

“Not a Blind Faith”

An overview of Christian Apologetics

Preface

An understanding of the historicity of the Bible can be an important tool for Christians to use in the witness to others, both Christians and non-Christians. The word “apologetics” can be translated to “make a defense of,” and the primary thing being defended is that the four Gospel texts are primary source documents which demonstrate that God came into the world in the person of Jesus to reconcile mankind unto Himself. Like any tool, however, apologetics can be misused or even used when it is not appropriate. Apologetic arguments do not “convert” people – only the Holy Spirit can do that. Apologetics is used to remove objections that many people have about the validity of the Biblical texts, or what those texts present. Having taken an interest in the subject, I endeavored to read around 20 texts on the subject. There is a great deal of overlap between various texts, some covering familiar territory and then adding a few bits of new information beyond what was contained in the other texts. It occurred to me that it would be useful to prepare a high-level survey of the key information that is presented in apologetics literature, and to compile a bibliography that people can use to dig deeper into a specific question which interests them. While this document ended up being something between an outline and a treatise, it was originally intended only as a guide for me to use while presenting the information to a group. However, it now appears that it will have some value for people to have a copy of this information for future reference. That being the case, it seems appropriate to present a disclaimer...

Disclaimer: This is intended as an informal outline, not the sort of document which would ever be published or even submitted as a school report. References have been cited in most cases for direct quotations, but it is entirely possible that in reading the plethora of books on the subject I have blurred what I have read and what I have conjured on my own, and thus failed to give appropriate credit to others. Unless I specifically take credit for a statement, the reader is urged to assume that the statement is derived from the works of the wonderful authors cited at the end of the first section.

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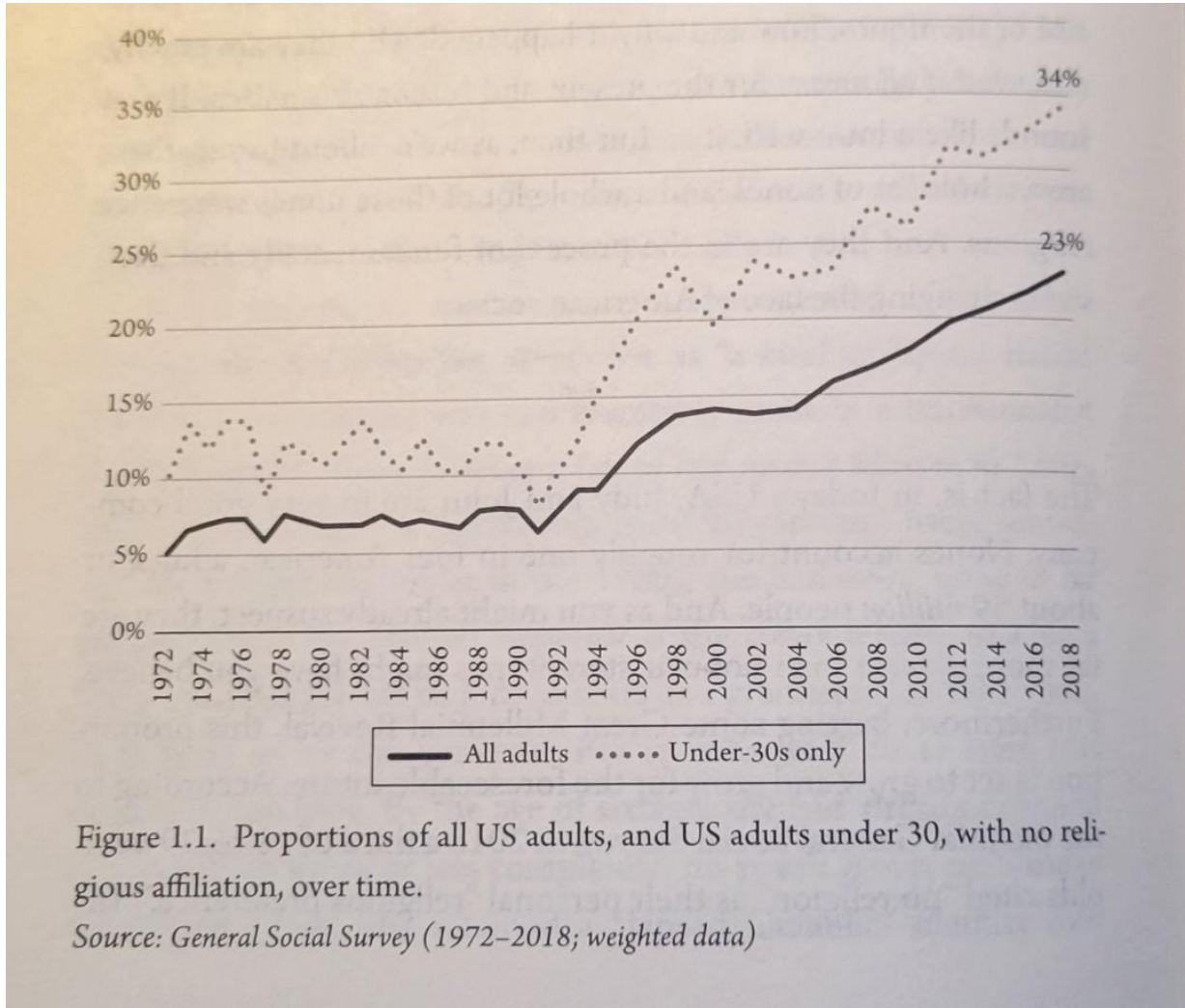
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I. Introduction

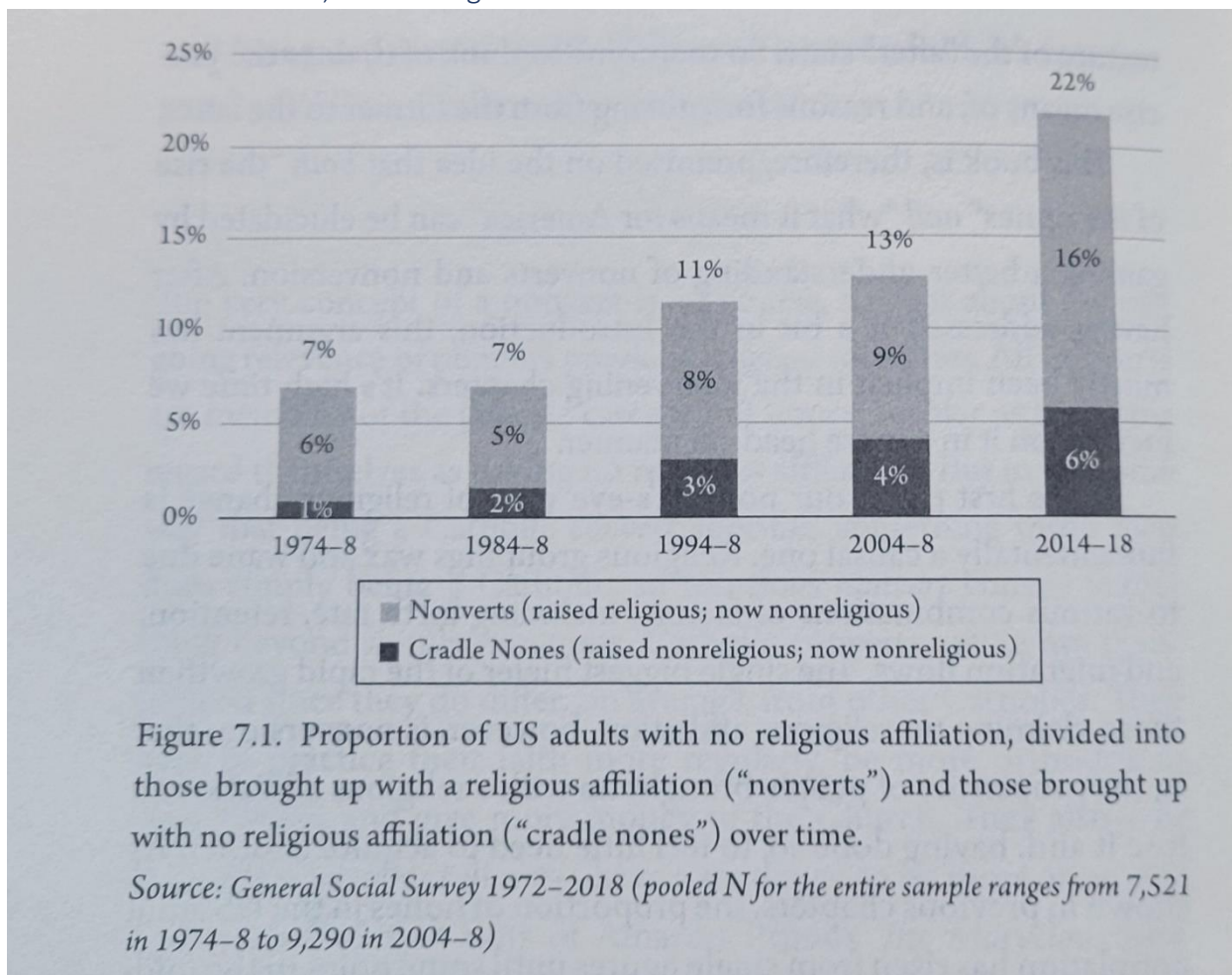
A. The State of the Church

1. There is growing exodus from the Christian faith.



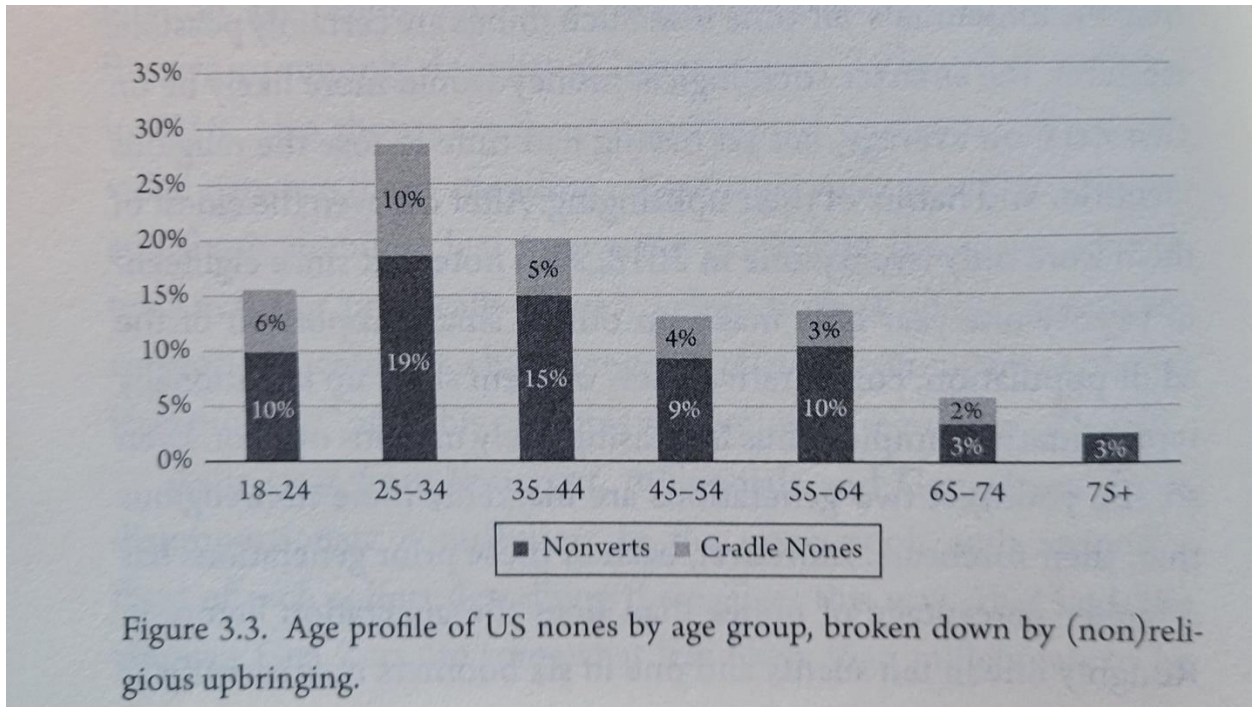
[From "Nonverts – The Making of Ex-Christian America," S. Bullivant]

2. The growth of those who are leaving the faith they grew up with, “nonverts,” is startling.



[From “Nonverts – The Making of Ex-Christian America,” S. Bullivant]

3. The people leaving their faith are primarily younger.



[From "Nonverts – The Making of Ex-Christian America," S. Bullivant]

4. There are many factors that contribute to people leaving the faith that they grew up with.

a) *Internet – The internet revolutionized the ability of people who are questioning their faith to find their way into an echo chamber of other people who are either questioning their faith, or those who had already walked away from it.*

b) *Do as I say, not as I do – There is a generational progression away from church attendance. Parents who are not regular church attendees result in children who are even less so.*

c) *Science – The conflict between evolution and Biblical creation is an insurmountable barrier for some, resulting in Christianity looking like nothing more than myth.*

d) *Strawmen – Some heterodox churches set up a strawman version of Christianity that is very easy to knock over.*

e) *Examples:*

(1) *Law / Christian Perfectionism: John Wesley believed and taught that with enough work Christians could become free of sin. This is not supported by the Bible, and when it is attempted leads to failure and despair. Other ‘fire and brimstone’ churches preach nothing but law, wearing out their congregations and bringing on the same hopelessness as Christian perfectionism.*

(2) *Prosperity Gospel: “Live your best life now!” Our best life isn’t on this earth, but in the restored creation. I don’t want to live my best life now! Saying that becoming Christian will make your life great is in complete disagreement with the Bible, and when congregants fail to achieve their best life now, they dump not only the false teaching but Christianity altogether.*

(3) *Word of Faith: Name it and claim it. Some heterodox churches teach that you can make demands of God, demons, or even nature. We have no such standing, and God isn’t a vending machine. Saying that we have these powers, like to make COVID go away, will lead people to leave Christianity when those attempts predictably fail.*

(4) *Who needs Jesus when we have the Holy Spirit: Pentecostals are so focused on receiving signs from the Holy Spirit that they lose all focus on Jesus and His word. Kids learn to mimic “speaking in tongues,” because they are falsely taught that you aren’t saved if you can’t speak in tongues. This is another teaching that leads to people to leave Christianity altogether.*

f) *When someone says they left Christianity, my first thought is “did you really leave Christianity? Or did you leave some heterodox faith that bears little resemblance to Christianity?”*

g) *Christian hypocrisy. Christians believe that we are sinful, and will remain sinful until the day we die. However the perception from outside the faith is that Christians believe that they are somehow better than other sinful people. Christians just believe that they are forgiven for their sins, not that they are without them.*

h) *One faith among many. Christianity is seen as being no different than any other religious belief system. It is simply a choice like an entrée from a menu.*

(1) The goal for the Christian apologist should be to point to the historical underpinnings of Christianity, the validity of the Biblical texts, and from that point lead people to understand that Christianity is different than all other world religions.

(2) Christianity, therefore, is not a blind faith. Unfortunately, even many Christians would point to feelings, or family history, to say why they are Christian.

B. What is apologetics?

1. *Απολογία* – defense, in our case the defense of the Christian faith (not defense of God).

2. Key methodology: Our goal is to bring the person to understand that the same logic they use to make decisions in everyday life is what is needed to bring them to accept the validity of the Biblical texts. Nothing more. That isn't necessarily enough to bring them into the faith, but it will bring them to the point where they no longer have the crutches of ignorance or bad information to hold against Christianity.

3. We live in a largely secular nation. As such, we should avoid the assumption that everybody already knows about Christ. We should also avoid Christian jargon. "Christ's resurrection is the first fruits of our resurrection" won't mean anything to non-Christians or even nominal Christians.

a) *Christian jargon can end up being a way for people to identify each other as being members of a very specific denominational group rather than witnessing to the larger population.*

(1) Example, the bumper sticker "In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unoccupied."

4. Many Christians are turning to Gnosticism. They want a silent God that doesn't proclaim an objective morality. To them, there is no greater offense than projecting your views of right and wrong onto somebody else.

a) *If we don't have an objective morality that comes from outside the human race, mankind will descend into chaos. To quote Hobbs from "The Leviathan," the life of man during his time appeared to be 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.'*"

b) *God gives us His Law, and the institutions of society such as marriage, the family, and governments to establish a structure where we don't destroy ourselves. [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity"]*

5. When someone who grew up as a Christian becomes agnostic, rather than us becoming apoplectic about it, recognize that the word agnostic means "not knowing." They could be at a stage where they are throwing off a heterodox form of Christianity. That is a perfect time to introduce that person to actual Biblical Christianity, particularly the Gospel – pure and simple.

