

WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER CHRISTIANITY

“He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.”¹

—John 12:25

Each of us is stranded on a sinking ship. We can't swim to 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.

In other words, 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. We can slow the visible effects of aging; we can try to extend our lives through healthy living; we can put our faith in modern medicine; we can try to attain immortality through our children or our achievements. But despite anything and everything we do, sooner or later we will all 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 the truth is that their accomplishments will be treasured for a generation or two, and then gradually forgotten. We pretend that Death will never come for us—until someone's passing, or perhaps our own debilitation, forces us to face our inescapable doom. Everyone who has ever lived has eventually died.² 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

¹ All Biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard* translation.

² 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.”).

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, 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. Let's start with the wildest claim ever made by men.

Seeking Truth Through History

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. Nonsense. We have 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 assertion 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 came back from the dead, then we must very seriously consider everything He said, including what He said about Himself.

Jesus' Claims of Divinity. Let's start with the first assertion—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 *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.

3. He said He was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, and he considered Himself equal with God.⁶

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 own death—and, more importantly, His resurrection.⁹

7. He believed His death was necessary to save the world.¹⁰

8. He claimed to have authority to forgive sins.¹¹

⁶ See for example, John 14:9: “ ‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father.’ ” Or John 10:30: “ ‘I and the Father are one.’ ” For other examples, see: **Matthew** 14:33, 16:16-17, 26:63-64; **Mark** 8:29-30, 14:61-62; **Luke** 9:20-22, 10:22, 22:70; **John** 1:49-50, 5:17-18, 5:36-37, 8:18-19, 12:45, 14:6-8, 15:23.

⁷ See, for example, Luke 12:8-9:

“ ‘And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.’ ”

For other examples, see **Matthew** 10:32-33, 10:37-40, 11:27-30, 19:29; **Mark** 8:34-38, 9:41, 10:29-30, 13:13; **Luke** 6:22-23, 7:23, 9:24-26, 21:16-19, 22:28-30; **John** 3:14-18, 4:10, 4:14, 5:21-24, 6:27-29, 6:40, 8:12, 8:51, 10:9-10, 10:28, 11:25-26, 14:1.

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, 26:32, 27:62-63; **Mark** 8:31, 9:9-10, 9:31, 10:32-34, 14:28; **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 See, for example, Matthew 20:28: “ ‘just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’ ” See also, **Matthew** 16:21-23, 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: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so

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

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

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 untrodden 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, 5:28, 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

If a friend of yours said he was God, you would undoubtedly think he was joking. And if he convinced you that he was serious, you would think he had lost his mind. But Jesus was entirely serious, and the Jewish leaders took His claims very seriously indeed. Nor could they dismiss Him as simply a harmless nut case; as we will see, Jesus possessed remarkable wisdom, cleverness, and insight into human nature that seem inconsistent with lunacy. That left only one alternative in their mind: that He was evil incarnate—a lying, deceiving demon of a man. And they condemned Him to death because of it.¹⁸ But there is another alternative that the Jews were unwilling to consider—what if He was telling the truth? What if He was what He said He was? How can we know? Well, if Christ indeed came back to life after being dead, then we have our answer.

The Resurrection. 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.

In another article on this web site, “Is Jesus’ Resurrection Fact or Fairy Tale?” I discuss the evidence concerning Jesus’ resurrection, and I encourage you to read that article and other sources before making up your mind. But the bottom line is this—Jesus’ followers either told the truth about seeing Him alive again after He had suffered a horrific death by crucifixion, or they lied. There is no middle ground.

Jesus’ followers preached His resurrection as the foundation of Christianity from the very beginning. This was no myth or legend that

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 Matthew 26:63-66 and Mark 14:61-64; see also, Luke 22:66-71.

developed over a long period of time. You will find references to Jesus' resurrection in the earliest Christian preaching in Acts, and in almost every book of the New Testament, all of which were written in the first century A.D. Moreover, you will find numerous references to Christ's resurrection in early Christian writings of the first, second, third, and later centuries, A.D. Paul, writing within 25 years after Jesus' death, claimed that over 500 people had seen Jesus alive after his death and resurrection—many of whom were still alive at that time ¹⁹—and conceded that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then the disciples would all be liars and Christianity would be worse than useless. ²⁰

Furthermore, only two explanations for this preaching are credible: the disciples told the truth about what they actually witnessed, or they made it all up. Jesus' followers 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 severely wounded man who had miraculously survived a savage flogging and the agony of crucifixion.

So did they lie or did they tell the truth? You should study the question for yourself, 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 reasonable likelihood of earthly reward, for the sake of a lie? And keep in mind that this was not just any lie, but a whopper so preposterous that they should not have expected anything but widespread

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:6

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.

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 the Roman Empire, and even beyond, 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, sensible people that this resurrection story was actually true?

If you want to conduct your own study, you can begin with the article, "Is Jesus' Resurrection Fact or Fairy Tale?" on this web site. Continue with Frank Morison's *Who Moved the Stone?*, an easy read that is nonetheless compelling; 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.

