

WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER CHRISTIANITY

Each of us is embarked on a sinking ship. We cannot swim to any nearby land, and the ship has no lifeboats or life preservers. No one will come to rescue us. We are destined to go down with the ship—the ship we call Life.

You see, each of us, from the youngest to the oldest, is slowly dying. Some will die today; some will die this year; others may not die for 80 years or more. But all will eventually die. You can slow the visible effects of aging; you can try to extend your life through healthy living; you can put your faith in modern medicine; you can try to attain immortality through your children or your achievements. But despite everything you do, sooner or later you will die.

The problem, of course, is that most of us do not want to die. We enjoy life—and we fear death. In short, we want to be immortal. Yet this truth confronts us: immortality is beyond our grasp. Most of the time we live with this truth by ignoring it or denying it. We speak hyperbolically of an athlete's achievements lasting "forever," or of an actress becoming "immortalized," when what we really mean is that their work will be treasured for a generation or two, and then quietly forgotten. We pretend that Death is never going to come for us—until a loved one's passing forces us to recognize our inescapable doom. Everyone who has ever lived has eventually died.¹ So will you. And so will I.

Christianity offers us a way of escape from this sinking ship, through the promise of eternal life. Maybe that sounds too good to be true. But if there is even a possibility that you could gain immortality, shouldn't you at least take a closer look at Christianity?

If you are skeptical at this point, that is understandable. Until I was 20 years old, I was convinced that Christianity was a religion for fools and nitwits—for people who turned off their brains when they entered a church. But I have learned otherwise. Indeed, my experiences and my own study of the subject have convinced me of the truth of Christianity almost beyond any possible doubt. But my knowledge and experiences are unlikely to convince you. You must search for yourself. All I can do is tell you where to look,

¹ Two possible exceptions are Enoch and Elijah. See Genesis 5:24 ("And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.") and II Kings 2:11 ("Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven."). (All Biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard* translation.)

and perhaps what to look for. On the other hand, I am confident that if you search in good faith, you will find the Truth. As Jesus said, “Seek and you will find.”² Let’s start with the wildest claim ever made by men.

1. **Christ’s Resurrection**. For a long time, I have secretly disliked the last line of the famous Alfred Ackley hymn, “He Lives!”:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.³

The last line implies that Christianity is entirely subjective, and that faith depends solely upon personal experience. It does not. God has left us some very convincing, objective proof of the truth of Christianity in the historical evidence for Christ’s Resurrection.

Christianity makes two bold assertions, both grounded in historical fact: (1) that its founder, Jesus Christ, claimed to be divine (i.e., God, or at least God-like), and (2) that He died, was buried, and then came back to life. The first is made relevant by the second. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, He was merely a charlatan or a deluded madman. But if He rose from the dead, then everything He said, including what He said about Himself, must be taken very seriously.

a. **Jesus’ Claims of Divinity**. Let’s start with the first statement—that Jesus claimed to be divine. Did He really say this about Himself, or was this merely something that, like Buddha, was concluded by His followers after His death? Well, Jesus made at least nine claims that show that He thought He was much more than a mere man. He seems to have actually believed He was God! Those nine claims are:

1. He thought He was perfect.⁴
2. He claimed to be eternal.⁵
3. He said He was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, and he considered Himself equal with God.⁶

² Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9

³ *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn #226, “He Lives!” (words and music by Alfred H. Ackley, 1933).

⁴ In John 8:29, Jesus says, “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him [i.e., God].” See also Matthew 5:17 and John 17:4.

⁵ John 8:58: “before Abraham was born, I am.” See also John 17:5 and 17:24.

4. He taught that following—or rejecting—Him was the same as following or rejecting God.⁷
5. He insisted that He had come from Heaven, and He spoke about Heaven as if He'd been there.⁸
6. He predicted His death (as well as His resurrection).⁹
7. He believed His death was necessary to save the world.¹⁰
8. He forgave sins.¹¹

⁶ See for example, Luke 10:22: “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” For other examples, see: Matthew 14:33, Matthew 16:16-17, Matthew 26:63-64, Mark 8:29-30, Mark 14:61-62, Luke 9:20-22, Luke 22:70, John 1:49-50, John 5:17-18, John 5:36-37, John 8:18-19, John 10:30, John 12:45, John 14:6-7, and John 15:23.

⁷ See, for example, Luke 6:22-23:

“Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.”

For other examples, see Matthew 10:32-33, Matthew 10:37-40, Matthew 11:27-30, Matthew 19:29, Mark 8:34-38, Mark 9:41, Mark 10:29-30, Mark 13:13, Luke 7:23, Luke 9:24-26, Luke 12:8-9, Luke 21:16-19, Luke 22:28-30, John 3:14-18, John 4:10, 14, John 5:21-24, John 6:27-29, John 6:40, John 8:12, John 8:51, John 10:9-10, John 10:28, John 11:25-26.

