witnesses, both followers and enemies of Christ. The enemies of Christianity could have easily refuted the account if it were not true. The fact is they could not refute it.

In regard to His own death and resurrection, the Old Testament predicted the death of the Messiah in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. However, it also predicts the resurrection in Psalm 16:8 11 and refers to the eternal reign of the Messiah. The only way to reconcile these verses is a resurrected Messiah.

Jesus himself made these predictions in regard to His resurrection: "Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up" (John 2:19). In Mark 8:31 Jesus taught "that the

son of Man must suffer many things . . . and be killed, and after three days rise again." In John 10:18 Jesus states, "I have authority to lay it (My life) down, and I have authority to take it up again." In these passages, Jesus predicts His own death and resurrection. Either Jesus was mad, or He really had the authority over death.

Jesus' resurrection proved His authority over sin and death. For a more detailed defense of the historicity of the Resurrection, check the Probe perspective on the Resurrection titled, [Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

At the beginning of this study we examined the claims of Christ. We realized only three conclusions were possible: liar, lunatic, or Lord. Since the first two were inconceivable, we needed to see if Christ could further confirm His credentials of being God. We discovered that His claims were confirmed by the record of prophecy, His miracles, and the Resurrection.

Jesus proves himself to be unique among all men.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure for much of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as this "One Solitary Life." [\[7\]](#)

Notes

1. William Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (New York: D.Appleton and Company, 1903), p. 8.
2. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), p. 167.
3. Norman Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, Ill.:Victor Press, 1990), p. 116.

4. Tim LaHaye, *Jesus, Who is He?* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Books, 1996), p. 176.
5. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), pp. 365-66.
6. Peter Carsten Theide and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 163.
7. Anonymous, "One Solitary Life," quoted in Tim LaHaye, *Jesus, Who is He?*, p. 68.

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The Mystery of Reincarnation – A Christian Perspective

Can reincarnation be true? Dr. Pat Zukeran examines evidence for this Eastern belief and compares it to the Biblical concept of resurrection.



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

Eastern Doctrine of Reincarnation

Many cultures throughout the world have long held to the concept of reincarnation. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that one in four Americans believed in reincarnation. Reincarnation literally means, “to come again in the flesh.” World religions author Geoffrey Parrinder defines reincarnation as “the belief that the soul or some power passes after death into another body.”[\[1\]](#)

Reincarnation is a major facet of the eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Many sects have variant views of reincarnation. Here is a general summary of the basic principles. Most hold to a pantheistic view of God. Pantheism

comes from the Greek *pan* meaning “all” and concept of *theism* meaning “God.” In Pantheism, God is an impersonal force made up of all things; the universe is God and God is the universe. All created beings are an extension of or an emanation from God.

Living things possess a physical body and an immaterial entity called the soul, life force, or Jiva. At death, the life force separates from the body and takes a new physical form. The law of karma determines what form the individual will take. This law teaches that one’s thoughts, words, and deeds have an ethical consequence, fixing one’s lot in future existences.[\[2\]](#) Our present state is the result of actions and intentions performed in a previous life. The amount of good or bad karma attained in our present life will determine if one returns in a higher or a lower form of existence.

One will endure hundreds, even millions of reincarnations, either evolving into a higher or lower form of life to work off the debt of karma. This cycle of reincarnation is called the *law of samsara*. Eventually one hopes to work off all bad karma and free oneself from the reincarnation cycle and attain unity with the divine. This freeing from the cycle of reincarnation is called *moksha*. The soul is viewed as imprisoned in a body and must be freed to attain unity with the divine.

Each school of thought varies in their teaching regarding how one attains ultimate deliverance from the reincarnation cycle. Most agree that it is only from the human form one can attain unity with the divine. Deliverance from the bondage of the body can be attained through various means. Some schools teach that through enlightenment that comes from knowledge, meditation, and channeling, one can break the cycle. Other schools teach that deliverance comes through faith and service to a particular deity or manifestation of the divine. In return, the deity will aid you in your quest for moksha. Other schools teach that one can attain deliverance through

discipline and good works.

Much of the reincarnation teaching in the West is adapted from the teachings in the eastern religions. Is there evidence that proves reincarnation to be true? We will examine these next.

Evidences for Reincarnation

Leading reincarnation researcher Dr. Ian Stephenson, head of the department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, believes there is compelling evidence for reincarnation. Proponents give five proofs: hypnotic regression, déjà vu, Xenoglossy, birthmarks, and the Bible.