6. Many Christians have fallen unnecessarily into fideism (faith in faith). We don't have faith in faith, we have faith in the real, historical, risen Christ. In particular, we have faith that He will raise us up on the last day, and we will live in our restored bodies forever with Him in paradise.

a) *Fideism is a pathway out of the Church. A house built on sand.*

(1) In my teenage years, when I was invincible, a friend and I were skiing and went way off the groomed trails. This was called tree bashing. At some point, I fell into the unpacked snow. Laying on my side, I pushed my arm down toward the ground to right myself. My arm extended to its full length without hitting anything solid. Deep snow. This was a problem, much like realizing you are in quicksand. I managed to get up by hooking my ski pole on an overhead tree branch. Having no understanding that Christianity is a religion that is **objectively true** puts you at risk of one day having that same uncomfortable feeling that I had when my arm didn't reach solid ground. It is of course possible that someone who grows up in the church will make it all the way to their death bed without ever questioning the validity of their faith, but we shouldn't assume everybody will share that fate. [Hattz]

b) *If you defend your Christian faith by saying that you know it is true because you feel it in your heart, you are presenting the exact same defense of your faith that most other religions present of theirs. All other religions have to do this, because all they have is unsubstantiated belief, but that is not so with Christianity.*

c) *The apostles didn't attempt to sway non-believers based on their personal testimony of how their life is so much better because of their faith. They recounted events that occurred in plain sight, and encouraged people to talk to other witnesses who could corroborate their stories about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Their argument for Christianity was based on Apologetics, not personal happiness.*

(1) “We saw that the Apostles concentrated on recounting, again and again, a historical event which was intimately known to them, and to which they could give their unqualified, personal testimony; the life, words and deeds, and above all the death and resurrection, of One with whom they had kept close company for some three years... they could not be silenced from “speaking about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20)” [Sir Norman Anderson, in “Creedal Apologetics,” p.26]

d) *Presuppositional arguments have no sway over non-believers. “The bible is true because it says it is true” may be correct, but not persuasive.*

e) *Worse yet, saying that someone’s life will be better if they believe in Jesus is just wrong. Christians have targets on their back. Satan can ignore people who are already outside of salvation.*

f) *The very best way to lead a person into a short-term belief in Christianity, followed by a complete shipwrecking of their faith and a permanent departure from Christianity, is to tell them that becoming Christian will make their temporal lives easier. While there is comfort in Christianity, it is the comfort offered someone during a crisis, a beacon on the hill indicating that the trials of this life will not endure forever. That is far different than presenting a “your best life now” prosperity gospel. [Hattz]*

7. We are told that we should be ready to make a defense for our faith.

a) *1 Peter 3:14-16:*

(1) ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

b) *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

(1) ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

8. Liberal Christian Scholars who reject basic tenets of the Christian faith have caused great harm that endures to this day.

a) *In the 19th century, many liberal scholars either rejected the existence of a historical Jesus altogether (G.A. Wells), or they de-emphasized the fact that Jesus really existed (Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann), or they argued that all the miraculous claims in the New Testament were fictitious (Rudolf Bultmann).*

b) *The impact these scholars have had on Christianity should not be underestimated. They wish to characterize themselves as placing reason above faith, but what they actually do is place bad scholarship above good scholarship. They reject a historical Jesus without doing any study of the evidence for his existence. They reject miracles a priori without allowing a historical investigation into the miraculous claims. I call that B.S. (bad scholarship). [Hattz]*

c) *The “Jesus Seminar” in the 1970’s was a group of [74] self-appointed scholars who insisted on a naturalistic Jesus. They voted on which verses in the Gospels were actually quotations from Jesus, and most of Jesus’ words were voted out. They removed the miraculous, because miracles do not align with nature (by definition). If someone is walking on water, it better be frozen... [see “The Case for Christ” chapter 6]*

(1) Their view on the impact of scientific discovery in undoing Christian “mythology” can be summed up by the following:

(a) *“The Christ of creed and dogma... can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens through Galileo’s telescope. The old deities and demons were swept from the skies by that remarkable glass. Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo have dismantled the mythological abodes of the gods and Satan, and bequeathed us secular heavens.” [quote from “The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus,” taken from F.F. Bruce “The Historical Jesus.”]*

d) *The Jesus Seminar bears a striking resemblance to the words of Bultmann, who decades earlier wrote:*

(1) *“It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.” [Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” from F.F. Bruce “The Historical Jesus.”]*

9. Christianity is the only religion that can be overthrown by evidence.

a) *This sounds sacrilegious but it isn’t. It is actually one of the strengths of Biblical Christianity.*

b) *Many religions depend on the validity of a personal private revelation given to an individual. These religions by definition cannot be examined evidentially, beyond the testimony of the individual.*

(1) You are asked to believe in these religions because of a “feeling” you get when you read the inspired book or follow the path.

(2) Examples are Mormonism and Islam...

(a) “As authors John Ankenberg and John Weldon concluded in a book on the topic, ‘In other words, no Book of Mormon cities have ever been located, no Book of Mormon person, place, nation, or name has ever been found, no Book of Mormon artifacts, no Book of Mormon scriptures, no Book of Mormon inscriptions... nothing which demonstrates the Book of Mormon is anything other than a myth or invention has ever been found.’ [“The Case for Christ,” p.117]

c) *Others are constructed in a manner where no evidence can be used for or against them.*

d) *Christianity falls if Christ is not risen from the dead.*

(1) This is probably the reason that popular magazines routinely have articles around Easter saying that “Jesus’ tomb has been found.” They find an ossuary with “Joshua” or “Jesus” written on it, and think they can undo Christianity – or at least make the faithful start questioning their religion. Joshua was a common name, as was Jesus.

(2) 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

(a) ¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

e) *If Jesus was not risen, the authorities could have simply opened the tomb and showed his decomposing body lying there as soon as the disciples started claiming that they had seen the risen Lord. There is no historical evidence that this happened, and it certainly would have been a blow to the early Christian church.*

f) *If you start examining other religions, their apologetics are thin or nonexistent. They rely completely on fideism (faith in faith) and presuppositional arguments.*

g) *Recently, when Ken Ham from “Answers in Genesis” debated Bill Nye, he was confronted by the question “is there anything that would result in you leaving the Christian faith?” Ken answered “no.” That is actually the wrong answer.*

C. What is the proper use of apologetics?

1. Gospel first, apologetics as needed.

- a) *It makes no sense to defend something if you haven't defined what that thing is.*
- b) *Picture a house of faith, and on the path to that house there are boulders – which are objections to Christianity. The object of the Christian apologist is to identify and remove those boulders.*
- c) *We are defending that Jesus, a real person, was also fully God. He came into the world and performed many miracles. He fulfilled hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. He claimed to be nothing less than God. He said he would die at the hands of men, then live again after three days. Then he did it. Afterwards, He hung around for 40 days, was seen by multitudes of people, and publicly ascended into the clouds. Because of what He did, everybody who trusts in Him will be saved and will rise again in the flesh in the “new earth.”*
- d) *Gospel from 1 Corinthians 13:3-7*
 - (1) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

2. Don't give someone a problem they don't already have.

- a) *Montgomery – “Doubtless you have problems with the virgin birth!”*
 - (a) The Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 (~ha'alma) can mean “maiden” or “virgin,” but the people who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the Septuagint (~ 300 B.C.) used the word παρθανος (parthanos), which can only mean virgin. The ancients who spoke Hebrew and Greek surely were in a better position from which to provide a proper translation of the Hebraic texts than modern scholars. In fact, the Septuagint is quoted more often than the Hebrew Bible by the New Testament writers. [Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity”]

3. The goal is to get someone to the cross, not to argue for the existence of God.

- a) *Better yet – we want to get them to the empty tomb and the witness testimony of the apostles, which will then lead to the cross.*
- b) *Theodicy – defense of God – bad*
 - (1) It is not our place to put God on the dock (a space exclusively reserved for seating a criminal defendant).
 - (2) God does not need nor want us to be His attorney.
 - (3) This becomes a trap (problem of evil, doctrine of hell, etc...)
- c) *Even if you convince someone that there is a god, you are miles away from leading them to Christ. Satan believes in God.*

4. Apologetics isn't sufficient for conversion. That is solely the work of the Holy Spirit.

a) *Apologetics is helpful for removing barriers to someone being receptive to hearing about Christianity.*

b) *Remember the house of faith with boulders on the pathway? Apologetics removes the boulders, but it doesn't make someone go into the house. If they do, it is purely by the working of God the Holy Spirit, not the apologist.*

c) *In one apologist's experience, 75% of college students will still reject Christianity even if overwhelming evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical fact is presented to them. They decide a priori that they are simply not going to believe regardless of how much evidence is presented to them.*

(1) Atheism requires faith.

(2) An example is given by Dr. Montgomery of an old farmer who visits a zoo. When he sees a giraffe for the first time, his reaction is to say "there ain't no such animal," and then he walks away. It is possible to reject Christianity even when it means rejecting overwhelming evidence that supports Christianity.

d) *While ultimately there is a need to make a decision to believe in Christ, once made it wasn't you that made it. There is a Lutheran doctrine of predestination: If you are saved, it is by the grace of God. If you are condemned, it is because of your choice to reject Christ.*

(1) Command to act – make decision

(a) Philippians 2:12

(i) ¹² *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

(b) Acts 16:25-33

(i) ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.**" ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

(2) But once you made the decision to believe, it was the work of God the Holy Spirit and not your will that made it happen.

(a) Ephesians 8:1-10

(i) ¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

5. The purpose is not to bring someone into your specific denomination.

- a) *This is not the time to get into the finer details of various doctrines, much less to attack other Christian denominations.*
- b) *The goal is to remove barriers to the person being brought to the cross, not to bring them into your fold.*

D. Individuals who are great resources for apologetics info:

1. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery – Author of many apologetics books
2. Dr. Adam Francisco – Expert on Christian history and Islam, teaches an apologetics course online at 1517.org .
3. Dr. Gary Habermas – Many books and a lecture series on YouTube.
4. Craig Parton – Apologetics from a legal perspective
5. Dr. William Lane Craig – Several books on apologetics, videos on YouTube
6. Lee Strobel – Very good communicator
7. C.S. Lewis – One of the best apologists in the 20th century
8. Dr. Nancy Almodovar – Very good at writing in an understandable manner

E. Literary resources:

1. The goal should be to understand what resources are best at answering specific questions or objections, not to memorize the content of each book.
2. Many otherwise great books struggle with jargon or untranslated phrases, but some books avoid those issues.
 - a) *“Sensible Christianity” audio series by J. W. Montgomery*
 - b) *“Defending the Faith in a Messy World,” by J. W. Montgomery*
 - c) *“History, Law, and Christianity,” by J. W. Montgomery*
 - d) *“Faith Founded on Fact,” by J.W. Montgomery*
 - e) *“The Resurrection Fact,” Edited by John Bombaro and Adam Francisco*
 - f) *“Objections Overruled I and II,” by a variety of authors*
 - g) *“Tractatus Logico Theologicus,” by J. W. Montgomery (Read this as a “logical treatise on theology.”)*
 - h) *“The Case for the Real Jesus,” by Lee Strobel*
 - i) *“The Defense Never Rests,” by Craig Parton*
 - j) *“They Were Eyewitnesses – Defending the Faith Like the Ancient Church,” by Dr. Nancy A. Almodovar*
 - k) *“Reasons to Reason – Defending the Faith is Good for Christians,” by Dr. Nancy A. Almodovar*
 - l) *“Nothing Else Matters – How the Resurrection of Jesus Changes Everything,” by Dr. Nancy A. Almodovar*
 - m) *“Creedal Apologetics,” by Dr. Nancy A. Almodovar*
 - n) *“The Historical Jesus,” by Gary Habermas*
 - o) *“Tactics,” by Gregory Koukl*
 - p) *“Mere Christianity,” C.S. Lewis*

- q) *“The Problem of Pain,” C.S. Lewis*
- r) *“The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?,” by F.F. Bruce*

II. Epistemology

- A. From the Greek word *επιστημη*, “to know”, and *λογος* meaning “word.”
- B. A study of knowledge. How do we know what is true and what is not?
 - a) *Different people have different epistemologies.*
 - b) *If you are trying to find out what is happening in politics, do you only look at one source of information? Do you weigh different sources? Do you trust the reporters, or read the source material (e.g. recent Supreme Court ruling, actual texts of the Law)?*
 - c) *If you are seeking the true religion, do you try one after another attempting to decide which one puts the warmest feeling in your heart? Or would you study each one and look for which ones point to actual historical events that are well documented and preserved, and when analyzed serve to underwrite its authenticity?*
 - (1) This is important, because many religions or Christian denominations take a “try it and you’ll like it” approach.
 - (2) While there are many things wrong with that, the primary one is that the Bible nowhere states that becoming a Christian will give you your best life now. In fact it says just the opposite. You become a target.
- C. The approach for this series will be to study the data and see where it leads us.
 - a) *We will not start with the Bible as the inspired Word of God. We will start with it as a historical text no different than the Iliad or the Dialogs of Plato.*
 - b) *There are solid methods for determining the reliability of historical texts, and those methods will be applied the same way they would be applied to any other historical text of that relative time period.*
 - c) *Theology and hard science are not enemies. You are not asked to just check your brain at the door and subscribe to a blind faith.*
 - d) *The data doesn’t always lead where you expect. People who studied the evidence for the validity of the Christian faith with the intent of discrediting it have often times become Christians. They were able to set aside their presuppositions in the face of overwhelming evidence. Not everyone is. Think back to the farmer and the giraffe.*

III. Analytic versus Synthetic Statements

- A. Remember, your goal is to bring the person to understand that the same logic they use to make decisions in everyday life is what is needed to bring them to accept the validity of the Biblical texts.

1. A useful way to do this is to point out the difference between types of statements, namely Analytic and Synthetic. Something which can't be defended analytically or synthetically is technically meaningless – not because it means nothing, but because it is inherently unprovable there is no point in studying it further.
- B. Analytic statements are definitional.
1. Example $2+2=4$, or all unmarried men are bachelors.
 2. Analytic statements don't require a defense that they are "probably correct," because they are definitional. $2+2=4$ can be proven, but it is proven by using axioms not evidence. $2+2$ is always equal to 4.
 3. They are 100% reliable but don't really provide anything beyond restating axioms.
- C. Synthetic statements are probabilistic.
1. Crossing the street, you look left, right, left again (at least in the US) and make a decision that it is highly likely that you will not be run over. But it is not guaranteed. Remember the Coyote and Roadrunner cartoons. Surviving crossing the street is probabilistic in nature, even if you can't numerically quantify the risk. By the way, it's worse now with electric cars. Bottom line, there is still a chance that you will get run over, and you know it, but you cross the street anyway.
 2. You eat out at a restaurant knowing that there is some small probability that you will get food poisoning that makes you extremely ill. Perhaps you look at the ratings of the restaurant, talk to friends, or take other steps to gain confidence in the restaurant's ability not to make you sick. But ultimately you may still get sick. You gather evidence and make your decision based on the evidence.
 3. You are driving and decide that you have enough time to make a left turn across multiple lanes of oncoming traffic. There are other countless examples of critical decisions you make while driving, especially these days where the impatience and self-centered nature of other drivers makes it a full contact sport.
 4. The point is that you weigh evidence every day to make life and death decisions. That is all we are asking a person to do when considering the validity of the Christian faith.
 5. Christian apologetics engages in an effort to offer a synthetic proof for the reliability of the Holy Scriptures. The goal is to show people that the same decision making process that they use everyday to make life-or-death decisions, when applied to Christianity, will vindicate the Christian faith. And only the Christian faith.

a) *Saying “extraordinary claims require overwhelming evidence” is a logical fallacy. Did you need overwhelming evidence that the restaurant food wasn’t tainted before risking your life eating it?*

b) *If you demand perfect 100% proof of the Christian position, then you are demanding an Analytic proof. You are seeking a God that is only a definition – nothing but form and no substance, and therefore a God that does nothing for you. [Montgomery – Sensible Christianity]*

c) *So we will not expect to ever get to 100% certainty about the truth claims of Christianity, and that is ok. We can get to the point where the evidence is so much on our side, that rejecting Christianity has to be done based solely on one’s own faith in it being untrue is greater than all the evidence in its favor.*

6. You must always start from the evidence and work toward a theory. People like Dan Brown (DiVinci Code) work from a theory, then find bits and pieces of evidence to support it. That is bad scholarship. Let the data lead you to a logical conclusion rather than forcing it to justify, at least in part, what you believe to be true. Watch out for confirmation bias.

a) *Confirmation bias is people’s tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with their existing beliefs. This biased approach to decision making is largely unintentional, and it results in a person ignoring information that is inconsistent with their beliefs. These beliefs can include a person’s expectations in a given situation and their predictions about a particular outcome. People are especially likely to process information to support their own beliefs when an issue is highly important or self-relevant. [Britannica]*

D. Technically meaningless statements are those which are, by design, untestable. They are neither analytic nor synthetic.

1. “There are eight invisible men in the room. You also can’t hear, touch, or smell them.” This statement can’t be proven or disproven. Inherently untestable by the way it is constructed.

2. A funny example mentioned by Dr. Montgomery is where a college professor writes in the margins of a colleague’s paper “This isn’t right. In fact, it isn’t even wrong.”

3. If something is constructed in a way whereby it is inherently untestable, then it doesn’t deserve any of our time looking into it further.

E. So what?

1. We can use these categories to identify what sort of statement someone is making if they are arguing against Christianity.

2. Example from Gregory Koukl’s book “Street Smarts,” is a waitress, formerly Christian, who now says that “the universe” takes care of her, and that “God is the universe.” What type of statement is that?... It is set up in a matter that is untestable.

3. If someone says that they need 100% proof for the resurrection of Jesus, recognize that what they are seeking something that is impossible in any other subject area.

IV. Historicity of the Bible – Textual Criticism

A. First of all, why do we care whether the Bible is a credible historical document?

1. If we are saved by faith, then who cares, right?
2. Faith demands an object. We say too easily “I am a person of faith,” without defining what we have faith in.
3. We say “I believe in Jesus,” well so does Satan. What do we believe *about* Jesus?
4. The Gospel texts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, describe the object of our faith.

a) *We have faith in Jesus, God in the flesh, who came to earth to reconcile all of mankind unto himself. His arrival, his explanations about what He was going to do to solve our ultimate problem, and the description of Him accomplishing His task, is all captured in great detail by multiple eyewitnesses.*

5. There are two ways to convey information about a person to someone who hasn't met them: by describing them (denotative), or by presenting them in person (demonstrative).
6. Descriptions are never adequate to fully convey the essence of a person.
7. God chose to appear in person so that his followers would have a better understanding of him, as opposed as remaining only a figure of prophesy.

a) *John 14:8-10*

(1) ⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”

8. Because we end up relying heavily upon the Gospel accounts for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it is important to establish their credibility as primary source historical accounts of actual events.

B. The New Testament documents are the primary-source records for the determination of Jesus' life and work and are historically veracious. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.2]

1. That is a synthetic assertion which requires a methodological defense.

2. Lower Textual Criticism

3. To determine the reliability of any historical document, authenticity is established using established methods of examination. The three principal tests are the bibliographical test, the internal test, and the external test. Note: These are the tests used to examine the authenticity of any ancient writing. They are not being used in any different manner here just because the text being studied happens to be the Bible.

a) *Bibliographical test*

(1) “By ‘bibliographical test,’ we mean the analysis of the textual tradition by which the given document reaches us; in the case of the New Testament documents, the question is: Are the printed texts as we have them today essentially the same as when they were originally written, or have they been significantly corrupted in translation?

[Montgomery, Tractatus 3.25]

(2) Texts which were written close to the date of the actual recorded events are inherently stronger bibliographically than texts written far after the events.

(3) While there is not universal agreement on the dates when the New Testament texts were written, the approximate dates are as follows: [Taken from Lutheran Study Bible, sorted by early date or average of early and late date if a range is given.]