⁸ For example, see John 3:13, where Jesus says of Himself: “ ‘No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.’ ” See also: Matthew 18:10, 22:29-30, 24:36, 26:53, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35-36, John 8:23, 14:2-3. And then there are verses in which Jesus implies that He knows what Heaven will be like, such as Luke 15:7:

“I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

See also: Matthew 5:3, 5:10, 5:12, 5:19-20, 6:1, 6:20, 7:21, 8:11, 11:11, 16:19, 18:1-4, 18:18, 19:21, 26:64; Mark 10:21, 13:24-27, 14:62; Luke 6:23, 10:18, 10:20, 12:33, 18:22; John 6:38, 6:50-51.

⁹ See Matthew 12:38-40, 16:21, 17:9-12, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, 26:1-2, 27:62-63; Mark 8:31, 9:9-10, 9:31, 10:32-34; Luke 9:21-22, 9:44, 17:25, 18:31-33, 24:6-7; John 2:18-22, 3:14-15, 10:11-18, 12:32-33, 14:28-29, 16:5-7, 16:16-22.

¹⁰ Matthew 16:21-23, 20:28, 26:28; Mark 8:31-33, 10:45, 14:24; Luke 22:19-20; John 6:51-58, 10:11, 10:15

¹¹ See Matthew 9:2, Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20, 24; 7:47-48. C.S. Lewis explained why this was such an arrogant thing to do:

One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins:

9. He didn't bother to cite any type of authority to validate what He said or did.

Let's think about why that last one would be a claim of divinity at all, because it may not be as obvious as the others. In His famous Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”¹²

Note that Jesus lays down a new moral rule (or, if you prefer, a new interpretation of an old rule), and provides no authority whatsoever for doing so, other than His own say-so: “You have heard . . . but I say. . . .” Unlike scholars and prophets, Jesus did not claim that His authority came from Scripture or a vision from God, or from any book or person. His word was enough.¹³ The common people immediately noticed the difference:

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.¹⁴

any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you; you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrampled on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money?

Mere Christianity (Large Print Edition), Book II (“What Christians Believe”), Chapter 3 (“The Shocking Alternative”) (Walker and Company, 435 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014; reprinted by arrangement with Macmillan Publishing Co. 1987), p. 76.

¹² Matthew 5:27-28

¹³ For other examples, see: Matthew 5:18, 5:20, 5:21-22, 5:26, 5:31-32, 5:33-34, 5:38-39, 5:43-44, 6:2, 6:5, 6:16, 6:25, 8:11-12, 10:15, 10:23, 10:42, 11:1, 11:22, 11:24, 12:6, 12:31, 13:17, 17:12, 17:20, 18:3, 18:10, 18:13, 18:18-19, 18:21-22, 19:9, 19:23-24, 19:28, 21:21, 21:31, 21:43, 23:36, 24:2, 24:34, 26:13; Mark 3:28-29, 7:14-15, 8:12, 9:1, 9:13, 9:41, 10:15, 10:29-30, 11:23-24, 13:30, Luke 6:27-28, 7:26-28, 9:27, 10:12, 11:9, 12:4, 12:22, 18:17, 18:29, 21:3, 23:43; John 3:3, 3:5, 5:19, 5:24-25, 6:47, 6:53, 8:34, 8:51, 8:58, 10:1, 10:7, 12:24, 13:16, 13:20, 14:12, 16:23.

¹⁴ Matthew 7:28-29; see also Mark 1:22, Luke 4:32

The Jewish religious leaders reacted as we would—they demanded to see His credentials: “ ‘By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?’ ”¹⁵ But Jesus didn’t tell them.¹⁶ The only authority He ever cited was that of God:

“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.”¹⁷

Could there be a more arrogant statement than this? Jesus asserted that He was sent by God and spoke for God! If that was not true, then Jesus was demented, or simply evil. But what if it was true? How can we know? Well, if Christ indeed rose from the dead, then we have our answer.

Critics and skeptics reject even the possibility that the resurrection story could be true, because it would be a miracle of the first order. But before you dismiss Jesus’ resurrection as a fairy tale, please consider the evidence. Christ’s resurrection was preached as the foundation of Christianity from its infancy. You will find references to the resurrection in almost every book of the New Testament,¹⁸ all of which were written in the first century A.D.¹⁹ Moreover, you will find numerous references to

¹⁵ Matthew 21:23; see also Mark 11:28, Luke 20:1-2; and see John 2:18

¹⁶ Matthew 21:27; see also Mark 11:33, Luke 20:8

¹⁷ John 12:49-50; see also John 6:37-40, 6:57, 17:1-8, 17:18, 17:21, 17:22-25.

¹⁸ See, for example: Matthew 28:5-10, 28:16-20; Mark 16:4-20 (although Mark 16:9-20 is not found in some of the oldest manuscripts); Luke 24:1-48; John 20:19-29, 20:24-29, 21:1-2, 21:20-25; Acts 1:1-3, 2:14, 2:22-24, 2:32-33, 3:12-15, 4:1-3, 4:8-10, 4:33, 5:29-32, 10:38-41, 13:28-31, 17:2-3, 17:18, 17:31, 26:22-23; Romans 1:1-4, 7:4, 10:9, 14:9; 1 Corinthians 9:1-2, 15:3-8, 15:12-20; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14, 5:14-15; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20-23, 2:4-6; Philippians 3:10-11; Colossians 1:18, 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:8; 1 Peter 1:3, 3:21-22; and 1 John 1:1-3.