History, however, is not the only path to Truth. Many have recognized the truth of Christianity by simply reading the New Testament. Let's look at what they found there.

Seeking Truth Through 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 they acted 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 invented 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, 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.

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*, 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*, pp. 52-57.) The messenger god, Hermes, stole cattle from the god Apollo. (See *The World of Myth*, 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*, 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.

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.

In contrast, the New Testament doesn't seem like anything a human being would invent. For example, who could come up with the strange and eccentric idea that people should pray for their enemies 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 while few people value the qualities of gentleness and humility—often disparaging them with such derogatory terms as “wimp” and “loser”—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

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.

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.

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 sanctioned the payment of taxes to the hated Romans, and His disciples encouraged people to obey the oppressive Roman government³⁵ (the same Roman government that had cruelly and unjustly 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 suffering they must expect as His followers.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 inviting in Jesus' day than it is today.

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.

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

Jesus' wisdom and cleverness must also be considered, because they are extraordinary. For example, think about the memorable stories He told, such as the story of "The Good Samaritan." Even most unbelievers know this story (or at least know of it), in which Jesus depicts the love we are to show to others through this tale about a man who helps his enemy simply because he is in need.⁴¹ Or consider the story of "the Prodigal Son," in which Jesus illustrates God's love for us through a father's love for a son who made some very bad choices.⁴² Jesus told many wonderful stories like these (called parables) to teach moral and religious truths in a way people would remember.

He also consistently outwitted His opponents. For example, the Jewish leaders brought Him a woman caught in adultery, and asked whether the punishment prescribed by the Jewish Law—stoning—should be carried out. "No" would flout the Jewish Law, but "Yes" could get Jesus in trouble with the Romans, who did not permit non-Romans to carry out death sentences. Jesus' famous response—"He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her"—avoided this dilemma, prompting the woman's accusers to abandon the effort and leave.⁴³ On another occasion, the Jewish leaders asked Jesus if people should pay taxes to Rome. Again, "No" would antagonize the Romans, but "Yes" would upset many among the Jewish people, who loathed the Romans and their oppressive taxes. After pointing out that the coins used to pay the tax are **Roman** coins, Jesus responded: "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's,"⁴⁴ which silenced his enemies. When Jesus was challenged by the Jewish leaders to state His authority, He cleverly responded with a loaded question of His own which they refused to answer.⁴⁵ Jesus' wisdom and cleverness are simply exceptional by human standards.

Even Jesus' miracles are different. In most religions, the gods' miracles demonstrate their power, but seldom their goodness. In contrast,

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 Luke 10:29-37.

⁴² See Luke 15:11-32.

⁴³ See John 8:3-11.

⁴⁴ See Matthew 22:17-22; see also Mark 12:13-17 and Luke 20:21-26.

⁴⁵ Jesus' question was, "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" (Luke 20:4) The Jewish leaders did not believe John the Baptist was a true prophet, but they were afraid to say so publicly. See Matthew 21:23-27, Mark 11:27-33, and Luke 20:1-8.

Jesus' miracles almost always helped people—the vast majority of His miracles were done to heal, feed, or raise people from the dead.⁴⁶ Never did Jesus use His power to harm a person.⁴⁷ He rebuked two of His disciples for merely suggesting that He do so.⁴⁸

And then there is the strange, and very counter-intuitive, notion of grace.⁴⁹ This principle, which seems to have no parallel in any other religion, proclaims that we cannot earn God's favor through religious 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.⁵⁰

Of course, the simple fact that much of the New Testament runs counter to the way people normally 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 bitterly cold weather—although that would certainly be counter-intuitive—for the simple reason that it doesn't work. What makes the New Testament truly different is that the principles it espouses actually work, whereas the conventional wisdom does not.

A psychiatrist, J.T. Fisher, has written that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount⁵¹ confirms what science tells us about how to achieve and maintain mental health; in effect, Jesus set forth a concise “blueprint for successful

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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).

⁴⁸ Luke 9:51-56

⁴⁹ “Grace” means “unmerited favor.” Grace refers to any benefit that we receive from God which we do not deserve.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ Matthew chapters 5 through 7

human life with optimism, mental health, and contentment.”⁵² 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 often resolve disputes.

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 standard of perfection. Fortunately for us, the New Testament says we don’t have to, because He loves us anyway.⁵³ Unlike other religions, God in the New Testament is not just 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 stop resisting (for He will not force Himself on us), and surrender ourselves to Him.⁵⁴

Seeking Truth Through 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 emotional 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,⁵⁵ except without the certainty that anyone was listening. I asked God—if He 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 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:

⁵² Fisher, J.T. and L.S. Hawley, *A Few Buttons Missing* (Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1951), p. 273, as quoted in *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 162.

⁵³ See Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

⁵⁴ For a fuller discussion of what God wants from us, see the article, “For God So Loved . . . Well, Wait a Minute,” on this web site.

⁵⁵ See Judges 6:36-40.

“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!”⁵⁶

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 merely surrender themselves to Him. That is why you should consider Christianity.

⁵⁶ Matthew 7:7-11; see also, Luke 11:9-13 and Acts 17:27

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