Approximate Dating of New Testament Books and Letters		
Book	Early Date (AD)	Late Date (AD)
Matthew	50	50
James	50	50
1 Thessalonians	51	51
Galatians	51	53
2 Thessalonians	52	52
Mark	50	60
Romans	55	55
1 Corinthians	55	55
2 Corinthians	55	55
Luke	55	60
Ephesians	60	60
Philippians	60	60
Colossians	60	60
Acts	60	62
1 Timothy	65	65
1 Peter	67	67
2 Timothy	68	68
Titus	68	68
2 Peter	68	68
Jude	68	68
Hebrews	70	70
John	90	90
1 John	85	95
2 John	85	95
3 John	85	95
Revelation	95	95
Taken from the Lutheran Study Bible, 2001		

(a) Note that these date estimates may be later than the actual texts.

(i) *“In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably between A.D. 50 and 75)” [W.F. Albright, world’s foremost Biblical archeologist, in “History, Law, and Christianity,” p.17 (Kindle)]*

(4) Analysis of the “textual tradition” of the writings. How well were the original texts preserved? Have they been significantly altered over time? This is called “Lower Textual Criticism.”

(a) Erasmus [1466 – 1536] traveled to various monasteries and examined the original Greek texts, noting the apparent age of the scrolls. He produced the first critical edition of a Greek New Testament [Novum Instrumentum of 1516]. This was translated into the King James version. Subsequent volumes produced using more modern scholarship made very few changes to the 1516 work, resulting in the Revised King James and other translations. [Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity,” ep. 9]

(b) Sir Frederick Kenyon, Principal Librarian of the British Museum:

(i) *“The New Testament text... is far better attested than that of any other work of ancient literature. Its problems arise not from a deficiency of evidence but from an excess of it. In the case of no work of Greek or Latin literature do we possess manuscripts so plentiful in number or so near the date of composition.”*
[Montgomery, Tractatus 3.2521]

(ii) *Between the dates of the original composition and the earliest complete texts of the Gospels which we possess (Codex Vaticanus - ~350AD), there are extant fragments, quotations, and lectionary readings going back to the end of the first century and possibly even earlier. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.253]*

(iii) *“.. besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors... In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament... the interval then between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.” [Kenyon, in “Creedal Apologetics,” p.14]*

(iv) *“There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.” [F.F. Bruce, in “Creedal Apologetics,” p.15]*

(c) There exists a fragment of the 4th Gospel which must be dated no later than the end of the 1st century, thus eliminating the speculations of such critics as Bultmann that the Gospel reflects 2nd century Gnostic influences. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.2752]

(d) If you say that the New Testament texts are not reliable documents, then you must throw out all knowledge of historical persons or events which are more poorly attested. In other words, throw out all knowledge of the ancient world.

(i) *Caesar’s “Gallic Wars” (written in 58-50 BC) survive today on the basis of approximately 10 manuscripts, the oldest of which is dated about 900 years after the events.*

(ii) *Thucydides’ History (c. 460-400 B.C.) as well as the Herodotus’s History (c. 480-425 B.C.) are known to us through 8 manuscripts, the earliest of which is dated c. A.D. 900.*

(iii) *The poems of the Roman playwright Catallus (c. 84-54 B.C.) are known to us from just three manuscripts, the earliest of which dates from the late fourteenth century.*

(iv) *“No classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts which are of use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals.” [F. F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester]*

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Homer (Iliad)	900 BC	400 BC	500 years	643
Caesar (The Gallic Wars)	100 - 44 BC	900 AD	1,000 years	10
Plato (Tetralogies)	427 - 347 BC	900 AD	1,200 years	7
Aristotle	384 - 322 BC	1,100 AD	1,400 years	49
Herodotus (History)	480 - 425 BC	900 AD	1,300 years	8
Euripedes	480 - 406 BC	1,100 AD	1,500 years	9
New Testament	50 - 90 A.D.	130 AD (possibly now 40-70AD with Magdalene Manuscript)	30 years	24,000

This chart was adapted from charts in The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell, 1999, page 38.¹

From "Reasons to Reason, Defending the Faith is Good for Christians," Dr. Nancy A. Almodovar

(e) When people like Bart Erhman say there are more errors or contradictions in the New Testament manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament, it is only because there are thousands of manuscripts, fragments of papyri, etc... When one manuscript reads "He said" and another "Jesus said," that would count as an error/contradiction in Bart Erhman's mind. None of the so-called errors or contradictions call into question the central teaching of the New Testament texts.

(5) The books of the New Testament are admissible as evidence in a court of law.

(a) "In short, from a lawyer's viewpoint these documents are in solid shape and would surely, as Simon Greenleaf argued, be admissible under the so-called "ancient documents" exception to the hearsay rule. They give no evidence of tampering, are well-attested as coming from a strong tradition of manuscript evidence, arise almost on top of the events they record, and have no peer among all works of antiquity based on the sheer number of excellent and early manuscript copies. The documents are reliable historically, applying the commonly accepted canons of historical scholarship used to determine if any work that predates the printing press has reached us in substantially the same shape in which it was authored." [Craig A. Parton (a lawyer), "The Defense Never Rests," p.77]

(b) "To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I accept the gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts that they were able to substantiate." [Sir Edmund Clarke, British High Court Judge, "The Case for Christ," p.258]

b) *Internal test*

(1) What do the texts claim for themselves? In other words, do the New Testament texts claim to be primary-source attestations of the life and ministry of Jesus?

(a) In the case of the New Testament documents, they claim either to have been written by eyewitnesses of the events recounted (e.g., John's Gospel and Epistles, Peter's Epistles) or to have been written by close associates of eyewitnesses and based on careful research (e.g., Luke's writings). [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.262]

(i) *Luke 1:1-4*

(a) “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

(ii) *Acts 4:19*

(a) “But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

(iii) *John 1:1-3*

(a) “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

(b) To discount such claims on an objective basis require better sources refuting what the New testament materials say of themselves; such sources do not exist. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.263]

(c) In the first letter to the church in Corinth, Dr. Gary Habermas argues that Paul states a creed [statement of belief] using technical rabbinic terms “received and delivered,” indicating that he is passing along a holy tradition. Paul used Cephas, the Aramaic name for peter, also indicating that the creed is developed early. Therefore the creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is established immediately upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. It did not develop slowly over the course of centuries.

(i) James D. G. Dunn of the University of Durham, a fellow of the British Academy, said: "This tradition, we can be entirely confident, was formulated as tradition within months of Jesus' death." ["The Case for Christ," p.250]

(ii) It is apparent that there was an oral tradition that preceded Paul's letters, and the Gospel texts, dating right back to the time of Christ's resurrection.

(d) What do the texts claim about themselves? The texts claim to be factual and not myth.

(i) 1 Peter 1:16

(a) "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

(b) The Bible starts with "In the beginning God," not "Once upon a time."

c) *External test*

(1) What do contemporaries claim about the text? This can be both disciples of Jesus as well as enemies.

(2) Are there corroborating sources that are independent of the New Testament texts?

(a) Papius of Heiropolis (ca. 60 - 130AD), on the basis of information obtained from the "Elder" (Apostle) John, informs us that Mark recorded what the Apostle Peter had told him – and that "he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, nor to include any false statement among them." [Eusebius via Tractatus 3.2731]

(b) Eusebius recounting what he was told by Papius: "I shall not hesitate also to put into ordered form for you, along with the interpretations, everything I learned carefully in the past from the elders and noted down carefully, for the truth of which I vouch. For unlike most people I took no pleasure in those who told many different stories, but only in those who taught the truth. Nor did I take pleasure in those who reported their memory of someone else's commandments, but only in those who reported their memory of the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the Truth itself. And if by chance anyone who had been in attendance on the elders arrived, I made enquiries about the words of the elders—what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and whatever Aristion and John the Elder, the Lord's disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from the books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice." [Web: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org>, "Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine"]

(c) Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 202 AD), student of Polycarp in Smyrna, who in turn had been a disciple of John himself and had heard from him and from others personally acquainted with Jesus eyewitness accounts, states: "Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure [i.e., death, which occurred at the time of the Neronian persecution in 64-65], Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching. Luke the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, himself produced his Gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia." [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.2732]

(d) Therefore, we have external evidence definitively stating who authored each Gospel text. This undoes any attempt to assert that all the New Testament texts are derived from some mystery "Q" text (which has never been discovered).

(e) A bit more on the Bibliographical evidence...

(i) *It follows from the preceding analysis and evidence that the New Testament documents, with the exception of John's Gospel, should all be dated prior to the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and that John's Gospel had its origin ca. 95, not long before John's death at Ephesus. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.275]*

(ii) *"... we can tell from the language, grammar, and style that Mark got his empty tomb story – actually, his whole passion narrative – from an earlier source. In fact, there's evidence it [the Gospel of Mark] was written before AD 37, which is much too early for legend to have seriously corrupted it." [William Lane Craig, PhD, DTh, "The Case for Christ," p.225]*

(iii) *Paul dies in 64-65, but that is not mentioned in Acts. So, logically Acts was written prior to Paul's death. Gospel of Luke was written before Acts (Acts refers to the Gospel of Luke). Gospel of Mark was written before Luke, as one of the sources for Luke's Gospel was the Gospel of Mark. Therefore the time period between Jesus' ministry and the writing of the Gospel texts was extraordinarily short. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.2771]*

(a) *By contrast, the time period between the writing of Plato's Dialogs and the first complete texts discovered during the Italian renaissance is 1300 years.*

(b) *This means that the New Testament manuscripts were circulating while eyewitnesses to the documented events were still alive. If the accounts were erroneous then hostile witnesses were available to refute them.*

4. *Independent, and even hostile, sources exist which document information about Jesus.*

a) *Why would the Apostles maintain the resurrection of Jesus as the central fact in their testimony if it could be disproven by witnesses? Jesus showing himself to 500+ people, eating with them, talking with them, showing his wounds, was foundational to the early church. This observable fact resulted in an explosion of growth in the first years of the church.*

b) *Josephus [37AD - ~100AD], "Jewish Antiquities"*

(1) The Jewish historian Josephus was born of a priestly family in 37 AD. At 19 he joined the Pharisaic party. He fought in the Jewish War in AD 66, being made commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee. After being captured, he won the favor of a Roman commander Vespasian by predicting his rise in rank, and acted as an interpreter for Titus, Vespasian's son, during the siege of Jerusalem. After the fall of the city, he settled down to a comfortable life in Rome as a pensioner of the emperor. This made him rather unpopular with his fellow Jews. However, Josephus wrote historical accounts of the Jewish War, and also produced a history of the Jewish people from Genesis up to his current day. Reading Josephus alongside the Old Testament books can give better insight into what was happening historically during those time periods. [derived from F.F. Bruce – “The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?”]

(a) “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 had a veneration for truth. 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 among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had spoken of these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him: Thus the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

(2) Some scholars believe that the quote from Josephus was altered by early Christians. One way to reconcile this is to look at an Arabic manuscript that contains the same quote, with some differences. It is unlikely that the Arabic text would have been changed by the early church.

(a) “At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to him three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.” [F.F. Bruce, qu“The Historical Jesus”, Chapter 7]

(3) Josephus also mentions the execution of John the Baptist and the stoning of James, the brother of “Jesus the so-called Christ.”

c) *Roman historian Tacitus and Christian persecutor Pliny the Younger also mention Jesus. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.211]*

(1) “In AD 115 [Tacitus] explicitly states that Nero persecuted the Christians as scapegoats to divert suspicion away from himself for the great fire that had devastated Rome in AD 64.” [Dr. Yamauchi, “The Case for Christ.” p.87]

(a) “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. 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, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.... Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty: then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as hatred against mankind.” [Dr. Yamauchi quoting Tacitus, “The Case for Christ.” pp.87-88]

(2) In his tenth letter, Pliny the Younger (~61 AD) states the following:

(a) “They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate versus a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and the reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.” [F.F. Bruce, “The Historical Jesus,” Chapter 7]

(b) Note that the mission of Pliny the Younger was to interrogate Christians, and torture and execute them if they refused to deny and ultimately curse Christ.

(c) The reference to ‘food of an ordinary and innocent kind’ likely refers to rumors that Christians were cannibals, eating the flesh of some person (Jesus) during their meetings.

d) *Thallus, an enemy of Christians in Rome, wrote ca. 52 about the darkness which occurred during Jesus’ crucifixion as being caused by an eclipse. This isn’t possible because a lunar eclipse can’t occur during Passover which always occurs during a full moon. An eclipse can only last around 7.5 minutes, whereas the mid-day darkness during the crucifixion lasted several hours. [“Case for Christ” and “The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable” both contain information about Thallus and his explanation of the mid-day darkness.]*

(1) “On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and man places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.” [Julius Africanus, in F. F. Bruce “The Historical Jesus,” Chapter 7]

e) *“The Jewish Talmud and Mishnah contain the writings of rabbis who sought to interpret and explain the Old Testament law. These Jewish rabbinical traditions not only mention Jesus, but they are also the only sources that spell his name accurately in Aramaic, his native tongue: Yeshua Hanotzri (Joshua (Jesus) of Nazereth)... These references seem to be based on written sources and come from the Mishnah, the earliest collection of writings in the Talmud. This is no less than the arrest notice for Jesus, which runs as follows:” [Dr. Paul A. Maier, “Objections Overruled”, Page 19]*

(1) “He [Yeshua Hanotzri] shall be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and lured Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf. Anyone who knows where he is, let him declare it to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.” [Sanhedrin 43a in “Objections Overruled”, page 19]

f) *“Four items in this statement strongly support its authenticity as a notice composed before Jesus’ arrest: 1) The future tense is used; 2) Stoning was the regular punishment for blasphemy among the Jews whenever the Roman government was not involved; 3) There is no reference whatever to crucifixion; and 4) That Jesus was performing “sorcery” – the extraordinary or miraculous with a negative spin – is quite remarkable. This meets what the historians call the “criterion of embarrassment;” that is, since the information is embarrassing to the writer, it is not likely that the writer would have made it up.” [Dr. Paul A. Maier, “Objections Overruled,” P.19]*

(1) However these documents aren’t primary sources, because the authors weren’t in contact with Jesus. It doesn’t make them unreliable, it just means they are not primary sources which would describe the life and works of Jesus.

g) *And yet, despite all this evidence, some people will still argue that Jesus never existed!*

h) *Even Bart Ehrman, who is certainly no friend of Christianity, is irritated by atheists who assert that Jesus never existed. When he was confronted by someone who said “I do not see evidence in archeology or history for a historical Jesus,” he responded by saying:*

(1) “Well, I do. I mean.... *I have a whole book on it.* There is a *lot* of evidence. There’s so much evidence that... [frustrated pause]. I know, in the crowds you all run around with, it’s commonly thought that Jesus did not exist. Let me tell you... this is not even an issue for scholars of antiquity. *It is not an issue...* There is no scholar in any college or university in the Western world who teaches classics, ancient history, New Testament, early Christianity – any related field – who doubts that Jesus existed.... The reason for thinking Jesus existed is because he is abundantly attested in early sources... Early and independent sources indicate certainly that Jesus existed. One author that we know about *knew Jesus’ brother* and *knew Jesus’ closest disciple, Peter.* He is an eyewitness to both.” He continues, “I’m sorry. Again, I respect your disbelief, but... I think that atheists have done themselves a disservice by jumping on the bandwagon of mythicism because, frankly, it makes you look foolish to the outside world... You are much better off going with historical evidence... rather than coming up with the theory that Jesus didn’t exist.” [Koukl, “Street Smarts,” pp.146-147]

5. Facts that are Agreed Upon Even by a Majority of Sceptics

a) *The following section is a summary of Lee Strobel’s “The Case for the Real Jesus,” Challenge 3, pp. 113 – 126.*

b) *Fact 1: Jesus was killed by crucifixion.*

(1) The four Gospels, and external skeptical sources Tacitus, Josephus, Lucian, Mara Bar-Serapion, and the Jewish Talmud confirm this fact.

c) *Fact 2: Jesus’ disciples believed that he rose and appeared to them.*

(1) Contained in the four Gospels, including texts that are derived from oral tradition that pre-dated their copying into the Gospel documents, and the writings of Paul.

(2) “At a very minimum, we can say that the vast majority of historians believe that the early apostolic teachings are enshrined in these sermon summaries in Acts – and they’re not at all ambiguous: they declare that Jesus rose bodily from the dead.” [Dr. Michael Licona, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, p. 116] Note: Bodily not spiritually.

d) *Fact 3: The conversion of the church persecutor Paul (Saul of Tarsus)*

(1) Technically, Paul was a hostile witness to the resurrection. He didn’t believe until he personally encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus.

(2) Six additional ancient sources report that Paul was willing to suffer continuously and even die for his beliefs (Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen).

(3) Paul had nothing to gain by making up the story of his road to Damascus conversion event.

e) *Fact 4: The conversion of the skeptic James, the half-brother of Jesus*

- (1) Josephus confirms the existence of James and identifies him as Jesus' half-brother.
- (2) Hegesippus (2nd century) reports that James was a pious Jew who strictly abided by Jewish law. Mark and John both attest that none of Jesus' brothers believed in him.
- (3) Jesus didn't entrust the care of Mary to James or the other brothers, but rather to John!
- (4) In 1 Corinthians 15, it states that Jesus appeared to James. After this, James not only becomes a believer, but he later becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
- (5) James died as a martyr.

f) *Fact 5: Jesus' tomb was empty.*

- (1) Not as universally agreed upon by skeptics, but still good evidence.
- (2) 75 percent of scholars agree on the empty tomb as a historical fact. [Habermas, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, p.123]
- (3) The fact that Jesus was publicly executed in Jerusalem, and then publicly seen three days later in that same city, strengthens the argument that the tomb was empty. Peter claims to the crowd "God raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact." The Roman or Jewish authorities could have simply walked over and pointed to the tomb if it were not in fact empty.
- (4) So atheists are hard-pressed to argue away the existence of Jesus, the execution of Jesus, or the empty tomb. So where does that leave them? Trying to find another plausible cause for the empty tomb.
- (5) The story was that "someone stole the body" not that "the disciples are lying about the empty tomb."
 - (a) Matthew 28:10-15
 - (b) "Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

(c) Justin Martyr and Tertullian confirm that what is stated in Matthew 28:11-15 about the disciples stealing the body continued to be the Jewish message through the second century. [“The Historical Jesus,” F.F. Bruce, chapter 6]

g) *When you combine the 5 facts, and acknowledge that the people who encountered the risen Jesus were all willing to be tortured and die without changing their testimony, the most probable explanation that fits is a resurrected Lord.*

h) *It is a totally different thing to die for something you believe to be true [even if it ultimately isn't], and dying for something that you know to be a fraud.*

6. Odd theories to explain the risen Lord

a) *Swoon Theory*

(1) The swoon theory, espoused by Heinrich Paulus and others during the heyday of the liberal naturalistic theories, proposes that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross. The theory is that Jesus was badly injured, but recovered at least long enough to be seen by some of his disciples. A version of the swoon theory was popularized in the book “The Passover Plot” by Hugh Shonfield. It describes an elaborate plan by Jesus to fulfill prophecies, appear to die on the cross (but actually was drugged by an unidentified man under the direction of Joseph of Arimathea), recover as He is rescued from the tomb three days later, only to die again quickly. There are various other similar constructions. None hold up to any degree of critical analysis. [see F.F. Bruce – “The Historical Jesus” section titled “The Rise of the Swoon Theory.”]