¹⁹ Scholars believe that Jesus’ death occurred between 30 and 33 A.D. The estimated dates for the writing of the New Testament books are as follows (all dates are A.D.):

Matthew	ca. 70
Mark	ca. 65-70
Luke	ca. 62-80
John	ca. 80-100
Acts	ca. 64-80
Romans	ca. 55-58
1 Corinthians	ca. 55-57
2 Corinthians	ca. 57

Christ's resurrection in early Christian writings of the first, second, third, and later centuries, A.D. Paul conceded that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then Christianity is worse than useless.²⁰

So did Jesus' disciples truly see Him raised from the dead, or was this just a fiction concocted by them for their own selfish purposes? Those are the only two reasonable alternatives: either He rose from the dead, or His followers lied. No other explanation is credible in view of the known facts and the stories told by the witnesses. They claimed to have seen Him in the flesh—they touched Him, spoke with Him, walked with Him. He ate and drank with them. He was healthy, vibrant, and very much alive. And then they saw Him ascend into Heaven. This was no mere mistake or hallucination. The resurrected Jesus they described was no ghost, nor was He a brutalized man who had miraculously survived a severe beating and the agony of crucifixion.

Galatians	ca. 47-58
Ephesians	ca. 57-63
Philippians	ca. 61-64
Colossians	ca. 58-63
1 Thessalonians	ca. 50
2 Thessalonians	ca. 50
1 Timothy	ca. 61-63
2 Timothy	ca. 65-68
Titus	ca. 61-63
Philemon	before 68
Hebrews	ca. 80-95
James	ca. 44-48 (if written by James, brother of Jesus)
1 Peter	ca. 64
2 Peter	ca. 67 (if written by Peter)
1 John	ca. 90-100
2 John	ca. 90-100
3 John	ca. 90-100
Jude	ca. 95
Revelation	ca. 95

²⁰ See 1 Corinthians 15:14-19:

. . . if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

So did He rise from the dead, or did His disciples lie? Much has been written on this topic, and a detailed discussion of the evidence is beyond the scope of this article. The reader is invited to study the matter on his own. But here are a few questions to ponder:

(1) Why would Jesus' followers have lied? Peter, Paul, James, John, and the rest of the disciples lived lives of poverty, persecution, and, in many cases, martyrdom—all for the sake of this Resurrection story. They did not seek or gain anything that the world considers valuable, such as wealth, fame, power, or even revenge. How many of us would endure such hardships, without any likelihood of earthly reward, for the sake of a lie? And keep in mind that this would not have been just any lie, but a whopper so preposterous that they could not have expected anything but widespread derision. Therefore, telling such a lie would not only have been against their own self-interests, but seemingly futile as well.

(2) Why did Jesus' disciples draw attention to themselves after the gruesome execution of their leader as a criminal? Why didn't they simply go underground or return to their previous lives? Why did many of them instead leave home and families, and travel to various locations within and without the Roman Empire, to spread this lie?

(3) Why did they consistently advocate such virtues as honesty, truthfulness, forgiveness (even of enemies), and moral restraint if the foundation of their cause was all a lie?

(4) What miracle changed Paul from a zealous persecutor of Christianity to one of its standard-bearers, a man who traveled all over the Roman Empire and suffered much for the sake of the faith he had once tried to eradicate? What changed Peter, James, John, and the other apostles from weak-minded cowards into pillars of strength, willing to brave prison, persecution, and even death? Could a lie effect such changes?

(5) And most perplexing of all, why did they succeed, against all odds? How were they able to convince thousands upon thousands of reasonable, intelligent people that this ridiculous resurrection story was actually true?

If you want to conduct your own study, you can begin with Frank Morison's easy read, *Who Moved the Stone?* Continue with Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (especially Section II) and C.S. Lewis' *The Case for Christianity*. William Steuart McBirnie's well-written and painstakingly researched *The Search for the Twelve Apostles* documents the historical evidence regarding the lives and deaths of Jesus' followers. These are only a start. The resources are almost endless.

2. ***The Credibility of the New Testament: The Message.*** When people invent a religion, what do they come up with? Most of the time, the gods look like us, think like us, and behave like us. For example, the ancient Greek gods were powerful and immortal, but otherwise were very much like humans. They fought, killed, kidnapped, and stole.²¹ They married, had children, and committed adultery.²² They exacted revenge, often without regard to fairness or justice.²³

Similarly, the gods of other religions almost always exhibit human flaws. When Krishna, the Hindu god, appears in human form, he steals, he humiliates young girls by taking their clothes while they are bathing naked in a river, and he performs many mischievous acts.²⁴ The Japanese god, Susa-no-wo, wreaks havoc on the earth, while the god, Oh-kuni-nushi, tries to steal Susa-no-wo's possessions and kidnap his daughter.²⁵ In Mesopotamian mythology, the goddess, Ishtar, tries to kill a human,

²¹ Zeus and his fellow Olympians came to power by waging war against the Titans and overthrowing them. The Olympians then consolidated their rule by killing the giants who opposed them. (See *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Classical Mythology*, by Kevin Osborn and Dana Burgess, Ph.D. (Alpha Books, a Division of Macmillan General Reference, a Simon & Schuster Macmillan Company, New York, 1998), pp. 99-102.) Hades, god of the underworld, obtained his bride, the goddess Persephone, by kidnapping her. (*Bulfinch's Mythology Illustrated: The Age of Fable, The Age of Chivalry, Legends of Charlemagne* (Avenel Books, New York, 1979), pp. 52-57.) The messenger god, Hermes, stole cattle from the god Apollo. (See *The World of Myth*, by David Adams Leeming (Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, Oxford, 1990), pp. 163-165.)