The first proof is hypnotic regression. Reincarnation proponents cite examples of individuals giving vivid and accurate descriptions of people, places, and events the individual could not have previously known. Today there is a small branch of psychology that practice past life therapy, the belief that one's present problems are the result of problems from a previous life.

However, the accuracy of facts attained from hypnosis remains highly questionable. First, some people are known to have lied under hypnosis. Second, human memory is subject to distortions of all sorts. Third, under hypnosis a patient's awareness of fantasy and reality is blurred. Dr. Kenneth Bowers, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo and Dr. Jan Dywane at McMaster University states:

“. . .although hypnosis increases recall, it also increases errors. In their study, hypnotized subjects correctly recalled twice as many items as did unhypnotized members of a control group but also made three times as many mistakes. During hypnosis, you are creating memories.”[\[3\]](#)

Fourth, studies have shown that under hypnosis, patients are easily influenced by leading questions. In the process of hypnosis, the patient is asked to release control of his or

her consciousness and body. Hans Holzer states, "Generally women are easier to hypnotize than men. But there are exceptions even among women, who may have difficulty letting go control over their bodies and personalities, something essential if genuine hypnosis is to take place."[\[4\]](#) In this state, memories can be altered by the cues from the hypnotist. For these reasons, many law courts do not consider testimony under hypnosis reliable evidence.

Past life recall can also be attributed to the influence of culture. Cultures heavily steeped in the doctrine of reincarnation create an environment conducive to past life recall. The countries of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and western Asia have a very high number of cases. Many who make claims of past life recall win the respect of their society. In areas like these the culture can have a strong influence on one's subconscious mind. If reincarnation is true, past life recall should be prevalent in all cultures, not primarily in one area.

Finally, the majority of the incidents occur among children. Dr. Stephenson states, "Many of those claiming to have lived before are children. Often they are very emotional when they talk of the person they used to be, and they give minute details of the life they lived."[\[5\]](#) Children are the most susceptible to suggestion and their testimony should be viewed with caution.

At best, the evidence from hypnotic regress can only suggest a possibility of reincarnation, but it does not conclusively prove it.

Déjà vu refers to a distinct feeling you have been to a place or performed an event before, while engaged in something that is presently happening. Reincarnation proponents attribute this to a previous life. However, researchers give alternate explanations. In our subconscious, we often relate a present event with a past one that the conscious mind does not

remember. Since the two events are similar we often fuse the events together in our minds, thus creating an impression that we have experienced this before. Other researchers have shown that the data that enters the eye is sometimes delayed for a microsecond on its way to the brain. This leads one to think that they have seen the data before.

Xenoglossy is the sudden ability to speak a language one has never learned. Reincarnation advocates attribute this as the language one spoke in a previous life. However, cryptoamnesia can account for this phenomenon. In cryptoamnesia, an individual forgets information that was learned earlier and recalls it at a later time, not knowing its source. It is possible that one can hear foreign terms through the media or as a child and recall these when prompted.

The fourth proof is the appearance of unique birthmarks that are similar to those possessed by a deceased individual. However, it is difficult to show any connection to reincarnation. Similarity does not prove sameness.

These alternative explanations can explain most of the evidences for reincarnation. However where they fall short, we must entertain the possibility of demonic possession where a foreign spirit takes control of the person as demonstrated several times throughout the New Testament. Demonic spirits have existed for thousands of years and are not limited by time and space. The information they possess can be injected into a person's mind during possession. Eastern meditation techniques allow for this possibility. Dr. Bro writes of Edgar Cayce, the father of the New Age movement, "Cayce's power came without equipment, in quiet. He appeared to empty himself, to hollow out his consciousness as a receptacle, a conduit."[\[6\]](#)

Even reincarnation advocates believe that many cases of past life recall can be attributed to possession. They confess that it is difficult to determine whether a past life recall is the result of reincarnation or possession. William de Arteaga

states, "In reference to the demonic counterfeit hypothesis, we can safely say that for many past life visions it is the most solidly verified hypothesis of all."[\[7\]](#)

Edgar Cayce stated, "That's what I always thought, and against this I put the idea that the Devil might be tempting me to do his work by operating through me when I was conceited enough to think God had given me special power. . . ."[\[8\]](#)

Although the evidence can be interpreted to support reincarnation, it cannot conclusively prove it.

Biblical Evidence for Reincarnation

Although reincarnation proponents cite the Bible as proof of their claim, the Bible refutes the idea. It teaches that we live once, die once, and then enter our eternal state. Hebrews 9:26b-27 states, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. . . ." The focus here is on the sacrificial work of Christ. Instead of the continual animal sacrifices needed to atone for sins under the old covenant, under the new covenant Christ paid for sins once and for all.