(a) Note that the Roman soldiers who performed crucifixions were experts at the trade, and if a person survived the cross and got away the soldiers would be executed. They had good motivation to ensure that Jesus was dead before removing him from the cross.

(b) When the spear was thrust by the Roman soldier into Jesus' side, John records that blood and water came out. This is consistent with what was happening medically to Jesus:

(i) *“Even before He [Jesus] died ... the hypovolemic shock would have caused a sustained rapid heart rate that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in the collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart, called a pericardial effusion, as well as around the lungs, which is called a pleural effusion.” [Alexander Metherell, MD, PhD, “The Case for Christ,” p.215]*

(ii) *Dr. William D. Edwards wrote an article that was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1968 that stated, "Clearly, the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted... Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge."*

b) *The Chariot of the Gods*

(1) The Chariot of the Gods theory proposes that Jesus was an alien with the abilities ascribed to Him in the Bible. Proposed by Erich Von Daniken in 1968, it states that all religions came about as a result of visitations by aliens who were considered gods by the ancients. [This is discussed in "Sensible Christianity" audio series.]

(a) However, since the arrival of Jesus was proposed thousands of years prior to his birth, if He was an alien He was certainly playing the long game. We can't argue about what is possible, only what is probable.

C. Higher Criticism

1. There exists another methodology for determining the authenticity of texts, namely "Higher Textual Criticism." Liberal Bible scholars are the only ones still using this methodology, as it is highly unreliable. If you hear disputes about who actually wrote a book of the Bible, or that it was written by multiple authors, you should be suspicious that higher criticism was used to reach that speculative conclusion.

2. Higher Criticism analyzes the writing styles of an author. They compare the consistency of that style within a document, and also against other documents supposedly authored by the same writer, to determine if the same person actually wrote the entire document or documents.

3. For example, the Gospel of John utilizes a completely different writing style than the book of Revelation. Therefore the higher critic would conclude that Revelation was not written by John (and 90% of modern liberal Bible scholars share this conviction). However, it makes sense that the Gospel of John would be different because of the reason given by John for why it was written:

[Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity"]

a) *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31)*

b) *In this case, John was recording historical events, at least a sampling of them, so that people might believe what had happened and so come to the faith (through the working of the Holy Spirit).*

4. Compare that to the context in which Revelation was written:

a) *Revelation was written hastily to record a vision that was given to John while in prison on the isle of Patmos. He wasn't giving an historical narrative of events which he participated in. Naturally those two books will utilize different styles.*

b) *Revelation 1:10*

(1) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches..."

c) *Revelation 22:8-10*

(1) I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."

d) *In this case, John was given an apocalyptic vision and told to write it down. Quickly.*

5. The entire Higher Criticism methodology is bad scholarship. New Testament scholars named McGregor and Morton did a computer analysis of St. Paul's letters. They fed Romans and Galatians into a computer, establishing a stylistic standard of comparison. Then they fed the other (supposed) Pauline letters into the computer to see if the styles compared adequately. The conclusion was that six or seven people had written these letters. [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity," ep 9]

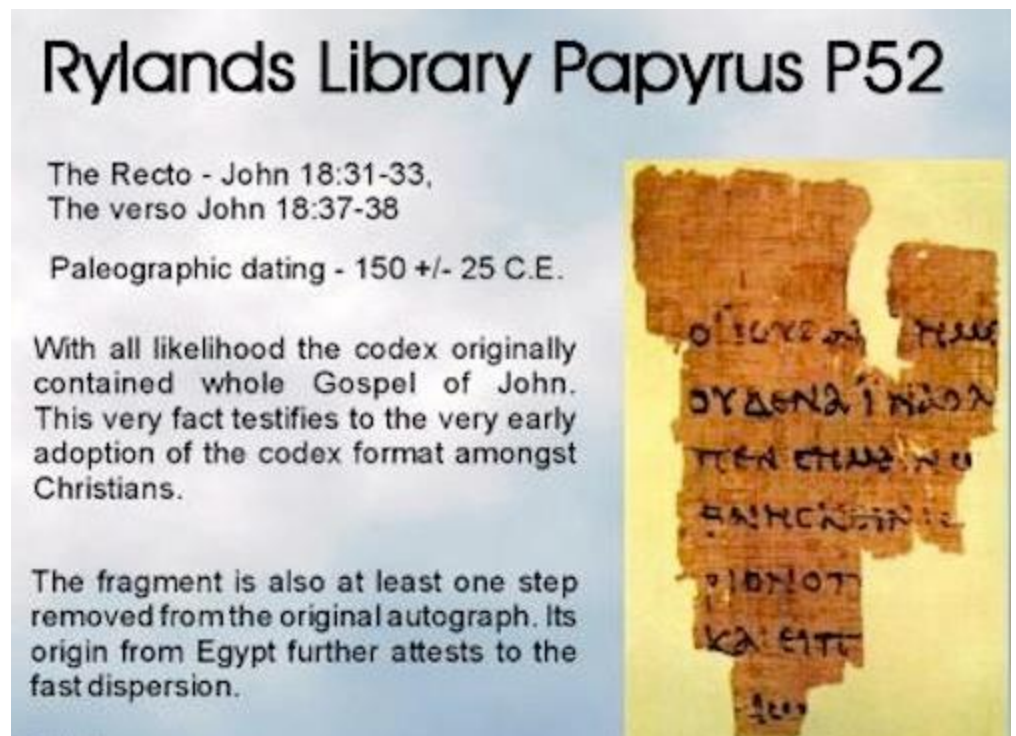
a) *Subsequently, some people at Harvard took McGregor and Morton's book on the subject and fed the style of the preface and the first chapter into a computer and checked the other chapters against it and found that five people had written their book! [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity," ep 9]*

6. C.S. Lewis commented that the higher critics who were trying to determine the underlying sources for his various works never got it right once. And he was alive while this was happening. So if this methodology doesn't work when applied to a contemporary figure, how could it possibly work for analyzing ancient writings? [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity," ep 9]

V. Historicity of the Bible – Archeological Evidence

A. Manuscripts

1. There are some 25,000-30,000 early manuscripts in existence, almost 6,000 of which (many being fragments, or sets of letters/books rather than the complete New Testament) are Greek texts, and the others being early translations of the Greek New Testament. Sixty manuscripts are of the complete New Testament.
2. Even if all of the manuscripts were destroyed tomorrow, there are enough quotations of the New Testament verses by the church fathers to nearly reconstruct the entire New Testament. [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity – Reliability of the New Testament Documents"]
3. "Through the first three centuries, we have nearly fifty manuscripts in Greek alone. Yet remarkably, the additions to the text over fourteen centuries of copying amount to about 2 percent of the total." [Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, in "The Case for the Real Jesus" p.83]
4. There remains only 1% of the New Testament words about which questions still exist; no questionable passage contradicts any Biblical teaching.
5. Some examples: a fragment of the Gospel of John dated 20-50 years after he wrote it.



- a)
- b) *The front side of the papyri translates as follows, with the bold text representing what is visible: [Source: Wikipedia]*

the Jews, "For us it is not permitted to kill anyone," so that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke signifying what kind of death he was going to die. Entered therefore again into the Praetorium Pilate and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Thou art king of the Jews?"

c)

d) *The back side of the papyri translates as follows: [Source: Wikipedia]*

a King I am. For **this I have been born** and (for this) I have come into the **world so that I would testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth** hears of me my voice." **Said to him** Pilate, "What is truth?" **and this** having said, again he went out unto **the Jews** and said to them, "I find **not one** fault in him."

e)

6. Bodmer Papyri – 22 papyri, oldest being dated ~200AD.



a)

b) *The Bodmer Papyri are a group of twenty-two papyri discovered in Egypt in 1952. They are named after Martin Bodmer, who purchased them. The papyri contain segments from the Old and New Testaments, early Christian literature, Homer, and Menander. The oldest, P66 dates to c. 200 AD. P66 [above] is a portion of the Gospel of John. [Source: Wikipedia]*

c)

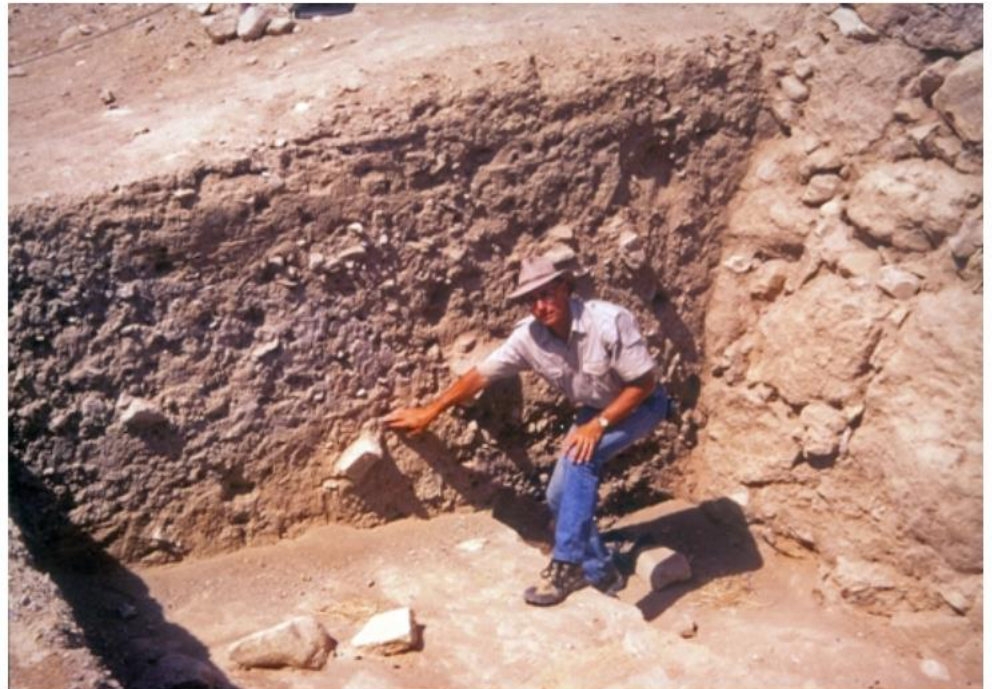
P66 is not a complete copy of the Gospel of John. It contains: John 1:1–6:11, 6:35b–14:26, 29–30; 15:2–26; 16:2–4, 6–7; 16:10–20:20, 22–23; 20:25–21:9, 12, 17. [Source: Wikipedia]

d) *It does not contain the story of the woman caught in adultery [which is generally acknowledged in Bibles that contain that story]. However, it is not a complete rendering of the Gospel of John, so the absence of that story isn't sufficient evidence to say that it was added later.*

B. Jericho

1. Excavations at Jericho showed the fallen and piled red mud brick laying against the lower stone retaining wall, forming a ramp up into the city out of the fallen part of the wall. This is exactly what one would expect to find after reading the Joshua 6 narrative about the wall falling down and the people going up into the city.

a) *So the people shouted, and they blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down under itself, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city (Joshua 6:20).*



Archaeologist, Dr. Bryan Wood points to collapsed mud bricks from the city wall that fell to the base of the retaining wall at Jericho. Photo Credit: Associates for Biblical Research

b)

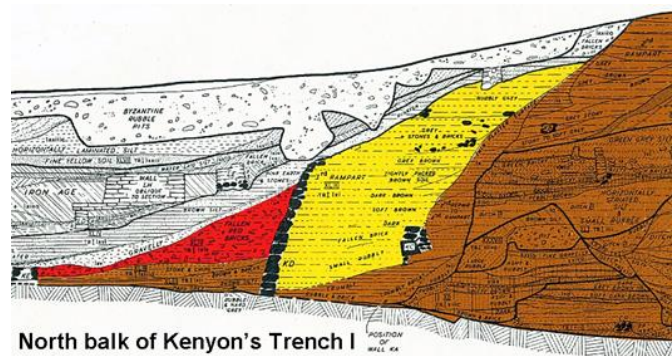
c) Archaeologist, Dr. Bryant Wood explains: “Although Kenyon (Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated the site in the 1950s) found the revetment [retaining] wall and the earthen rampart, she did not find the city wall itself on top of the tell. But, astoundingly, a heap of fallen red bricks lay outside the revetment wall. These red bricks almost certainly came from the city wall on top of the tell or from a mudbrick parapet wall atop the revetment wall, or both, as Kenyon recognized.” Amazingly, this pile of red bricks which went almost to the top of the revetment wall would have provided a natural siege ramp that would have allowed the Israelites to go “up into the city” just as the Bible describes. [biblearcheologyreport.com, which for some reason may have unsafe links now]



Schematic cross-section diagram of the fortification system at Jericho based on Kenyon’s west trench. Courtesy of Answers in Genesis.

<https://answersingenesis.org/archaeology/the-walls-of-gericho/>

d)



e)

2. The book of Joshua also records that the siege of Jericho was short and the Israelites did not loot the city. Excavations revealed that there was a short siege, that the walls fell outward suddenly instead of being slowly battered, and the city's grain stores were not plundered, as many storage jars in the city were found full of grain. Finally, Joshua says that the Israelites burned Jericho, and excavators have found abundant evidence of this city being destroyed by a huge and purposeful fire, with a layer of ash over 3 feet (1 meter) thick.

a) <https://biblicalisrael tours.com/2016/08/the-walls-of-jericho/>

C. Siolam Pool

1. Discovered in 2005 [Biblicalarcheology.org]



- 2.

D. Bethesda Pool

1. John 5:2-9

a) *Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.*

2. Discovered in 19th century but it has taken archeologists 100 years to accurately identify and interpret the site. [Biblicalarcheology.org]



a)

b) *When Jesus heals the paralytic in the Gospel of John, the Bethesda Pool is described as having five porticoes—a puzzling feature suggesting an unusual five-sided pool, which most scholars dismissed as an unhistorical literary creation. Yet when this site was excavated, it revealed a rectangular pool with two basins separated by a wall—thus a five-sided pool—and each side had a portico.*

E. Pilate Stone

1. The Pilate stone is a damaged block (82 cm x 65 cm) of carved limestone with a partially intact inscription attributed to, and mentioning, Pontius Pilate, a prefect of the Roman province of Judea from AD 26 to 36. It was discovered at the archaeological site of Caesarea Maritima in 1961. [Wikipedia]



a)

F. Chariot Wheels in the Red Sea

1. Discovered in 1978, most are in bad shape due to being covered in coral. They found both 6 spoked and 8 spoked wheels. A single gold plated wheel [likely belonging to the priestly caste who was at the back of the army] was well preserved because coral didn't grow on it. [wyattmuseum.com]



a)

G. Seal of Isaiah next to seal of King Hezekiah

1. Was found in Jerusalem, 10 feet apart in the same layer of dirt. [icr.org]
2. Shows that Isaiah and King Hezekiah lived at the same time, destroying doubters who were convinced that the book of Isaiah was written during the Babylonian captivity centuries later.



Partial clay seal showing most of Isaiah's name.

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a)



Bulla bearing biblical King Hezekiah's royal seal.

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b)

VI. More factors that lend credibility to the historicity of the Bible:

A. The apostles had nothing to gain by claiming that Jesus was the Christ

1. Jesus told them not to seek wealth.

a) *Matthew 10:9-10*

(1) "Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep."

2. Jesus told them in advance what hardships they would face on His account:

(1) *Matthew 10:16-20, 28*

(a) "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

(b) “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

3. Paul describes his ordeals which were brought by enemies of the Gospel.

a) *2 Corinthians 11:21-32*

(1) Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

(2) Side note: It is apparent from multiple Biblical texts that we are not to seek out persecution. Escape if you can, face it if you can’t. [e.g. Polycarp]

4. Most were executed for not recanting their testimony.

a) *From Church History (internet, so take it for what it is worth):*

(1) Peter was hung upside down on a cross.

(2) Andrew (Peter’s brother) was flayed then crucified on an X-shaped cross in Greece.

(3) Paul was beheaded during the Neronian persecution in Rome.

(4) Matthew, while in Ethiopia, was arrested and impaled by stakes in the ground, pierced by a sword, then beheaded.

(5) Thomas, while in India, was pierced by a sword in his side and died of the wound.

(6) It is believed that Simon [the Zealot] was crucified.

(7) Philip was impaled by giant fish hooks and hung upside down to die.

(8) It is believed that the Apostle James was crucified. James the half-brother of Jesus may have been pushed off the same cliff the Jews tried to push Jesus off of, but he survived the fall. So they clubbed him to death.

b) *It is one thing to die for something you believe to be true, although it isn't. It is an entirely different thing to die for something you know to be false.*

(1) This is an important distinction. Martyrs for other faiths die for what they believe to be true [not knowing it is actually not true], and this argument is used to marginalize the importance of the deaths of the apostles. The key difference is that the apostles were the ones who knew as a matter of fact that what they were proclaiming was true, as they were eyewitnesses to the events.

(a) The importance of this cannot be overstated.

(b) So I will state it again.

(c) It is important.

5. In *the Martyrdom*, Polycarp is recorded as saying on the day of his death: "Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong." This could indicate either that he was then eighty-six years old or that he had lived eighty-six years after his conversion. Polycarp goes on to say: "How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked." Polycarp was burned at the stake and pierced with a spear for refusing to burn incense to the Roman emperor. On his farewell, he said: "I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ." [Source: Wikipedia]

6. The church father Ignatius, in AD 117, wrote a letter on the way to his execution. The letter stated that Jesus was truly persecuted under Pilate, was truly crucified, was truly raised from the dead, and that those who believe in him would be raised too. [Strobel, "Case for Christ," p.95]

B. Principle of Embarrassment – If something in a historical document would be embarrassing to the original author, it serves to strengthen the historical reliability of the document.