²² Zeus, in particular, had many extramarital liaisons. (See *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Classical Mythology*, pp. 68-71 and 75.)

²³ For example, Artemis changed the unfortunate Actaeon into a stag when he accidentally saw her naked. And Hera struck poor Tiresias blind for agreeing with Zeus in a dispute between the goddess and her husband. See *The World of Myth*, by David Adams Leeming (Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, Oxford, 1990), pp. 109-111 and 178-179.

²⁴ See *The World of Myth*, pp. 165-169 and 225-226.

²⁵ See *The World of Myth*, pp. 199-202.

Gilgamesh, as well as his friend, Enkidu, because Gilgamesh would not marry her.²⁶ The Egyptian god, Osiris, is murdered through the trickery of the god, Set.²⁷ The Hawaiian goddess, Pele, seduces a young Hawaiian prince, Lohiau, and then leaves him to pine away for her until he dies.²⁸ Even in the relatively modern and sophisticated religion of Islam, Allah seems cruel and sadistic in His treatment of those who are condemned to Hell.²⁹ In each case, it is very easy to imagine a human being inventing the religion, because the gods think and behave just like humans.

In contrast, the New Testament doesn't read like anything a human being would invent. For example, who would come up with the wild idea that people should pray for their foes and act with mercy, kindness, and forgiveness toward those who mistreat them—as Jesus and His disciples advocated?³⁰ That is not how a normal person thinks or acts.

The New Testament contains many such counter-intuitive notions. While human wisdom tells us to seek happiness and security through wealth and possessions, Jesus taught that poverty is better than riches, because money impedes devotion to God.³¹ Contrary to human nature, the New Testament instructs us to avoid judging or condemning others.³² And how many people in this world value the qualities of gentleness and humility?

²⁶ See *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Classical Mythology*, pp. 30-33.

²⁷ See *The World of Myth*, pp. 147-153, and *Bulfinch's Mythology Illustrated: The Age of Fable, The Age of Chivalry, Legends of Charlemagne*, pp. 293-295.

²⁸ See *The World of Myth*, pp. 202-207.

²⁹ See "The Problem With Islam," at this web site.

³⁰ See Matthew 5:38-41, 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-35; Romans 12:14, 12:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:8. And on the subject of treating others with mercy, forgiveness, and kindness, see also: Matthew 5:7, 6:14-15, 7:12, 18:21-35; Mark 11:25-26, 12:31; Luke 6:36-38, 9:51-56, 10:25-37, 15:11-32, 17:3-4, 23:33-34; John 8:2-11; 1 Corinthians 4:12-13, 6:7; Galatians 5:22, 6:10; Ephesians 4:31-32; Colossians 3:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; James 3:17-18; 1 Peter 3:8.

³¹ For example, when a man came to Jesus asking what he must do to receive eternal life, Jesus told him to sell all of his possessions, and then commented: "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (See Luke 18:18-27) Similarly, see: Matthew 6:19-21, 6:24, 6:31-34, 19:16-21, 19:23-24; Mark 4:18-19, 10:19-27; Luke 6:20-21, 6:24-25, 8:14, 12:15-21, 12:22-23, 12:33-34, 14:33, 16:13-15; Philippians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 3:3, 6:6-10, 6:17-19; Hebrews 13:5; James 2:1-6, 4:3-4, 5:1-6; 1 John 2:15-16, 3:17; Revelation 3:17-18.

³² As Jesus said in Luke 6:37: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned." See also: Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:36-38; Romans 2:1-3, 14:1-4, 14:10-13; 1 Corinthians 4:5, 5:12-13; James 4:11-12, 5:9.

We generally disparage such traits, and deride people who exhibit them with such derogatory terms as “wimp” and “loser.” Yet the New Testament champions those who are meek, humble, weak, and self-giving, while reproving the arrogant, the boastful, the pretentious, and the vain.³³

Jesus and the New Testament authors did not seek acclaim by pandering to public opinion, either. Some of what He said and did was not merely counter-intuitive, but downright unpopular. For example, He condemned divorce except in cases of adultery.³⁴ He approved the payment of taxes to Rome, and His disciples encouraged people to obey the oppressive Roman government³⁵ (the same Roman government that had cruelly executed Jesus). He associated freely with the dregs of society: prostitutes, tax collectors,³⁶ and other notorious people,³⁷ while aggressively challenging the religious leaders of His day.³⁸ And as if trying to scare away followers, He warned His disciples about the persecution and