In the same way as Christ, who appeared only once, man is destined to die once. Just as there is finality in Christ's sacrifice, there is finality in man's physical death. After that, the soul faces the judgment before God to determine one's eternal destiny. Once judgment is delivered, Scripture gives no evidence that sins can be atoned for in another time of living on earth (Rev. 20:11-15; Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 25:31-46).

The passage often appealed to by those who support reincarnation is John 9:1-3, which states, "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him,

'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" Reincarnation proponents claim that in this passage the disciples are attributing the man's blindness as the result of bad karma from a previous existence.

However, Jewish theology attributed birth defects to two factors. Prenatal sin committed by the baby after conception, but before birth, or sin committed by the parents. Genesis 25:22, the struggle of Jacob and Esau in Rachel's womb, was interpreted as a conflict that resulted from prenatal sin. Exodus 20:5 states that the parents' sin often had repercussions on their offspring. However, in the passage in John 9:1-3, Jesus refutes any connection between the man's defects and any previous sins, thus putting an end to any concept of karma.

Another passage is Matthew 11 where Jesus states that John the Baptist is Elijah. Reincarnation proponents interpret John as being the reincarnated Elijah from the Old Testament. This cannot be true for the following reasons. First, in 2 Kings 2, Elijah never died, but was taken to heaven. In the reincarnation model one must die before one can take on a new form. Second, in Matthew 17 Elijah appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. John the Baptist had lived and died by this time. If he had been the reincarnation of Elijah, John would have appeared instead. John came not as the reincarnation of Elijah, but in a metaphorical sense as Elijah in that he was filled with the same spirit and power as Elijah. So the Bible does not affirm reincarnation.

Reincarnation and Resurrection

The Bible teaches that what happens after death is a resurrection, not reincarnation. First Corinthians 15 is one of the clearest passages on what happens to the human soul after death. Like the reincarnation proponents, we agree that the immaterial component of man separates from the body at death and survives eternally. We both agree that the soul

inhabits another bodily form.

The major difference is this: reincarnation proponents believe that the soul inhabits many bodily forms in an evolutionary progress toward union with the divine. This can happen over millions of years or in a shorter period. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:26b-27, as previously discussed, that we live once, die once and then enter into an eternal state.

Our eternal state is described in 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 20 states, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." By "firstfruits" Paul was drawing on the imagery found in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were prior to the main harvest and served as an example and an assurance of the harvest that was coming. So Christ's resurrection is a precursor and a guarantee of the believer's resurrection. His resurrection greatly differs from the reincarnation model.

First, Christ's resurrected body physically resembled His earthly body. It had physical properties displayed by the fact that He could be touched, He communicated, and He ate. His glorified body also possessed supernatural attributes. He was able to walk through walls, appear and disappear, and ascend to heaven.

Paul describes the glorified body as having a different kind of flesh from the earthly body. He states, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. . . ." The new body will be imperishable and immortal. It will be a spiritual body that is designed for life in heaven. The glorified body will not suffer the effects of sin or the effects of time, sickness, or pain.

The unrighteous, however, enter a state of eternal torment immediately after death. Luke 16:19-31 demonstrates this point. In this example the unrighteous wealthy man enters hell

immediately at death. In Matthew 25 the goats enter a state of eternal punishment with no hope of escape.

In summary, these are the differences. First, reincarnation teaches that the migration of the soul occurs over many lifetimes while resurrection occurs once. Second, reincarnation teaches we inhabit many different bodies while resurrection teaches we inhabit only one body on earth and a glorified immortal body in heaven that resembles our earthly one. Third, reincarnation teaches we are in an evolutionary progress to union with God while resurrection teaches we arrive at our ultimate state immediately at death. The Bible does not support reincarnation and it must not be confused with the doctrine of the resurrection, which is very different.

Notes

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions* (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1971), 286.
2. John Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1980, 90.
3. Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today*, February 1984, p. 35, as cited by Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 67.
4. Hans Holzer, *Life Beyond*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1994, 176.
5. Dr. Ian Stephenson, quoted in *Life Beyond* by Hans Holzer, Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1994, 167.
6. Harmon Bro, *A Seer Out of Season: the Life of Edgar Cayce*, (New York: New American Library, 1989), 13.
7. William de Arteaga, *Past Life Visions: A Christian Exploration* (New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 174, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 80.
8. Thomas Sague, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River*, (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.