1. The fact that the Gospel accounts record that the women found the empty tomb first is significant. Someone making up this story, in the first century context, would not say that women found the empty tomb because it would hurt the credibility of their case. The testimony of women in 1st century courts was considered nearly useless (unless you had 10 women testifying in the same manner, maybe).

a) *“Women were on a very low rung of the social ladder in first-century Palestine. There are old rabbinical sayings that said, ‘Let the words of the Law be burned rather than delivered to women’ and ‘Blessed is he whose children are male, but woe to him whose children are female.’” [William Lane Craig, PhD, DTh, “The Case for Christ,” p.237]*

b) *This principle of embarrassment only works in one direction. A document that contains no embarrassing statements is not less reliable based solely on that fact.*

c) *Bart Ehrman misuses various criteria such as this one in a negative way to try to disprove the historicity of the Bible, but it is incorrect to use such criteria to prove the negative.*

(1) For example, while independent attestation strengthens the argument that a historical document is correct, the lack of independent attestation does not singularly disprove the historicity of the document.

2. The fact that the Apostles kept arguing with Jesus when he said he was going to be put to death makes them look foolish.

a) *Again, the principle of embarrassment would say that the writer would not want to show these pivotal figures in a negative light.*

C. Hostile witnesses were alive when the biblical texts were circulating.

1. The events cited in the Gospel texts would certainly be refuted by people who were hostile and who could easily check out the claims. For instance, the empty tomb, names of those involved, recorded historical events, etc...

a) *Peter’s sermon in the book of Acts does not say that the risen Christ was a private event, but rather he said “... but He [Christ] was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his today see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.” Rather than the crowd laughing at this lecture as being foolishness, 3000 people were converted that day.*

(1) Interestingly, the term “3000 souls” was used as a head count. Usually only the number of males is cited, for example the feeding of the 5000 doesn’t account for how many women and children were present [e.g. Matthew 14:21]. In fact, Peter is explicit that “this promise is for you and your children...”.

b) When Paul confronted King Agrippa, part of his argument for why Agrippa should believe in Jesus is stated as follows: "For the king knows about these things [the resurrection], and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner." [Acts 26:26]

D. The Apostles did not hallucinate a risen Jesus.

1. Hallucinations are not group events. Everybody's experience is unique.

a) "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren't something which can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce a hallucination in somebody else. Since a hallucination exists only in the subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it." [Gary Collings, psychologist and university professor. From "The Case for the Real Jesus," p.143]

E. It is beyond improbable that Jesus could fulfill so many Old Testament prophecies.

1. Following the power rule in statistics, if the probability of any of the prophecies (which are independent events) being fulfilled is 1 in 4, and only 25 of the numerous (~360) prophecies are considered, then the probability of Jesus accidentally fulfilling those 25 prophecies is 1 in one thousand trillion.

[Montgomery, presentation to Calvary Church, "Can We Trust the Bible?", on Youtube]

F. Jesus was not a ghost.

1. The apostles ate fish with the resurrected Jesus. Ghosts don't eat fish.

2. Jesus allowed Thomas to touch his wounds. Whether Thomas actually did touch the wounds is not clear in scripture, but it would make no sense for the "ghost" Jesus to make an offer such as this unless he was flesh.

3. The people who encountered the resurrected Jesus were quite capable of determining the difference between a living person and a dead person. They saw Jesus dead. They later saw him alive. It didn't require a medical degree for them to diagnose him as no longer dead.

VII. What did the Apostles claim about Jesus from their own experiences?

A. The Apostles primarily cite historical events, not their own conversion experience.

1. The Apostles claimed they were witness to real historical events which demonstrated the deity of Jesus. They did not testify to their emotional connection to Jesus, or a feeling in their heart. They did not justify the validity of their faith by the miracles they performed, but rather they pointed to the historical events which they witnessed.

a) *1 John 1:1-3*

(1) That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

b) *Acts 2:22-24*

(1) ²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

c) *2 Peter 1:16-21*

(1) ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

d) *Acts 4:5-12*

(1) ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. ⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

(a) “The earliest evidence we have for the resurrection almost certainly goes back to the time immediately after the resurrection even it alleged to have taken place. This is the evidence contained in the early sermons in the Acts of the Apostles... But there can be no doubt that in the first few chapters of Acts its author has preserved material from very early sources. Scholars have discovered that the language used in speaking about Jesus in these early speeches in Acts is quite different from that used at the time when the book was compiled in its final form.” [from F.F. Bruce, “The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?,” Chapter 7]

VIII. Excursus: Exegesis versus Eisegesis

A. Before we move on to the next section it will be helpful for us to define two terms that are used to describe how we interpret what the Biblical texts say.

B. Exegesis

1. Critical explanation or analysis, especially of a text.

a) *Not a particularly helpful definition, so let's try this:*

(1) Drawing from a text what it intends to say without importing personal bias (e.g., confirmation bias).

(2) One application of this with any text is to use the clear texts to help explain the more complicated texts.

(3) Context is critical.

C. Eisegesis

1. A subjective method of interpretation by introducing one's own opinions into the original: opposed to exegesis.

- a) *Another way to define exegesis was to interpret the Biblical texts in a manner that agrees with me.*
- b) *This is a routine way to misinterpret the Bible. If you read the Bible believing that the “finite cannot contain the infinite,” then you have to interpret Jesus’ discourse in John 6 about being the “bread of life” as being purely figurative. Or you end up pitting James against Paul about the role of faith versus works.*

IX. OK, the Gospel texts stand as Primary Source historical documents of unprecedented pedigree in every way we test ancient documents for historicity. So what?

A. We now transition from the Gospel texts being analyzed as any other ancient work of literature would be analyzed to an analysis of the contents.

1. This is where we start to move from the point of the Bible being a purely historical book, in particular the Gospel texts being primary historical references, to what the Gospel texts say. And we would do the same thing if we were reading an article in a scientific journal (hopefully). Namely, we would establish the credibility of the authors, establish whether the authors were intending to write fiction or fact, establish whether the journal has a reputation of allowing scientists to publish findings free of politics (good luck), and so forth. Once we establish that the source material is written by reputable researchers, who state that they are providing first-hand testimony to what they witnessed in the lab, and that it hasn’t been corrupted by being forced to fit within a politically motivated or otherwise constrained narrative, then and only then would we look at the conclusions of the research.

2. You might see some familiar verses in this section, but remember that before this point we were looking at them without assuming they were divinely inspired, but rather just as quotations from a book of ancient literature. Our purpose then was to establish the credibility of the text as being historically authentic, whereas now we are looking at the previously validated texts with great curiosity about what they say.

B. What is it that Jesus claims about himself in the Gospel documents?

1. In the Gospel documents, the man Jesus claims to be nothing less than God. This doesn’t seem like something that is in dispute, but it is with some liberal scholars.

- a) *Jesus proves that he has the ability to forgive sins by healing the paralytic.*
(1) Matthew 9:2-7:

(a) And behold, some people brought to him [Jesus] a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home.

b) *He uses the Son of Man reference from Daniel*

(1) Matthew 26:63b - 65

(a) And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.

(i) *Reference to Daniel 7:13-14*

(a) "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

(ii) *Also used in Luke 6:5*

(a) And he said to them [the Pharisees], "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

c) *He states that if you have seen Him, you have seen The Father.*

(1) John 14:8-10

(a) Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

d) *He uses the holy name "I AM" to refer to himself.*

(1) John 8:57-59

(a) So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

(i) *They didn’t try to kill Him because of a grammatical error!*

(b) The use of “εγω ειμι” (egg-oh ay-mee, literally “I - I am”, a way to emphasize the point) is indicative of a claim to being God, similar to the burning bush in Exodus where the pre-incarnate Christ uses the same reference:

(i) *Exodus 3:13-14*

(a) Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

2. Liar, Lunatic, or Lord

a) *Therefore, as stated by C.S. Lewis, we are left with the choice about how to characterize Jesus:*

(1) “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” – C.S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity”

(2) Jesus proves that he is God by dying and rising again, thus dispensing with all but one option: Jesus is Lord.

3. The resurrected Christ ate with his disciples.

a) *And yet some theologians wish to say that his resurrection was only spiritual.*

b) *Ghosts don’t eat fish.*

(1) Luke 24:36-42

(a) As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them [the disciples], and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

C. What about verses that seem to say that Jesus only claimed to be a man?

1. "Passages commonly cited by Moslems, Unitarians, and humanists to argue that Jesus considered himself at best a unique prophet and moral teacher, but not the incarnate God (e.g. Matthew 19:17, Mark 13:32) are explicable if we keep in mind that Jesus was fully man as well a fully God. If, however, these passages are understood to remove Jesus' claims to Deity, there is no way to explain the passages previously cited, in which Jesus unequivocally affirms his Divine status." [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.54-3.55]

a) *Matthew 19:16-17*

(1) And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."

b) *Mark 13:32*

(1) "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."

(a) This verse even tripped up C.S. Lewis. [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity"]

X. Because the Gospel documents are reliable primary sources, and because they show that Christ is Lord, we should listen to what He has to say.

A. Jesus states that the scriptures are divinely inspired:

1. John 14:25-26

a) *"These things I [Jesus] have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

B. Jesus states that he will die and rise on the third day (multiple times).

1. Luke 18:31-33
 - a) *And taking the twelve, he [Jesus] said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."*
 2. Matthew 12:38-40
 - a) *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*
- C. Jesus states that he will come again to redeem believers.
1. Luke 21:27-28
 - a) *And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*
- D. Jesus states what is required of us in order to be saved.
1. John 14:1-6
 - a) *"[Speaking to the disciples] Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

XI. Jesus and the Old Testament

- A. To prophesy does not mean to tell the future, necessarily.
1. The word 'prophecy' means either to convey the word of God, or to tell the future.
 - a) *When Moses is writing about Adam and Eve, he is recording a prophecy given to him by God. Obviously it is a story of a past historical event, not a prediction of the future.*
 - b) *When a person hits Jesus while He is on trial, the person asks him to prophesy as to who hit him – a past event.*
 - c) *We think of prophecy as only telling the future.*

2. The Bible is prophetic text, which means that it is breathed out by the Holy Spirit. It tells of past, present, and future historical events, and gives their meanings.

B. Jesus' Underwrites the Old Testament as being Factual, and He explains what it is about.

1. Jesus never speaks against the Old Testament texts. In fact, many of the texts he cites are the most controversial, such as the Creation account, the great flood, Noah being swallowed by the sea monster or giant fish ("whale" was a King James version interpretation).

a) *Matthew 12:40*

(1) For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

b) *Matthew 19:3-6*

(1) And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

c) *Matthew 24:37-39*

(1) For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

2. Jesus explains that the Old Testament points to Him.

a) *Luke 24:25-27*

(1) And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

b) *John 6:30-34*

(1) So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

XII. Jesus and the New Testament

A. Jesus Endorses the New Testament, even though it wasn’t written yet.

1. Jesus states that He will send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to give the disciples “total recall” of all that Jesus taught.

a) *John 14:25-26*

(1) “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

b) *John 15:26*

(1) “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

c) *Luke 24:25-27*

(1) And he said to them [two disciples on the road to Emmaus], “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

XIII. Apparent Errors and Contradictions in the Bible

A. There is a difference between a copyist error and a contradiction.

1. When Bart Ehrman says that there are 200,000 – 400,000 variants between the New Testament manuscripts, it does not mean there are that many errors. [The following info is from “The Case for the Real Jesus”, Challenge Two]

a) *70-80 percent of the variants are spelling differences in the Greek texts, like whether the name John has one or two “n’s”.*

b) *That means 280,000 – 320,000 of Ehrman’s variants are utterly meaningless.*

c) *Other “errors” are using words like “Jesus” in one manuscript versus “Lord” in another.*

d) *Greek words don’t have to be in any particular order, unlike English. But having words rearranged in a sentence counts as a variant even though it would be no different in meaning.*

e) *Only 1% of variants or errors have any possible effect on the meaning of the text.*

(1) Two of the most notorious examples: Romans 5:1, did Paul say “We have peace,” or “Let us have peace.” The difference is one Greek letter. 1 John 1:4, the verse says either “Thus we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete,” or “Thus we are writing these things so that your joy may be complete.”

f) *Another variant is introduced because early scribes replaced pronouns with “Jesus” to make the text more clear for lectionary readings. There are 89 verses in a row in the Gospel of Mark that don’t mention the word Jesus, but rather use pronouns. So every time a scribe changes ‘he’ to ‘Jesus’ it is counted as a variant, even if there is no dispute as to who the pronouns was referring.*

B. A contradiction requires two facts to be claimed that cannot possibly both be true.

1. Example: Two people look at the same object. One says that it is green and the other says that it is gray. Is their testimony contradictory?... No. One of them could be color blind.

2. When you reach a supposed error or contradiction in the Bible, you need to work very hard to reconcile it.

3. The term “contradiction” is misused to apply to differences between Biblical texts which can be reconciled.

a) *Example: Differing accounts of the resurrection reflected by the various Gospels can be reconciled. So while they do appear to be in conflict, there aren’t actually contradictions. Refer to Craig Parton’s essay “The Case Against the Case Against Christianity” in “The Resurrection Fact – Responding to Modern Critics” page 111-112. The resurrection accounts can be harmonized.*

(1) Mary Magdalene and Mary go to the tomb from Bethany, via John's house, picking up Salome from there (Matthew 28:1-15); Mary Magdalene rushes from the tomb to tell Peter and John (John 20:1); Joanna and Susanna arrive at the tomb, and the women go into the tomb (Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:3-8); the women tell the disciples and no one else (Matthew 28:8; Mark 16:8, Luke 24:9-11); Peter and John run to the tomb and return home (John 20; Luke 24:12); Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb again (John 20:11-18); Mary, wife of Cephas, and Salome set off to Bethany to tell the brethren and meet Jesus (Matthew 28:8-10); Clopas and another disciple got to Emmaus and later return and tell the others (Mark 16:11-12; Luke 24:13-35); Jesus appears to the disciples, including Thomas this time (John 20:24-29); the Twelve return to Galilee and meet Jesus again there (John 21); and Jesus appears to James and finally appears one last time before the ascension (Mark 16:15-20).

4. An apparent contradiction that plagued the Church for centuries is the differing accounts of which day of the month Jesus was crucified.

a) *The Gospel accounts of John and the Synoptic Gospels are different by one day.*

(1) John places the crucifixion as occurring on Nisan 14.

(2) The synoptic Gospels place it at Nisan 15.

b) *This was a challenge for the church until the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. Amongst those scrolls was a different calendar, later named the Qumran Jubilee calendar. It differs from the traditional Lunar calendar by one day.*

(1) We can't prove that the synoptic Gospels used one calendar and John used the other calendar, but the fact that there were two calendars in circulation at the time of the events removes the date discrepancy as a contradiction. There is a way to plausibly reconcile the dates, so they are not by definition a contradiction. And, quite frankly, it doesn't matter.

(2) So what appeared to be a clear contradiction was eventually reconciled, but not until much later in history.

(3) Readers of the Gospels at the time would have recognized why they weren't in conflict. It is chronological snobbery to think that we are so much more able to see these errors and contradictions.

5. There are no contradictions in the Bible that call into question the central teachings.

C. When sections of Gospel accounts are absent from older manuscripts, then that fact is highlighted in our ESV or NIV bibles.

1. Example: John 7:53-8:11 – The Woman Caught in Adultery

D. The Age of Reason – Thomas Paine

1. Thomas Paine, in the Age of Reason Part II, states a rather uninformed opinion of the Gospel texts, ignoring 1700 years of scholarship on the documents.

a) *“The disordered state of the history in these four books, the silence of one book upon matters related in the other, and the disagreement that is to be found among them, implies that they are the productions of some unconnected individuals, many years after the things they pretend to relate, each of whom made his own legend; and not the writings of men living intimately together, as the men called apostles are supposed to have done: in fine, that they have been manufactured, as the books of the Old Testament have been, by other persons than those whose names they bear.” – Thomas Paine, “Age of Reason,” 1793*

2. He has no use for any of the books of the Old or New Testament either.

3. Saying that one book is silent on an issue mentioned in another book does not call into question the validity of the texts – but he implies that it does.

4. Answers to each of his contentions can be found through research.

5. He also contends that the genealogies of Jesus being different in two of the gospels should make the reader stop reading further. However,

a) *Matthew and Luke were trying to demonstrate different things through their genealogies. Matthew’s goal is to focus on Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies. Matthew starts with Abraham and works his way up to Joseph and Mary, Jesus’ earthly parents, while Luke starts with Joseph (doesn’t mention Mary in his genealogy) and works his way back to God. Matthew portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, while Luke is concerned with showing that Jesus is both human (he is the son of Adam) and divine (Son of God). [essentialchurch.net]*

E. A relevant example of why the Gospel accounts appear different can be described by the parable of the six blind men and the elephant, which appears in various forms:

1. A group of blind men who have never come across an elephant before attempt to learn and imagine what the elephant is like by touching it. Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant's body, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk or the tail. They then describe the elephant based on their limited experience and their descriptions of the elephant are different from each other. In some versions, they come to suspect that the other person is dishonest and they come to blows.

F. If all the Gospels were nearly identical, it would actually hurt their credibility. It would imply collusion between the authors.

1. People like “New Testament Scholar” Bart Erhman have made a career of pointing out supposed errors and contradictions in the Bible.

2. A bit of history first.

a) *Bart Ehrman became a “born again” Christian in High School. He graduated from Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. He reached a turning point when studying at Princeton. Ehrman wrote a paper to offer ways to explain away an apparent discrepancy in the Gospel of Mark, and was proud of himself for being a good Christian scholar. The response from his (liberal) professor was, “Maybe Mark was just wrong.”*

b) *That response from the professor “went straight through [him].” He decided that Mark did, indeed, err, and the “floodgate opened.” Ehrman left Christianity and identifies as agnostic (which literally means “don’t know”). Now his mode of operation is to turn possibility into probability, and probability into certainty. He implicitly believes anything that shows a possible error means that the error is certain.*

3. If you don’t understand the difference between a contradiction and a copiest error, you will get your clock cleaned by people hostile to Christianity and familiar with the arguments of people like Bart Ehrman.