³³ See the following verses: Matthew 5:5, 5:21-22, 6:1-6, 6:16-18, 7:12, 11:25-26, 18:1-4, 19:30, 20:25-28, 22:39, 23:1-7, 23:11-12; Mark 9:33-37, 10:13-15, 10:31, 10:42-45, 12:31; Luke 6:29, 7:36-50, 9:46-48, 10:21, 11:43, 13:29-30, 14:11, 16:15, 18:9-17, 22:24-26; John 13:12-15; Romans 11:17-21, 12:3, 12:10, 12:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, 2:3-5, 3:18-20, 4:6-7, 4:10, 8:8-13, 10:24, 10:32-33, 13:4-5; 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, 10:17, 12:7-10, 13:4; Galatians 5:22-23, 5:26, 6:10; Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 2:3-4, 4:5; Colossians 3:8, 3:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:2-3, 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 3:1-2; Hebrews 12:14; James 1:21, 3:5-10, 3:17-18, 4:6, 4:10; 1 Peter 2:13-14, 3:8, 3:14-17, 5:5-6.

For more on this subject of arrogant pride, see the article, “The Greatest Obstacle to Happiness,” on this web site.

³⁴ Consider Luke 16:18: “ ‘Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.’ ” See also: Matthew 5:31-32, 19:9; Mark 10:2-12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

³⁵ Luke 20:19-25; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14

³⁶ The Roman government often hired people from the local population to collect Roman taxes, and set an amount that had to be collected and delivered to the Roman government. The tax collectors were allowed to keep any monies which they were able to amass in excess of the amount required by Rome. The Jews despised the tax collectors because they were usually greedy, corrupt, and wealthy—and because they were viewed as collaborators with Rome.

³⁷ Matthew 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32, 19:1-7

³⁸ For example, in Mark 12:38-40 Jesus says: “ ‘Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.’ ” And see: Matthew 6:1-6, 6:16-18, 21:23-46, 23:1-7, 23:13-35; Mark 7:5-13, 11:27-12:12; Luke 6:6-11, 11:37-54, 19:1-7, 20:1-19; John 9:39-41.

suffering they must expect.³⁹ Indeed, the New Testament frankly states that Christianity is sometimes difficult and that certain sacrifices are necessary.⁴⁰ This message of suffering and sacrifice was no more attractive in Jesus' day than it is today.

Even Jesus' miracles are different. In most religions, the gods' miracles demonstrate their power, but seldom their goodness. In contrast, Jesus' miracles almost always helped people—the vast majority of His miracles were done to heal, feed, or raise people from the dead.⁴¹ Never did Jesus use His power to harm a person.⁴² He rebuked two of His disciples for merely suggesting that He do so.⁴³

And then there is the strange, and very counter-intuitive, notion of grace.⁴⁴ This principle, which seems to have no parallel in any other religion, proclaims that we cannot earn God's favor through religious

³⁹ See, for example, Matthew 5:11: “ ‘Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.’ ” See also: Matthew 5:10, 10:17-23, 10:28, 23:34; Mark 13:13; Luke 6:22-23, 12:4-5, 21:12-19; John 15:19-20, 16:2. That the disciples did in fact suffer persecution is shown by: Romans 8:16-18; 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, 12:7-10; 2 Timothy 1:8-9, 2:3, 3:12; Hebrews 13:12-13; James 1:2-3, 1:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2:19-20, 3:14-17, 4:12-16, 5:8-10; 1 John 3:13; Revelation 2:10. And see the article on this web site, “Roman Persecution of Christianity.”

⁴⁰ As Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-26: “ ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’ ” See also: Matthew 10:37-39, 18:8-9, 25:31-45; Mark 8:34-38, 9:42-48, 10:42-45; Luke 9:23-26, 9:59-62, 14:26-33; John 12:25; Romans 15:1; 1 Corinthians 8:8-13, 10:24; Philippians 3:8-9.

⁴¹ See Matthew 4:23-24, 8:1-3, 8:5-17, 8:28-32, 9:2-7, 9:18-25, 9:27-30, 9:32-35, 10:1, 12:9-13, 12:15-16, 12:22, 14:14-22, 14:34-36, 15:21-38, 17:14-18, 19:1-2, 20:29-34, 21:14; Mark 1:23-26, 1:30-34, 1:39-42, 2:3-12, 3:1-5, 3:9-10, 5:1-13, 5:22-42, 6:5, 6:7-13, 6:35-44, 6:53-56, 7:25-30, 7:32-35, 8:1-9, 8:22-25, 9:14-29, 10:46-52; Luke 4:33-35, 4:38-41, 5:12-13, 5:17-25, 6:6-11, 6:17-19, 7:1-15, 7:21-22, 8:26-33, 8:41-55, 9:1-6, 9:10-17, 9:37-42, 10:1-9 and 10:17, 11:14, 13:10-16, 13:31-32, 14:1-5, 17:11-19, 18:35-43, 22:49-51; John 4:46-53, 5:2-16, 6:1-2, 6:5-14, 9:1-34, 11:1-44.

⁴² He did, however, curse a fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19, Mark 11:2-14 and 19-21), and He indirectly caused the death of some swine when he cast demons into them, ultimately resulting in their death by drowning (Matthew 8:28-32; Mark 5:1-13; Luke 8:26-33).