4. It is much better to focus on whether those supposed errors and contradictions actually countermand the overall Gospel message (they don’t).

5. When someone presents you with the statement that the manuscripts or final Gospel texts contain numerous errors, perhaps ask the question “Does that supposed error contradict the claim that God came in the person of Jesus Christ to reconcile all of mankind unto himself?”

a) *If their answer is a generalization like “it just shows that the Bible is unreliable,” then ask if a murder had 500 eyewitnesses whose testimony basically agreed about the essentials of the crime but differed on some minor details does it mean the defendant should walk?*

6. See: “Refutation of all Bart D. Ehrman's False Claims” by Dr. William Lane Craig on YouTube.

XIV. Miracles Just Can’t Happen

A. David Hume:

1. [May 7, 1711 to August 25, 1776] Born in Edinburgh Scotland. Hume was a Scottish philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist known especially for his philosophical empiricism and skepticism.

2. He makes a philosophical argument that miracles simply cannot happen.

a) *“A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can*

possibly be imagined . . . There must be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation.” [It follows that] “that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish . . .” [David Hume, “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,” Section X, 1748]

b) In other words, if someone tells you that they witnessed a miracle, then it is more likely that they were themselves deceived or are trying to deceive you than it is that they actually witnessed a miracle.

c) Hume’s argument encourages a miracle-free re-writing of the Bible, which many have adopted.

d) There are Seminary Professors today who don’t believe in a bodily resurrection of Jesus.

e) Hume states that resurrections don’t occur because “that has never been witnessed before in any culture.” So he throws out the evidence from primary source accounts of Jesus’ resurrection and substitutes an assertion from ignorance.

f) It should be obvious that Hume’s argument is circular – miracles don’t happen because miracles don’t happen. And yet he had a tremendous impact on Christian scholarship, convincing even seminary professors that it was best to stay away from a belief in all the miracles mentioned in the Bible.

B. The quest for a naturalistic Jesus

1. Remember the “Jesus Seminar” where scholars crawled through the Gospel texts and voted on which verses they believed were true? They end up with a Jesus that says very little, and all miracles are voted down. [refer to “The Case for Christ,” chapter 6 for more information on this]
2. The “Jesus Seminar” scholars used two erroneous tests to decide whether a passage was correct or not; the dissimilarity criterion and the multiple attestations criterion.

a) *Dissimilarity Criterion: Anything that was said by Jesus that was also written in any Jewish or Christian text was ruled invalid, because it could have been inserted at a later date. This really makes no sense when you consider that Jesus is the Word of God, and if he quotes Old Testament verses, he is just repeating himself. And since he is the head of the Christian church, it makes no sense to exclude Christian precepts as being added later.*

b) *Multiple Attestation Criterion: Unless there are multiple witnesses to Jesus saying something, it never happened. This is really bad scholarship. If you have multiple witnesses to an event it certainly strengthens the case that the event occurred, but not having but a single witness to an event is not a valid reason for ruling it out. Think of how valuable a single eyewitness is to a crime investigation. Now if the words supposedly spoken by Jesus are in obvious conflict with passages elsewhere in scripture (refer to the Gospel of Thomas for examples), then certainly a single witness would not hold much sway in convincing us that Jesus actually said those words.*

- (1) The “Jesus Seminar” scholars even rejected quotations of Jesus that were contained in multiple Gospel texts, saying they were copied from Mark, and were therefore only a single attestation.

3. Bottom line is that the “Jesus Seminar” and other scholars who long to extricate miracles from the Bible have to use very creative and illogical approaches to discredit the validity of the text. These approaches would never be allowed in any other field of historical research, but for whatever reason they are tolerated by the Liberal Christian community. In fact, many of these scholars believe they are helping Christianity by de-mythologizing it, but they are doing exactly the opposite.
4. Reference the Bible that was created by Thomas Jefferson (and printed at Government expense), which redacted all of the miracles and left Jesus purely as a moral teacher.

XV. Modernism and Postmodernism

A. Modernism

1. Modernism is the belief that one can reason their way to 100% certainty.
 - a) *Rene Descartes: “I think, therefore I am.”*

2. Modernism was called into question because of the two world wars. People who thought they had the complete “Truth” led to Marxism and Nazi movements.
3. Modernist movements are those that reject the miraculous a priori.
 - a) *A gift of the enlightenment era, and David Hume’s rejection of miracles on philosophical grounds.*
 - b) *Modernists reject the bodily resurrection of Jesus, or any actual presence of His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.*
 - c) *Modernism has infected liberal Seminaries, causing some to lose their faith.*
 - (1) Example: A professor citing Jesus saying “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth [Matthew 12:40], and since the story of Jonah was obviously mythological, so is Jesus’s bodily resurrection.” [Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity”]
 - (2) This kind of teaching can cause people to lose their faith.

B. Postmodernism

1. Postmodernism basically states that nobody has the “whole” truth.
 - a) *“So Postmodernism is a reaction to Descartes’s quest for certainty and the creation of systems like rationalism, romanticism, Marxism, Nazism, or scientism. These systems tend to oppress people who disagree with those in power – the Jews under Nazism and the capitalists under Marxism, for example. French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard said that, simplifying to the extreme, postmodernism is suspicion toward a metanarrative, which is a ‘world story’ that’s taken to be true for all people in all cultures and which ends up oppressing people.” [Paul Copan, PhD, in Stobel’s “The Case for the Real Jesus,” p. 233]*
 - b) *Meaning is derived from interpretation, since everybody interprets things (e.g. words, symbols) based on their own experiences. Therefore everybody’s understanding of the meaning of what they are interpreting is different. There isn’t a singular meaning. Therefore there isn’t a singular truth.*
 - (1) Think about the constant evolution of language. Words change meaning over time.
 - c) *Postmodernism rejects Christianity, because it purports to give meaning to all of life. It gives a story of who humans are, that can account for all parts of human life – e.g. right and wrong, good and bad, where we came from, where we are going, and the meaning of it all.*
 - d) *Postmodernism rejects science as being able to explain everything.*
 - e) *Anybody who states that they know the whole truth about something is attacked through methods of deconstruction.*
 - f) *Postmodernists gained steam after WWI and WWII, where people who believed they understood the “capital T Truth” drug the planet into war.*

g) *The goal when talking to a postmodernist is to convince them that postmodernism falls under its own weight – that it as a philosophy tries to say that it explains everything. Lead them to realize that they make decisions based on data every day. The Christian claim is based on synthetic arguments that are not 100% certain.*

h) *Meaning has to come from outside of us. God tells us what the meaning is. God was in Christ reconciling all of mankind unto Himself.*

XVI. Common Barriers to the Christian Faith

A. The Problem of Pain/Evil/Suffering

1. Good resources for further study are “Sensible Christianity” audio series by Montgomery, and “The Case for Faith” by Strobel.

2. “God is either all loving or all powerful, but not both, because evil exists in the world.”

a) *In truth, the Christian view of God is completely compatible with the broken world.*

(1) John 16:33

(a) “I [Jesus] have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

(2) Matthew 10:21-23

(a) [Jesus said] “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

3. Another form of this argument is “Why does God let bad things happen to good people?”

a) *The answer to that question is not really satisfying for the non-Christian, namely “nobody is good.”*

b) *Psalm 53*

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

c) *Romans 3:21-25*

(1) But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

4. Augustine famously posed the question “If there is no God, why is there so much good? If there is a God, why is there so much evil?” [Strobel, “The Case for Faith”, Chapter 1]

5. Before discussing this subject with someone, try to ascertain exactly what led them to struggle with the “problem of evil.” Was it something specific?

a) *It may be that what they need is Pastoral care and not a drawn-out logical discussion on the topic.*

6. Even if we allow the “problem of evil” to count as evidence against God, we have to weigh that evidence against all the evidence FOR the existence of God. [Strobel, “The Case for Faith”]

a) *Interestingly enough, the fact that we believe that there is such a thing as good versus evil is evidence for an objective morality that is in conflict with our self interest. Atheist Sam Harris refers to this as “serviceable intuitions,” which shows you can obfuscate an issue by making up a new name for it that sounds smart.*

7. It is a non-sequitur to say that God can’t exist because if He did, suffering wouldn’t exist. God either exists or he doesn’t. As apologists, we would never point to the condition of this world as proof one way or the other as to the existence of God.

a) *It is one thing to be angry or confused by suffering given what we know about God from the Bible (e.g. God is love), and a different thing altogether to say that God can’t logically exist given the suffering in the world.*

b) *Being angry at God, confused by His decisions since ultimately He is in control of the entire universe, does not mean you don’t have faith. It just means you are thinking, and that isn’t a bad thing. However, in the end, we have to recognize that God doesn’t cease to exist because we are mad at Him. “I can’t believe in a God who would allow such suffering” isn’t a logical argument for the non-existence of God – it is a statement of frustration and bewilderment as we try to reconcile the suffering in the world with a benevolent God who wants us all to be saved.*

c) *We quickly get to the point where the argument for the existence of God is the fact of the cross, that Jesus died and rose again and ascended publicly, bodily, into Heaven. The argument that God isn’t managing His creation in a manner that is agreeable to us doesn’t really stand up as evidence against His existence.*

8. Christian pastors have left the faith because they couldn't reconcile the problem of evil, so it is not something to take lightly.
9. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery presents a good discussion on the Problem of Evil in his "Sensible Christianity" audio series, so most of the information in this section is taken from that unless otherwise attributed.
10. God didn't cause the evil in the first place.
- a) *The cause of evil was the creature (Satan, us), not God.*
 - b) *Adam decides against God, wanting to be equivalent to God, and in so doing the result is that the "whole creation groans and travails."*
 - c) *In Adam's fall, we fell all. Adam was a representative man. We would have done the same thing.*
 - d) *Adam had a completely free choice, whereas people born after Adam are environmentally and hereditarily conditioned by Adam. We are all born into a sinful environment.*
11. Why did God allow the creature to get into that mess?
- a) *Love Requires Free Will.*
 - b) *God created mankind with free will. We are not marionettes.*
 - (1) We must have free will to accept His love or not.
 - (2) Love and the possibility of rejection always go together.
 - (3) It is evident that Satan and all the angels also have free will.
 - c) *[C.S. Lewis] It is not meaningful to say that God, being all powerful, can accomplish a task that is intrinsically impossible.*
 - (1) God cannot create man with free will, and at the same time restrain his will to prevent him doing something wrong.
 - (2) "If you choose to say 'God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it', you have not succeeded in saying *anything* about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words "God can."" – Problem of Pain Ch.2.
 - (3) "It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God." – Problem of Pain Ch.2.
12. Why does God have to allow the effects of evil?
- a) *Removing consequences removes free choice.*
 - b) *Vase example*
 - (1) If you tell your child not to pour the flowers out of the vase, that is exactly what he, in his sinful nature, will try to do.

(2) If you thwart his efforts by constantly having a bucket available to prevent a mess, then you remove all consequences of his actions. His actions cease to become immoral, and instead turn into a game. He effectively no longer has the choice to be bad or good, because either way there is no effect.

c) *If there is to be genuine free choice, then consequences have to follow from our decisions. If there is no consequence for our decisions, then we no longer have the ability to make a good decision.*

d) *This is similar to the effect of the Law. We wouldn't know about sin if it wasn't for the Law. If you take away the Law, then it is impossible to break it. The choice to sin or not sin is removed from us.*

13. But why doesn't God limit the effects of evil?

a) *God does limit the effects of sin.*

b) *If he didn't we would have annihilated ourselves by now.*

c) *God put in place family structures, society, governments, which all limit the effects of evil.*

(1) Hobbes in "The Leviathan"—Life is nasty, brutish, and short.

(2) If we didn't have civilization, then "might makes right" would be the norm. [This, by the way agrees with macro-evolution.]

d) *God loved us so much that he died on the cross to take care of the consequences of our sin.*

(1) "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
Romans 5:7-8

14. So God gave us free will, we chose against him, we necessarily bear the consequences, the severity of which are limited by the institutions He has put into effect, and He came into the world to ultimately deal with those consequences through pure grace.

15. Does this mean that in Heaven, free will would still result in a subsequent fall? (Definitely in the category of a problem you don't want to give somebody).

a) *Agustine dealt with this in the 5th century.*

(1) Adam fell, and as a result, there was a conditioning to evil that carries on to the entire human race.

(2) Suppose there was an act of good that was so powerful that it would spill over eternally as well?

(3) This happened in Jesus Christ. His death on the cross was the penultimate act of good for all mankind.

(4) We assume that the temptation to evil will occur because we can't imagine a world without evil – we can't imagine a sinless version of ourselves.

16. So shall we say that God should eliminate all evil and suffering by eliminating all free will?

17. A great quote from C.S. Lewis: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, and shouts in our pains.” [Strobel, “Case for Faith”]

a) *That being said, two things we never say about suffering are:*

(1) God is making this person suffer to teach them a lesson. Because we have no idea whether that is true or not and cannot and must not make that assertion.

(2) God is making this person suffer because something positive will eventually come of it, either for that person or in some general sense. Because we have no idea whether that is true or not and cannot and must not make that assertion.

18. Paganism solves the problem of evil by introducing many “gods,” some of which are good and some of which are evil. That way you can attribute every good and evil thing you see in the world to the appropriate god. [Strobel, “Case for Faith”]

19. What person would want to worship an aloof god who sits above in a temple of gold while they watch their child slowly die of starvation or Leukemia? Ultimately the answer to the problem of pain is Jesus. He entered into our suffering, took it upon Himself, a “man of sorrows,” and in His death and resurrection we receive the hard-earned promise of an eventual end to our suffering. Impersonal theological arguments are not adequate when talking to someone who is suffering. It requires pointing to the person of Jesus and the understanding of what He did in love for us. In all honesty, wiping us from the planet in Genesis 3 and starting over would have surely been much easier on God than the path He chose to redeem those who were beyond redemption. [Strobel, “The Case for Faith” plus thoughts of Hattz]

B. Is God a Moral Monster?

1. What is up with the Old Testament stories that are full of bloodshed?

2. Great books on the subject are Paul Copan’s “Is God a Moral Monster?” and Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Faith.” There is also some great information in Greg Koukl’s “Street Smarts.” The first two would be good references to have someone purchase if they are troubled by the Old Testament. Copan’s book is 222 pages long, so this will be a very high-level summary of some key points only.

3. There is a good treatise on slavery in Copan's book, discussing how we can't look at slavery in the ancient world as the same thing as slavery in early America. Bottom line is that most references to slavery are what we would call indentured servitude, much of it was voluntary or necessary for the physical and financial protection of the servants or slaves, and the treatment of "slaves" was required by God to be far kinder than the treatment of "slaves" in other cultures at the time. If you want the 34-page version of this bullet point read Copan's book. Saying that the Bible endorses slavery is simply false. Christians were highly instrumental in ending slavery both in Europe and the States.

4. I want to focus on bloodshed, particularly God ordering the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites. If any story is going to cause non-Christians to wince, it is this story in Deuteronomy:

a) *Deuteronomy 20:16-18*

(1) But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.

b) *But, Joshua didn't succeed in wiping out the Canaanites. And yet God, through Joshua, states in Joshua 24:11-13:*

(1) And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.'

c) *The book of Judges starts out with the continuing battle against the Canaanites. For instance, Judges 1:27-28:*

(1) Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.

d) *Indeed the Canaanites would continue to be a thorn in Israel's side for a long time. So what is going on here? Do we have an actual contradiction in the Biblical text that we should be concerned about?*

5. Key points that must be considered when reading this command from God: [all from Copan, "Is God a Moral Monster"]

a) *God instructed the Israelites to forewarn a nation before invading. Likely many of the women and children would have fled prior to the battle.*

b) *God waited 430 years on the Canaanites before finally passing judgment.*

c) *The Canaanites practiced sexual depravity (including temple sex to bring rain from their gods), incest, bestiality, and child sacrifice.*

d) *The Israelites were not xenophobic. There are countless stories of them interacting positively with other peoples and cultures.*

e) *The purpose for executing judgment on the Canaanites was to prevent Israel from falling into their idolatry.*

f) *Ancient near-east hyperbole*

(1) It was common for hyperbole to be used when discussing military campaigns. So when you hear "leave nothing alive that breathes," think of it in the same way a football coach tells his team to slaughter their opponents.

(2) It is apparent from the Biblical texts that the Canaanites were not all killed, and continued to pose problems for the Israelites years later. Same is true of other people-groups that were "annihilated" by the Israelites.

(3) This hyperbolic language doesn't mean the Bible is lying. It is simply speaking in a language that was common and familiar. There are other verses that indicate that the battle will be long lived, and that after the Canaanites are destroyed the Israelites are not to intermarry with them...

(4) The commands to kill everybody including women and children in a city are likely hyperbolic in that the cities mentioned appear to be military centers, housing the government officials, military personnel, and the priests. The citizenry lived in the surrounding areas.

(a) "... all the archeological evidence indicates that no civilian populations existed at Jericho, Ai, and other cities mentioned in Joshua. Other biblical evidence of various cities used as fortresses, citadels, or military outposts also exists (e.g., Rabbah in 2 Samuel 12:26; Zion in 2 Samuel 5:7 and 1 Chronicles 11:5,7) [Copan, "Is God a Moral Monster", p.176]

(5) Some things are lost in translation. The word Harem, translated to "dedicate to destruction," refers to warriors in a battle and not non-combatants. [Copan, "Is God a Moral Monster," p.175]

6. Destruction of the Amalekites

a) *God instructed Saul to wipe out the Amalekites:*

(1) 1 Samuel 15

(a) Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

b) *The Amalekites were a nomadic people who picked off the weak, elderly, or injured as the Israelites wandered in the desert.*

c) *So did the Saul wipe out the Amalekites? No. David fights them later in the book of Samuel (1 Samuel 30). Even King David didn't finish the job. Remember Haman in the book of Esther? He was an Amalekite.*

7. The larger point is to not get hung up on a surface reading of the Old Testament discussions about God telling His people to wipe out other nations. As with many things, it is more complicated than it appears.

8. Even if you disagree with Copan's book, remember that Apologetics isn't Systematic Theology. You can legitimately tell someone "there are some biblical scholars, who believe in that scripture is divinely inspired and inerrant, who also believe that the commands to kill every man, woman, and child in various cities is hyperbolic and must be read in a manner that is consistent with ancient near-east military rhetoric." And therefore, someone cannot use the excuse that "because God appears to be a moral monster in the Old Testament, I will not become Christian."

C. Doctrine of Hell

1. Definitely a topic not to dive into unless you understand why this is a barrier to a particular individual. It likely deeply personal, and not just an intellectual curiosity.

a) *If someone is concerned for the eternal well-being of a particular person or persons, the doctrine of hell can be a source of great discomfort for non-Christians and Christians as well.*

b) *If the concept of hell doesn't cause you discomfort, you probably haven't thought about it hard enough.*

(1) Non-Christians will point to hell and say they want no part of a God who would create such a nightmare. What terrifying logic!

(a) However, remember that God didn't create hell for mankind. He created hell for other created beings that attempted to overthrow him. Mankind chose to start making reservations.

(b) Revelation 12:7-9

(i) Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

(c) Revelation 12:12

(i) Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

(d) Revelation 12:17a

(i) Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

c) God solved the problem of hell by dying on the cross to redeem all mankind. But many refuse to believe this. And seldom are people given any reason to believe it (hence this overview).

d) We still struggle with the same temptation that Adam faced: God says that what is right is x, our sinful nature wants y, so we choose y. God said don't eat the fruit of tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Satan tells Eve (and she tells Adam) that eating the fruit will make them equal to God, which they desire. They eat the fruit.

(1) Very quickly after Adam and Eve sin against God, he tells them how they will be redeemed:

(a) Genesis 3:15 [NIV]

(i) “And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring [or seed] and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

(a) Note: Offspring or seed is singular not plural, and the gender of this particular offspring is male.

e) Modern technology has introduced Christian youth to a vast network of non-Christians, many of whom are wonderful people; kind, loving, gentle, and non-Christian. The thought of those acquaintances going to hell is devastating, as in “leaving the harsh exclusivist Christian faith” devastating.

(1) While the best response would be to communicate the Gospel to these distant acquaintances, the more likely defense mechanism is to try to either ignore the doctrine of hell, or to sprinkle proverbial water on it.

f) *The bottom line is this: We believe in a good and loving God, who wants all to be saved. We trust that, while maintaining the requirement that love requires free will, He will do whatever He can, such that none are lost.*

g) *“No person comes to the Father but through Christ” according to Jesus (John 14).*

(1) Jesus makes it clear that only through Him are people saved. Not by their good works. Not by living a good life. Not by charity.

(2) The claim that anyone can be saved simply by “living according to one’s best lights” is utterly wrong, even when this belief is set forth as official teaching by a church body. [Montgomery, Tractatus 6.44111]

h) *“We can say we find certain doctrines troubling (e.g. doctrine of hell) – fine. But to try to pick and choose which doctrines we accept is denying the teachings of Jesus, who through his resurrection has demonstrated the reliability of his claims about being the Son of God and thus knowing what is true and what isn’t.” [Paul Copan, PH.D., “The Case for the Real Jesus,” p.241]*

i) *It is alright to be angry about hell. But to tell God that He is in the wrong for creating it is to put ourselves above God. So be angry, but don’t fall to the temptation of saying that God is immoral. Immoral relative to what? Our sinful distorted version of morality?*

j) *Don’t fall into theodicy – a defense of God.*

(1) It is unlikely that you will be able to convince a person that God is justified in creating hell, because our morality is corrupted by sin, and hell will never sit well with us. In the end, have faith that justice will be done.

k) *Saying you can’t believe in a God that would create Hell is like saying you won’t believe in fire after it burns your house down.*

(1) God remains God completely independently of whether you believe in Him.

(2) Romans 14:10-12

(a) Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

l) *If the doctrine of hell is something that someone just can’t get past, then there are a few more points that may be helpful. However, I wouldn’t lead with these.*

m) *The Bible says there are different degrees of punishment in hell (e.g., Matthew 11:20-24). Certainly separation from God is a core tenant of hell, but isn’t that what people who are rejecting God are seeking?*

n) *C.S. Lewis describes hell as a jail that is locked from the inside.*

o) J.P. Moreland, PhD, sheds a bit of light on how some of the descriptions of hell in the Bible may be figurative:

(1) “We know that the reference to flames is figurative because if you try to take it literally, it makes no sense. For example, hell is described as a place of utter darkness and yet there are flames too. How can that be? Flames would light things up.” [Strobel, “The Case for Faith”, p.197]

(2) In Revelation – Death and Hell (Hades) are cast into the lake of fire. [Revelation 20:14]

(3) “Make no mistake: hell *is* punishment – but it’s not a *punishing*. It is not torture. The punishment of hell is separation from God, bringing shame, anguish, and regret. And because we will have both body and soul in the resurrected state, the misery experienced can be both mental and physical. But the pain that’s suffered will be due to the sorrow from the final, ultimate, unending banishment from God, His kingdom, and the good life for which we were created in the first place. People in hell will deeply grieve for all they’ve lost.” [Strobel, “The Case for Faith,” p.194]

p) We have no idea who we will see in heaven. I believe deathbed conversions are common. When someone is face-to-face with their imminent death, it takes either complete ignorance of Christ (which is unfortunately too common) or open defiance [e.g., Richard Dawkins waving fist at the ceiling]. It could be that the job of the apologist is to give them something to think about in those last hours or moments – even if they refuse to come to the faith earlier in life. So maybe rather than a pebble in their shoe (i.e., Greg Koukl), you point out the rip cord that they can pull at the last second. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved....” [Acts 16:31].

D. Evolution

1. First and foremost, not a ‘hill to die on.’

2. If you run into a diehard evolutionist, then you can tell them that there are Christian scholars who hold to the principle of the Bible being divinely inspired and inerrant, who also hold to the belief that the early chapters of Genesis are poetry, not history. Therefore they cannot reject Christianity on the basis of conflicts between science and evolution. [Montgomery – “Sensible Christianity”]

a) Their basis is to point out that some of the words used in the creation account in Genesis chapter 1 are used as poetry elsewhere in the same book.

b) With respect to an “old earth” rather than the roughly 6000-year dating of creation based on genealogies, the following verse is often cited:

(1) 2 Peter 3:8

(a) But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

3. First and foremost, realize that saying the theory of evolution is correct can be a true or false statement depending on what someone means when they say evolution.

a) *If they mean variations in species (micro-evolution), then of course all Christians believe in that! Look at how many breeds of dogs there are.*

b) *However, if they mean “macro-evolution,” namely that humans evolved from lesser animals (ultimately a puddle of chemicals), then that is not a scientific assertion. It is untestable in the way it is set up, because it requires observation over the course of millions of years. It is a religion, not a science.*

4. There are good resources out there, such as “Answers in Genesis,” which can be useful. But don’t try to argue creation versus evolution if you are talking to a scientist whose whole academic upbringing rejects creationism. It would be like arguing for the existence of God. Even if you win, you are miles from the cross, which is the final destination for any apologetics discussion.

5. Some believe that life on earth had to develop over millions of years, but at the same time believe that Adam and Eve were each created instantaneously, fully grown.

a) *Is it so hard to believe that a God who created the universe could create a tree with a bunch of rings already in it?*

b) *The Christian answer to “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” is THE CHICKEN.*

c) *God sits outside of time and space, and we can’t constrain Him to the “laws of nature” or our understanding of physics.*

6. Search for “Creatures that defy evolution” on YouTube. Dr. Jobe Martin was teaching biology in a university when some Christian students approached him and asked if he had ever considered all of the assumptions that are necessary in the theory of evolution. His videos show multiple cases of animals that could not have evolved due to multiple successive biological changes over many years.

7. Since there is a ton of information on this topic, I will put a bunch of links to videos on the church website, on the Apologetics page.

E. What about people who grow up in a place where they never hear the Gospel?

1. Tough topic. Similar answer to evolution. Some reputable Christian scholars who believe in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible have an interpretation of scripture that allows for those who were never exposed to the Gospel to make a decision after they die. Therefore this topic can not be an excuse for not being Christian.

a) *Martin Luther, in a 1522 letter, wrote "God forbid that I should limit the time of acquiring faith to the present life. In the depth of the divine mercy, there may be opportunity to win it in the future." [Strobel, "The Case for Faith" Objection #5, p.182]*

2. This is in the territory of speculation more than theology. The point is that whatever God does, it will be right. Our confidence should be in the fact that God wants all to be saved, and nobody who can possibly be saved will be lost.

3. As Lutherans, our belief is that there is no "second chance." Christ will come, and judgment will happen.

a) *Hebrews 9:27-28*

(1) And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

b) *Paul Copan argues that because the second part of that sentence talks about the crucifixion of Jesus and then the return of Jesus, which don't happen immediately one after the other, that it can be inferred that there may be a gap between death and judgment for those who for whatever reason were never exposed to, or never understood, the gospel. [see Strobel's "The Case for Faith," p. 181]*

4. As Christians, our job is to spread the Gospel message. We are never to rely on speculation about what happens with people who for some reason die without believing in Jesus as their savior.

5. So, once more, the only point of this discussion is that speculation about the fate of people who were never exposed to the Gospel during their life is a point of contention between Christian scholars and therefore cannot be a reason for rejecting Christianity.

F. Translations

1. How Can You Believe the Bible, Given all the Translations? If it is the inspired, inerrant, Word of God, why isn't there only one version of the Bible?

2. When we say that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, Word of God, we mean "as it was originally recorded." Unfortunately, we don't have the original manuscripts. What we do have, however, is a treasure trove of manuscripts or partial manuscripts that are very close in time to when the original documents were written.

3. God did not dictate the Bible. God communicated His word through visions, dreams, and so forth, and the prophet was putting the information into his own words. But ultimately the result is exactly what God wanted to produce. [“The Case for the Real Jesus”, p.72]
4. To quote Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Without violating the authors’ personalities, they wrote with their own feelings, literary abilities, and concerns. But in the end, God could say, ‘That’s exactly what I wanted to have written.’ [The Case for the Real Jesus, P.73]
5. If there are slight differences in the quotations of Jesus in the Gospels, it is because the authors were only interested in getting to the gist of what was said. There aren’t quotation marks in ancient Greek.
6. The belief in Biblical inerrancy isn’t a requirement for salvation. So if you are presented with an apparent error in the Biblical text, it does not “undo” Christianity. None of the supposed errors challenge the central tenants of the faith.
7. The books of the Bible were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
 - a) *Note: a few chapters of the books Ezra (ch. 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26) and Daniel (ch. 2:4 to 7:28), one verse in Jeremiah (ch. 10:11), and a word in Genesis (ch. 31:47) are written, not in ancient Hebrew, but in Aramaic. Aramaic is about as closely related to Hebrew as Spanish is to Portuguese. However, the differences between Aramaic and Hebrew are not those of dialect, and the two are regarded as two separate languages. [bibleinfo.com]*
8. With any effort of translating one language into another, decisions are made as to the best way to substitute the new language for the old.
9. Translation not only requires a knowledge of both languages, but also an understanding of the context in which the original text was written.
10. There are many faithful translations of the Old and New Testaments, and the differences between them do not result in contradictions that challenge the basic tenants of the Christian faith.
11. By way of example, look at 2 Timothy 2:15:
 - a) *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly **handling** the word of truth.” [ESV]*
 - b) *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly **dividing** the word of truth.” [New King James Version]*
 - c) *So which is right, handling the word of truth or dividing the word of truth?*
 - d) *Greek word in question: ορθοτομω (orthotomeo)*
 - (1) Definition from Bullinger Lexicon: “to cut straight, to divide right (as sacrificial victims).”

(2) Definition from Thayer Lexicon: “to cut straight”, or “to make straight.”

e) *So which is better? Handling or Dividing?*

12. Paraphrases are a different matter altogether. While they may have their usefulness, it should be recognized that they are written from the perspective of the author, and not a true translation of the original texts.

a) *Example: 1 Corinthians 11:27-30*

(1) ²⁷ “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ **For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.** ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” [ESV]

(2) ²⁷⁻²⁸ “Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Master irreverently is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on him at his death. Is that the kind of “remembrance” you want to be part of? Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe. ²⁹⁻³² **If you give no thought (or worse, don’t care) about the broken body of the Master when you eat and drink, you’re running the risk of serious consequences.** That’s why so many of you even now are listless and sick, and others have gone to an early grave.” [The Message]

b) *Do you see how The Message paraphrase avoids the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper? The bread and wine are only a remembrance. This reflects the theology of the author, not the original Greek text.*

(1) “...μη διακρινων το σωμα” ...not discerning the body.

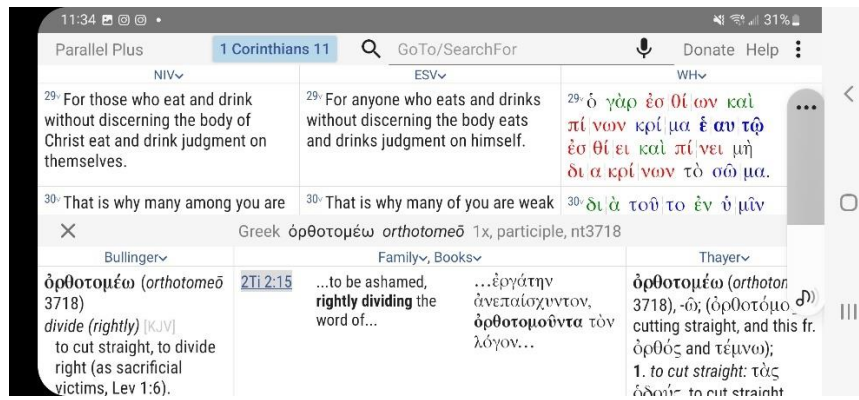
13. Avoid “The Amplified Bible, The Living Bible, The Good News.” Stick with ESV, NIV, NASB...

14. Be cautious of any preacher who hasn’t studied the original languages of the Bible. Rick Warren searches a plethora of translations and paraphrases to try to proof-text whatever message he has derived from his own thoughts.

15. Get the “Koine Greek Interlinear Bible” and “Parallel Plus” applications. You can look up the verse, see the original language wording, and study the various definitions from Lexicons – all on your phone.



16.



17.

G. Trinity

1. We believe in a triune God, namely Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost).
2. We believe this because the Bible, while not using the term Trinity, describes God in this manner.

a) *Genesis 1:26*

(1) ²⁶ Then God said, “**Let us** make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

b) *Genesis 11:7*

(1) ⁷ Come, **let us** go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.”

c) *Matthew 3:16*

(1) ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he [Jesus] went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

3. Muslims and Jehova's Witnesses accuse Christians of being polytheists. There is a publication by the Jehova's Witnesses that mockingly shows God as having one body and three heads. [Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity"]

4. Just because we can't explain the Trinity doesn't mean it isn't the true nature of God.

a) *It appears to be contradictory that God can exist in three persons at the same time.*

b) *But light exists as a wave and a particle at the same time. That also seems contradictory, but when that was discovered, scientists didn't break up into two denominations – the wave denomination and the particle denomination.*

[Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity"]

(1) We have to go with where the data leads us. If light, when subjected to rigorous testing can be repeatedly demonstrated to act as both an energy wave and a group of particles, then we have no choice but to accept that, and wait for our understanding to catch up.

(2) In the case of God, the data, namely the written Word of God, leads us to the conclusion that God exists as a Trinity. We are not polytheists. One God, three persons. We don't have to understand it.

(a) A 4-year old not understanding a text on Quantum Mechanics doesn't make the text wrong.

H. Christianity Derived from Pagan Religions

1. Started in earnest with the book "The Golden Bough" by Sir James Frazer. [The following is all from "Defense Never Rests II," essay by Dr. Adam Francisco unless otherwise credited.]

a) *"The Golden Bough" surveyed a plethora of ancient religious myths, and included Christianity in their midst. "The Golden Bough" influenced a generation of scholars. They developed the claim that much of the story of Jesus, especially his death for sin and resurrection for justification, was merely copied.*

b) *As it turns out, the argument of Frazer's "The Golden Bough" and other works like it have been shown to be contrived interpretations of weak evidence.*

c) *Mithras-*

(1) The myth: Mithras was a Persian (Iranian) god who was said to be born of a virgin in something like a cave on December 25th. He allegedly had twelve disciples to whom he promised eternal life. He sacrificed himself for some greater good, was buried in a tomb, and rose after three days.

- (2) Mithraism predates Christianity by over a thousand years.
 - (a) However, “Mithraism as a mystery religion cannot be attested before about 90AD, which is about the time we see a Mithraic motif in a poem by Statius. No mithrea [or Mithraic temples] have been found at Pompeii, which was destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD79. The earliest Mithraic inscription in the West is a statue of a prefect under the emperor Trajan in AD101. The earliest mithrea are dated to the early second century, but the vast majority of texts are dated after AD140. Most of what we have as evidence of Mithraism comes in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. That’s basically what’s wrong with the theories about Mithraism influencing the beginnings of Christianity.” [Edwin M. Yamuchi, PH.D., in “The Case for the Real Jesus,” p.169]
- (3) Mithras was born from a rock, not a virgin. [“The Case for the Real Jesus,” p.171]
- (4) There is nothing in the Gospel accounts of Jesus being born in a cave (and the same is true of the stories of Mithras).
- (5) There is nothing in the New Testament claiming that Jesus was born on December 25. It is an observed holiday.
- (6) Mithras is never referred to as a teacher with 12 disciples in the Mithraic texts.
- (7) In the various sects of Mithras cults, nowhere is he viewed as an itinerant teacher who lived in real time and space with a distinct group of immediate followers.
- (8) There is no evidence of Mithraic teaching that Mithras sacrificed himself, was buried in a tomb, or rose from the dead.
- (9) Saying the story of Jesus was copied from the myth of Mithras is an “*post hoc ergo propter hoc*” fallacy. (Because of the thing, therefore the thing.)
- (10) T.N.D Mettinger – senior Swedish scholar, professor at Lund University, and member of the Royal Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities of Stockholm, in his book “The Riddle of Resurrection” admits that the consensus of modern scholars – nearly universal – is that there were no dying and rising gods that preceded Christianity. [“The Case for the Real Jesus,” p. 160]
 - (a) So how can the story of the dying and rising Jesus be based on older myths that didn’t contain this belief?