⁴³ Luke 9:51-56

⁴⁴ “Grace” means “unmerited favor.” Grace refers to any benefit that we receive from God which we do not deserve.

practices, or righteous behavior, or charitable deeds—but that God gives us immortality if we will merely surrender our lives to Him in love and trust.⁴⁵

Of course, the simple fact that much of the New Testament runs counter to the way most people think and live their lives does not by itself prove that it came from God rather than men. I would not ascribe divinity to a book that advocated wearing wet clothing during cold weather, although that would certainly be counter-intuitive. What makes the New Testament truly different is that the principles it espouses actually work, whereas the conventional wisdom does not.

You will not find peace or happiness in wealth, but you can find both in Christ. Hatred and revenge solve nothing—the Israelis and the Palestinians have been proving this for many years, with no end in sight. Yet mercy and forgiveness can change enemies into friends. Arrogance generates resentment and hostility; meekness and gentleness restore calm.

And, as it turns out, the strange doctrine of grace makes far more sense than those religions which try to please God through proper behavior. For we cannot earn anyone's love—least of all God's—nor can we ever be good enough to meet His standards. Fortunately for us, the New Testament says He loves us anyway.⁴⁶ Unlike other religions, God in the New Testament is not primarily a judge, deciding whether or not our behavior and religious practices measure up. He is instead a loving Father who embraces us even though we do not deserve it. All we have to do is to stop resisting (for He will not force Himself on us), and surrender ourselves to Him.

3. ***The Credibility of the New Testament: The Witnesses.*** The authors of the New Testament had a very high regard for Truth. They stuck to the Truth even when it made them, their friends, or their story look foolish. For example, all four Gospels tell the story of Peter—one of the most prominent leaders of Christianity after Jesus' death—cowardly denying three times that he even knows Jesus, after vociferously pledging to remain

⁴⁵ See: Acts 15:11; Romans 3:24-26, 3:27-30, 4:1-5, 4:16, 4:22-25, 5:1-2, 5:15-21, 6:23, 10:8-13; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Galatians 2:15-16, 3:24-25; Ephesians 2:4-9; Philippians 3:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; Titus 2:11-12, 3:3-7; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:10. Also note the element of grace which is implicit in these Scriptures, in which people win Jesus' approval through love or faith, rather than by any good deeds or religious behavior: Matthew 20:1-16, 21:28-32; Luke 5:29-32, 7:36-50, 17:7-10, 18:9-14, 19:1-7. For more on this topic, see "For God So Loved the World," at this web site.

⁴⁶ See Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

faithful even to the point of death.⁴⁷ Two of the four Gospels talk about Jesus rebuking Peter.⁴⁸ Three of the four Gospels candidly admit that the disciples fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane—in Jesus’ hour of greatest need—and Matthew and Mark confess that His disciples ran away when He was arrested.⁴⁹ Jesus’ disciples often seem thick-headed in their inability to grasp His message and His true purposes, and He occasionally chides them for their lack of faith or understanding.⁵⁰ Even Paul, the great missionary for Christ, does not escape. His persecution of the church is prominently mentioned,⁵¹ and he calls himself the “foremost” of sinners.⁵² He talks openly about his weaknesses and deficiencies.⁵³

The New Testament writers also include details which are detrimental to their cause, such as the lengthy gap between Jesus’ resurrection and its public proclamation on Pentecost. Frank Morison explains why this is so important:

According to the official history of these events⁵⁴—a document that was not only universally accepted from early times, but that comes from the pen of a writer who had exceptional facilities for learning what really did happen, the first public statement concerning the resurrection of Jesus was made in Jerusalem during the Feast of Weeks—that is to say, the feast immediately

⁴⁷ See Matthew 26:31-35 and 26:69-75; Mark 14:27-31 and 14:66-72; Luke 22:31-34 and 22:54-62; and John 13:37-38, 18:15-18, and 18:25-27.

⁴⁸ Matthew 16:21-23 and Mark 8:31-33. For example, Mark says:

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

⁴⁹ See Matthew 26:36-45 and 56, Mark 14:32-41 and 50-52, and Luke 22:39-46.

⁵⁰ For example, see Matthew 16:5-12 and Mark 8:14-21 (the disciples misunderstand Jesus’ meaning regarding the “leaven” of the Jewish leaders); Mark 4:13 (the disciples do not understand the meaning of Jesus’ parable of the sower); Mark 9:31-32 and Luke 9:44-45 (the disciples do not understand Jesus’ prediction of His own death and resurrection).

⁵¹ Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13

⁵² 1 Timothy 1:15

⁵³ See 1 Corinthians 1:17, 2:1-5, 4:10, 9:22; 2 Corinthians 10:10, 11:30, 12:7-10, 13:4, 13:9

⁵⁴ I.e., the Book of Acts

following the fatal Passover, and seven weeks after the date of the Crucifixion.