I. The Bible is Mythology

- 1. The Apostles, seeming to predict that such claims would happen, directly addressed whether their account of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection was intended to be fantasy.

a) 2 Peter 1:16-21

(1) ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2. C. S. Lewis, author of highly acclaimed mythology, commented on Christianity as being myth: [All from Montgomery, Tractatus 6.424-6.44]

a) *Folktales begin with the timeless formula, “Once upon a time...”; the Gospel story – which fulfills [all folktales] – commences in real history with the words, “And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus...” (C.S. Lewis)*

b) *“I was by now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospels as myths. They had not the mythical taste. And yet their very matter which they set down in their artless, historical fashion – those narrow, unattractive Jews, too blind to the mythical wealth of the pagan world around them – was precisely the matter of the great myths. If ever a myth had become fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. Myths were like it in one way. Histories were like it in another. But nothing was simply like it. And no person was like the Person it depicted; as real, as recognizable, through all that depth of time, as Plato’s Socrates or Boswell’s Johnson ... yet also numinous, lit by a light from beyond the world, a god. But if a god – we are no longer polytheists – then not a god, but God. Here and here only in all time the myth must become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not ‘a religion,’ or ‘a philosophy.’ It is the summing up and actuality of them all.” (C. S. Lewis)*

c) *“The Gospels contain ... a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels – peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving; ‘mythical’ in their perfect, self-contained significance; and at the same time powerfully symbolic and allegorical; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the ‘inner consistency of reality.’ There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or wrath.*

d) *“It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be ‘primarily’ true, its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical or allegorical significance that it had possessed... The joy would have exactly the same quality, if not the same degree, as the joy which the ‘turn’ in a fairy-story gives: such as the very taste of primary truth. (Otherwise its name would not be joy.) It looks forward (or backward: the direction in this regard is unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe. The Christian joy, the Gloria, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. Because this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.” (C.S. Lewis)*

J. Christians are Hypocrites

1. Since Christians acknowledge that we are sinful, saying we are behaving badly can’t be a barrier to coming to the Christian faith – you are only confirming what we testify about ourselves. If we said that becoming Christian immediately caused us to stop sinning, then we would be found to be hypocrites.

a) *John 1:8-10*

(1) If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and His word is not in us.

K. The Bible commands Christians to stone adulterers and homosexuals.

1. The Old Testament contained ‘moral laws,’ (i.e. the Ten Commandments) and the ‘ceremonial law.’ The moral law is still in effect, not to mean that if we sin against it we are condemned, but that the moral law is God’s will for how we are to live our lives. However, the ceremonial laws given specifically to the Hebrews to set them apart as the people from whom the Messiah would come are no longer in effect, being fulfilled by Christ’s death on the cross.

a) *Galatians 3:19-22*

(1) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

b) *Galatians 3:23-29*

(1) Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

2. We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. This includes our sinful neighbors, obviously, since "... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23)

a) *Romans 3:22b-26*

(1) For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

3. That being said, we are not supposed to condone the sin.

a) *Better to say "Homosexuality is a sin, as is adultery – which includes lustful thoughts. Of the latter I am guilty." Looking down on someone because of their sin is hypocritical.*

b) *Man was created in God's image and was considered "very good" by God. Man threw off the image of God by trying to be God. If people have a strong pull to sinful behaviors, it is the "sin of Adam" working in their lives, not a reflection of how God made them.*

(1) Genesis 1:27

(a) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

(2) Genesis 1:31a

(a) And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

c) *Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, and those sins include adultery.*

L. Other “Gospels” Appear to Present a Different Jesus

1. The “Gospel of Thomas,” “Gospel of Peter,” “Gospel of Mary,” and “Secret Gospel of Mark” have recently been presented as being historically defensible writings from the 1st century.

2. In “The Case for the Real Jesus,” Lee Strobel interviews Dr. Craig A. Evans about these mysterious documents and Dr. Evans gives evidence for them being “late,” like 2nd century or later, and they are written to satisfy an agenda of the writer.

3. None of these texts withstand the earlier mentioned tests for historical authenticity.

4. The Gospel of Thomas

a) *Partially uncovered in Egypt in 1890’s. Remainder uncovered in 1945.*

b) *Likely originally written in Syriac.*

c) *Either half of the New Testament writings are either quoted, paralleled, or alluded to in Thomas.*

d) *Likely written around AD 150, despite those who contend that it was written much earlier.*

e) *Much more mysticism, like “inner light, inner revelation.”*

f) *And quite frankly, just some weird stuff:*

(1) “Simon Peter says, ‘Miriam’ – or Mary – should leave us. Females are not worthy of life,” and Jesus answers, “Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

5. The Gospel of Peter

a) *Akhmim fragment found in the 1890s, in Egypt, in the coffin of a Christian monk who died in the 9th century. Thought that it could be the lost Gospel of Peter.*

b) *Eusebius warned that there was a Gospel of Peter circulating that was falsely attributed to the Apostle Peter.*

c) *States that the ruling priest spent the night in a cemetery, which would never happen.*

(1) Then the stone rolls away and two angels emerge with their heads reaching all the way to the clouds. Then Jesus emerges with his head reaching above the clouds. Then the cross follows them out of the tomb. A heavenly voice is heard asking “Have you preached to them that sleep?,” and the cross answers “yes.”

d) *May or may not be the actual (erroneous) Gospel of Peter.*

e) *May be as late as the 5th century.*

6. The Gospel of Mary

a) *Popularized by Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code".*

b) *Supposedly composed by Mary Magdalene, but no serious scholars believe that.*

c) *Probably authored AD 150-200.*

d) *In the Gospel of Mary, Peter exhorts the disciples to "preach the Gospel, 'neither setting boundaries nor laying down laws, as the Savior said."*

e) *Appears to be an attack on the pastoral epistles, such as Timothy and Titus, that define the roles for women in the church.*

f) *The concept that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married is associated with the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Phillip, both of which were written late, and neither of which state that Jesus and Mary were ever married.*

7. Secret Gospel of Mark

a) *Morton Smith, a professor of Judeo Christian origins at Columbia University, in the 1960s discovered writings in the back of a 1646 book, supposedly from Clement of Alexandria to someone named Theodore. Writings dated AD 800. Contained quotes from a previously unknown mystical or secret version of Mark.*

b) *Believed to be a forgery authored by Morton Smith himself.*

c) *In the discovered writing, Jesus is described as raising a young man from the dead, and then later the youth comes to him 'wearing a linen cloth over his naked body,' and 'remained with Him that night,' so that he could be taught the 'mystery of the kingdom of god.'*

d) *He wrote a 450-page scholarly treatment of the writings, but never referenced them in his other scholarly works.*

e) *By the way, all the evidence of this 1646 book has vanished.*

f) *"So Secret Mark is a nonexistent work cited by a now nonexistent text by a late second-century writer who's known for being naive about these things. The vast majority of scholars don't give this any credibility. Unfortunately, those who do get a lot of press, because the media love the sensational." [Dr. John McRay, PhD, "The Case for Christ," p.133]*

M. I'm Spiritual not Religious

1. Essentially this is syncretism: The blending of elements from different faiths into a new form of spirituality that is comfortable to the individual.

a) *"People have shifted religious authority away from the creeds, traditions and churches and assumed it themselves," said James R. Edwards of Whitworth College. "People are less inclined today to defer to established religious authorities, and more inclined to express their own religious preferences." ["The Case for the Real Jesus," P.228]*

2. People like Jesus more than they like the church (sometimes with good reason). See also: “The Gospel for People Broken by the Church” by Rod Rosenblatt. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TJvBxIXLII>
3. Why?
 - a) *They see the church as exclusivistic, condemning, intolerant, and dogmatic.*
 - b) *Scandals in the church, both historic and current, reinforce their skepticism about organized religion. Scandal has never not existed in the church, and it will continue until Jesus returns. Ultimately we’re not saved by creating a scandal-free perfect church. We are saved despite ourselves.*
 - c) *They are offended by anything that presents an objective truth (anti-postmodern) and objective morality that comes from outside mankind.*
 - d) *They superimpose upon the people in a church a belief that they think they are all “good people.” Often times that is not actually the case. The church is for the broken. However, social norms take over and people in church aren’t apt to publicly confess their personal sins.*
4. Unfortunately, the image of Jesus that “Spiritual but not Religious” people have in mind bears almost no resemblance to the historical Jesus.
 - a) *In John 14:5-7, Jesus doesn’t seem to support the syncretistic approach.*
 - (1) Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”
 - b) *Despite this, “A 2005 Newsweek poll showed that 8 in 10 Americans do not believe that any one faith is the sole path to salvation.” [Journalist David Ian Miller, “The Case for the Real Jesus,” p.230]*
 - c) *And yet every religion excludes all other religions, except possibly for the Jedi religion that is recognized in the United Kingdom.*
<https://www.jedichurch.org/>

N. Jesus says “Do not judge.” So isn’t it wrong for Christians to judge the faiths of other people?

1. Matthew 7:1
 - a) *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”*
2. But Jesus also said in John 7:24
 - a) *“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”*
3. Also consider Galatians 6:1
 - a) *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*

4. Jesus is condemning a critical and judgmental attitude, or an unholy sense of moral superiority.

a) *Matthew 7:2-4*

(1) “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye?”

5. Christians are encouraged to judge, but judge only according to the Word of God, not against their own self-perceived piety.

a) *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

(1) All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, **for reproof, for correction**, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

XVII. Philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

A. This will be a brief examination of some of the classical proofs for the existence of God.

1. It will be brief because even if you convince someone of the existence of God, you are still miles away from the cross of Christ.

2. There are two different methods for describing something or someone: Descriptive or Denotative.

a) *Descriptive is just what it sounds like. You attempt to describe the thing in as much detail as possible.*

b) *Denotative means that you show the thing and let many of its aspects be apparent from inspection.*

(1) This is why it is better to show God denotatively by showing Christ, rather than attempting to describe God. A description of God will always be inadequate.

(a) John 14:8-11

(i) *Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.*

3. Contingency

- a) *We live in a contingent universe.*
- b) *Everything in the universe is contingent on something else.*
 - (1) Nothing in the world can explain itself.
 - (2) The world is the sum total of everything in it.
 - (3) Therefore, the world as a whole is contingent, requiring an explanation beyond itself, i.e., a transcendent God.
 - (4) You can imagine a discussion with a child when they ask where wooden boards come from. You would say “trees.” Then they ask “where do trees come from?” You would say “seeds.” See where this is going? Ultimately you end up in an infinite regression, or you end up saying “God made them.”
 - (5) The infinite regressive analysis forced by contingency either leads to the Absolute (non-contingent) God, or it leads nowhere.
- c) *When atheist Richard Dawkins begins his book, “The Blind Watchmaker,” with the assertion, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose,” one is reminded of the old adage, “If it looks like a duck, smells like a duck, quacks like a duck, and tastes like [duck], chances are it is not a kumquat.” [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.861]*
- d) *Aldus Huxley’s notion that monkeys typing at random long enough will eventually produce literature (“The works of Shakespeare”) has been tested at Plymouth University, England. Over time, the monkeys (1) attacked their computer, (2) urinated on it, and (3) failed to produce a single word. [Montgomery, Tractatus 8.86111, AP dispatch, 9 May 2003, see Angus Menuge – “Agents Under Fire”]*
- e) *The Second Law of Thermodynamics supports the contingency argument.*
 - (1) The Law declares that in closed systems (systems not receiving energy from an outside source), the entropic process will result in “heat death” in a finite time, i.e., a point will be reached in a finite period where there will be no “workable” energy any longer available.
 - (2) Atheists believe that the universe has always existed, because otherwise they would have to acknowledge a “prime mover” which created the universe.
 - (3) However, if the universe was infinitely old, we would have already reached heat death, and wouldn’t be having this conversation.
 - (4) The big bang theory seems to purport to explain how the universe began, but it doesn’t. Where did the matter come from that was spewed out? What caused the event? Normally when there is a big explosion, there is also a cause (and causer).

4. Fine Tuned Universe [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.86421]

- a) *If it were not for six highly specific constants, our universe could not exist as it is.*
- b) *These constants include:*

(1) The N-factor (the strength of the electrical forces holding atoms together divided by the force of gravity between them: 1 followed by 36 zeros): if even one zero were missing, only a short-lived miniature universe could exist.

(2) The ϵ -constant: 0.007, defining how firmly atomic nuclei bind together (if this were 0.006 or 0.008, our existence would be impossible).

(3) The Ω -number determines the expansion energy in the universe (were it higher than it is, the universe would have collapsed long ago; were it lower, no stars or galaxies have formed).

(a) $\Omega = 0.567143290409783872999968662210\dots$

(4) Λ – The cosmic antigravity constant has to be as small as it is, or galaxies and stars would have been prevented from forming.

(a)
$$\Lambda = 3 \left(\frac{H_0}{c} \right)^2 \Omega_\Lambda = 1.1056 \times 10^{-52} \text{ m}^{-2}$$

(5) The Q-constant: about 1/100,000, represents the ratio of two fundamental energies (if smaller, the universe would be inert and structureless; if larger, the universe would be dominated by black holes and so violent that solar systems wouldn't survive).

c) *The precision so manifested makes exceedingly difficult the atheistic claim that ours is a universe which arose by random chance. [Montgomery, Tractatus 3.86423]*

d) *Atheists respond with a theory of an infinite number of universes, all with different values for the critical constants. We just happen to be in the only stable version. Their assertion is inherently untestable, and therefore philosophically meaningless.*

5. Ontological

a) *Not a great argument.*

b) *From Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury:*

(1) God is than which no greater exists.

(2) In consequence, God possesses all properties.

(3) Existence is a property.

(4) Therefore, God exists.

6. Teleological

a) *God exists because the complexity of nature demands intelligent design.*

(1) Irreducible complexity can be seen in the most simple biological entities.

- (a) There are irreducibly complex biochemical systems, such as the bacterial flagellum, which cannot be accounted for by evolutionary development, since they are at the very beginning of biological life; the “engineering” manifested by these biochemical system cries out for an intelligent designer. [Michael Behe, Michael Denton]
- (b) All the parts had to exist at the same time in order for the bacteria with its flagellar motor to exist.
- (2) Darwin stated that irreducible complexity would un-do his theory of evolution:
 - (a) “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find no such case.” – Charles Darwin
 - (b) Atheists will simply never allow any amount of evidence for irreducible complexity to be sufficient. They can’t.

XVIII. Conclusion

- A. [From “The Shape of the Past” by J.W. Montgomery, pp.138-139]
 1. On the basis of accepted principles of textual and historical analysis, the Gospel records are found to be trustworthy historical documents – primary source evidence for the life of Christ.
 2. In these, records, Jesus exercises divine prerogatives and claims to be God in human flesh; and He rests His claims on His forthcoming resurrection.
 3. In all four Gospels, Christ’s bodily resurrection is described in minute detail; Christ’s resurrection evidences His deity.
 4. The fact of the resurrection cannot be discounted on *a priori*, philosophical grounds; miracles are impossible only if one so defines them – but such definition rules out proper historical investigation.
 5. If Christ is God, He speaks the truth concerning the absolute divine authority of the Old Testament and of the soon-to-be-written New Testament; concerning His death for the sins of the world; and concerning the nature of man and history.
 6. It follows from the preceding that all Biblical assertions bearing on philosophy of history are to be regarded as revealed truth, and that all human attempts at historical interpretation are to be judged for truth-value on the basis of harmony with Scriptural revelation.
- B. Thinking about it backwards, what do you have to believe to NOT be a Christian?

1. You have to believe that either the disciples stole the body and were willing to die horrific deaths rather than simply admit to it, or the Roman soldiers stole the body in direct defiance of Pilate's orders (guaranteeing their own executions), or that the Sanhedrin stole the body thus undercutting their own request to have the tomb sealed and launching the growth of the Christian church.
2. You have to believe that the disciples were persuasive enough that when they were witnessing to recent historical events that were demonstrably false based on the experiences of the various audiences, nobody was willing to call them out on the lie.
3. You have to believe that the disciples created a fictional account of the discovery of the empty tomb, and chose to make the first witnesses women, whose testimony wouldn't even count as meaningful in that society.
4. You have to believe that the four Gospels are myths. However they are myths that have stunning historical accuracy, and read like history (especially the Gospel written by Luke). Some of the best contemporary writers of mythology, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, did not view the Gospels as myth. And the writers of the Gospels specifically state that they are not writing mythology. What other mythological stories can you think of that claim to be historical fact?
5. You have to believe that the hostile witnesses that knew the Jesus story was made up elected not to write about that fact. There are zero recorded witnesses to the Roman soldiers throwing the deceased Jesus into a shallow grave to be eaten by dogs, but hundreds that saw him alive again. Even the most hostile witnesses, the Jewish leaders, confirm in their writings that the tomb with Jesus' body was empty.
6. You have to ignore the coincidence that Judaism and Christianity are unique religions in that both have interaction between groups of people (witnesses) and God. Other religions are based on private experiences of a single individual. And remember, early Judaism was messianic, believing in the Christ, the Messiah that would come and "crush the head of the serpent."
7. You have to believe that Jesus just randomly fulfilled hundreds of Old Testament prophecies, many of which He couldn't accomplish just because He was aware of them (e.g., virgin birth, town of birth, etc...).
8. You have to believe that the universe came into existence by random chance, the base material for the big bang came from nowhere, puddles of chemicals become humans if you wait long enough, and that we live in the only stable universe that has all of the right tuning of physics parameters.
9. What you quickly see is that it requires a much stronger faith to NOT be Christian than to BE Christian – once you understand the true Christian faith and its history.

XIX. Remember, Gospel first, Apologetics as needed

A. Apologetics is a form of evangelism. The chief part of evangelism is to proclaim the Gospel:

1. The Gospel message can be delivered in many forms, and perhaps less formal is better than more formal in your conversations with a non-Christian.

a) *Example: "We broke the world by trying to be our own gods. God fixed it by entering into humanity and suffering death on our behalf. All that is required of us is to believe."*

b) *Example: "God made mankind. Mankind decided he wanted to be equal to God. That went poorly. But God entered into mankind by becoming man, bore our suffering, and died on the cross to kill death. Then he rose again, and because of His death and resurrection we too will be resurrected and live in our new bodies with Him forever in paradise."*

2. But you can become too informal to the point of giving only part of the answer.

a) *Example: "Jesus died for you."*

b) *Example: "Jesus is our savior."*

c) *Example: "You have to believe in Jesus."*

d) *Example: "Jesus died for sinners."*