Why, in the first instance, this seven weeks' gap? It is a very pertinent and suggestive question. The date when Acts was first committed to writing by Luke was at least some thirty or forty years after the events in question. There was time for the legend of the Resurrection—if legend it was—to have assumed its fullest and most developed form. Many of the actual eye-witnesses had passed away and a broad gulf of years lay between those who remained and the events themselves. The story they would tell in A.D. 65 would either be the literal truth, which of course would be unassailable, or such a development of it as would carry the maximum conviction to the contemporary mind. The story would not tend to become *less convincing* as time went on. It would tend rather to lose its weak and incongruous elements, to shake out its awkward and inconvenient features.

Viewed, however, from the standpoint of pure legend, this seven weeks' gap is an inconvenient feature, an anachronism of the first order. It does not help the credibility of the apostles' story. It embarrasses it. It provides an unnecessary and even incomprehensible stumbling-block to faith. It leaves the door wide open for the entry of the gravest suspicion. People would say: If Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday and appeared to His disciples, why did they not proclaim it from the housetops at once? Why wait for seven weeks, until people had begun to forget about the great tragedy, and then suddenly spring their announcement on the world?⁵⁵

If the resurrection story was mere falsehood, this gap of seven weeks would have never become part of the story—or it would have been quickly discarded as unhelpful. Its inclusion in Acts is a powerful indicator of the candor of the author and the reliability of the story he tells.

Another example is the use of “Son of Man” in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. “Son of Man” is a Messianic reference from Daniel.⁵⁶ We would expect to find this phrase in the Gospel of Matthew (and we do). Matthew, after all, wrote his Gospel for those who were familiar with Jewish

⁵⁵ *Who Moved the Stone?*, pp. 105-106 (Chapter 9)

⁵⁶ See Daniel 7:13-14.

prophecy, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah and to demonstrate that He had fulfilled many Messianic prophecies.⁵⁷ But scholars agree that Mark and Luke addressed their Gospels to Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews),⁵⁸ who would not ordinarily be familiar with the Messianic connotations of the phrase, “Son of Man.” To a Gentile audience, this moniker contradicts Jesus’ claim of divinity. If the stories about Jesus (including His resurrection) were fabricated, why not delete this problematic phrase in the two Gospels intended for Gentiles? Yet Mark refers to Jesus in this way 14 times, while Luke uses it 25 times.⁵⁹ This is more evidence of the authors’ faithfulness to the truth, despite the potential consequences.

Villains will leave out damaging details when they tell their stories. The New Testament authors did not do that—presumably, because they were either very stupid or scrupulously truthful. Further study reveals another clue that the latter is correct: the New Testament authors frequently, yet subtly, corroborate each other.

For example, Luke, the author of Acts and a friend of Paul, mentions a dispute between Paul and Barnabas that was so serious that it split them up as a missionary team.⁶⁰ They argued over whether to take Mark along on their second missionary journey, after he deserted them during the first journey.⁶¹ As a result, Barnabas returned to Cyprus (Barnabas’ home) with Mark, while Paul took along Silas and went back to Asia Minor.⁶² Why was Barnabas so adamant that Mark should go with them? Was this simple friendship, or something deeper? Luke doesn’t tell us, but we can discern the likely answer from one of Paul’s letters: Mark and Barnabas were cousins.⁶³ Thus, Barnabas was tied to Mark by family loyalty. Neither

⁵⁷ See, for example, Matthew 1:1, 1:22-23, 2:1-6, 2:15, 2:23, 4:14-16, 5:17, 8:17, 11:7-10, 12:17-21, 13:35, 21:4-5, 26:55-56.

⁵⁸ Mark’s explanations of Jewish language, beliefs, and customs demonstrate that he did not expect his audience to be familiar with them. See Mark 5:41, 7:3-4, 7:34, 12:18. Luke’s Gospel is addressed to “Theophilus” (Luke 1:3), a Greek name meaning “lover of God.” We do not know whether this was a person or merely a generic reference to Greek Christians, but it seems certain that Luke’s audience was Greek, not Jewish.

⁵⁹ See Mark 2:10, 2:28, 8:31, 8:38, 9:9, 9:12, 9:31, 10:33, 10:45, 13:26, 14:21 (used twice), 14:41, 14:62; Luke 5:24, 6:5, 6:22, 7:34, 9:22, 9:26, 9:44, 9:58, 11:30, 12:8, 12:10, 12:40, 17:22, 17:24, 17:26, 17:30, 18:8, 18:31, 19:10, 21:27, 21:36, 22:22, 22:48, 22:69, 24:7. Matthew uses “Son of Man” at least 29 times, and John uses it 11 times.

⁶⁰ Acts 15:36-39

⁶¹ Acts 15:36-39 and 13:13

⁶² Acts 15:39-41

⁶³ Colossians 4:10

Luke nor Paul call attention to this consonance between their respective writings, but together they explain much.

This is but one example of many. In Acts 16:12 - 17:9, Luke describes the persecution Paul suffered in Philippi and the opposition he faced in Thessalonica; Paul mentions these same events in passing in 1 Thessalonians 2:2. While Paul was in Thessalonica, Luke tells us that Paul stayed with a man named Jason, but again Luke doesn't tell us why.⁶⁴ Another of Paul's letters fills in the gap by informing us that Jason was Paul's kinsman.⁶⁵

All four Gospels tell the story of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.⁶⁶ Only Luke tells us where this miracle occurred—near the town of Bethsaida.⁶⁷ But John adds an interesting detail to the story: before performing the miracle, Jesus turns to Philip and asks, “Where are we to buy bread?”⁶⁸ Why did He ask Philip? Why not Thomas or Matthew—or Judas, the keeper of the money bag?⁶⁹ Perhaps because Philip was from Bethsaida, as John tells us elsewhere in his Gospel.⁷⁰ The subtle agreement between Luke and John on this matter is impressive, and gives credence to both the story and the miracle.

More examples can be given. In Chapter 4 of *Who Moved the Stone?* (“A Psychological Parallelogram of Forces”), Frank Morison weaves together the Gospel stories about Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate,⁷¹ illustrating how they explain and corroborate each other. Similarly, he demonstrates the interaction of the Gospel accounts of the women who witnessed the crucifixion and burial of Jesus,⁷² to show that Salome, the mother of the apostles James and John,⁷³ probably helped John look after Jesus' mother, Mary, as Jesus had requested.⁷⁴ For this reason, Salome was

⁶⁴ Acts 17:5-7

⁶⁵ Romans 16:21

⁶⁶ See Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-13. Actually, 5,000 men, plus women and children, were fed. The total number of people fed probably numbered between 10,000 and 15,000.

⁶⁷ Luke 9:10

⁶⁸ John 6:5

⁶⁹ John 13:29

⁷⁰ John 6:5

⁷¹ Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16

⁷² *Who Moved the Stone?*, pp. 69-71

⁷³ Compare Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40.

⁷⁴ See John 19:26-27.

absent when Jesus' body was buried,⁷⁵ although she had returned to the group by the time they went to the tomb on Sunday morning.⁷⁶

As you might expect, Jesus, Paul, Peter, and the other apostles are mentioned by multiple New Testament authors. But so are many relatively obscure individuals: Alexander,⁷⁷ Apollos,⁷⁸ Aristarchus,⁷⁹ Barnabas,⁸⁰ Crispus,⁸¹ Erastus,⁸² Gaius,⁸³ James,⁸⁴ Mark (also known as John Mark),⁸⁵ Priscilla and Aquila,⁸⁶ Silas (also known as Silvanus),⁸⁷ Sosthenes,⁸⁸ Timothy,⁸⁹ and Tychicus,⁹⁰ to name a few.

If the New Testament is fiction, it is very well crafted and well coordinated fiction. I believe the more credible explanation is that the New Testament authors were telling the truth. A lie never fits the facts as well as the truth.

4. Prayer. Personally, I was not aware of any of this before I became a Christian. I only knew that something vital was missing in my life. The idea of eternity distressed me intensely, because it made my own existence seem hopelessly short, trivial, and meaningless. Death both frightened and attracted me. Suicide seemed like a way to stop the pain—but God rescued me before I found the courage to attempt it.

I found Christ through prayer. My prayer was not unlike Gideon's,⁹¹ except without the certainty that anyone was listening. I asked God—if He

⁷⁵ See Mark 15:47.

⁷⁶ Mark 16:1

⁷⁷ Luke, in Acts 19:33; Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:20 and 2 Timothy 4:14

⁷⁸ Luke, in Acts 18:24-19:1; Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:4-6, 3:22, 16:12

⁷⁹ Luke, in Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2; Paul, in Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24

⁸⁰ Luke, in Acts 4:36, 9:27, 11:22, 11:30, 12:25, etc.; Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:6, Colossians 4:10

⁸¹ Luke, in Acts 18:8; Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:14

⁸² Luke, in Acts 19:22; Paul, in Romans 16:23, 2 Timothy 4:20

⁸³ Luke, in Acts 19:29, 20:4; Paul, in Romans 16:23, 1 Corinthians 1:14

⁸⁴ Luke, in Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18; Paul, in Galatians 1:19

⁸⁵ Luke, in Acts 12:12, 12:25, 13:5, 13:13, 15:37-39; Paul, in Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4:11

⁸⁶ Luke, in Acts 18:2, 18:18, 18:26; Paul, in Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19

⁸⁷ Luke, in Acts 15:22, 15:27, 15:32, 15:34, 15:40, 16:19, etc.; Peter, in 1 Peter 5:12; Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1

⁸⁸ Luke, in Acts 18:17; Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:1

⁸⁹ Luke, in Acts 16:1, 17:14-15, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4; Paul, in 1 Corinthians 16:10, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 3:2, 3:6, etc.

⁹⁰ Luke, in Acts 20:4; Paul, in Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, Titus 3:12

⁹¹ See Judges 6:36-40.

was real—to show me the truth. He did. I am convinced that God answered my prayer because He knew that I was earnestly seeking for the truth—and that I would accept the truth if I found it.

God does not lead everyone to the truth in the same way. However, I am certain of this: anyone who sincerely seeks the truth will find it, one way or another. As Jesus said:

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”⁹²

God is eagerly waiting to rescue all who want off this sinking ship we call Life. He has promised to give salvation and eternal life to any who will surrender their lives to Him.⁹³ That is why you should consider Christianity.

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