

A brief Course on Apologetics

Sunday School Notes*

October 2002 – May 2003

1 Introduction

Today we're going to start a new series – something quite different from what we have done before. The issue that we are going to deal with is explaining our faith to others.

Why do we believe what we believe? How do we deal with the many questions about Jesus, God, the Christian faith, and its relevance for our daily life? What answers can we give to those who doubt, those in difficult situations, those who don't want to believe us at all? Are our answers convincing, or do we realize that we don't really know ourselves how to deal with certain issues? Are we shocked when people question the very foundation of our faith – or can we reach out to them and give them answers that help them on their way to Christ? Do we just know “the basics” or can we explain why we view certain things as right or wrong? Can we participate when people discuss issues that currently move the world or do we realize that we don't know how to voice our opinion without sounding ridiculous – even to ourselves?

1.1 What is Apologetics?

In other words – are we able to *defend our faith*? This is what apologetics is about.

Q: *Does anyone know what the word “apologetics” means?*

The word has little to do with how we understand the word “apologize” today, although it comes from the same root. The Greek word *απολογία* means “a verbal defense”.

Q: *What does that mean with respect to our Christian faith?*

The best answer to this question is to look how the word is used in the Bible. The word *απολογία* occurs several times in the New Testament (**Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Corinthians 7:11; Philippians 1:7,17; 2 Timothy 4:16, 1 Peter 3:15**) and **1. Peter 3:15** probably explains best, what Christian apologetics really means.

*Part of the material presented here is taken from the Book *New Evidence that demands a verdict* by Josh McDowell and various web sites on apologetics such as www.carm.org, www.ApologeticsPress.org, and <http://www.behindthebadge.net/apologetics/>

... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

Thus in general, Christian apologetics deals with answering any and all critics who oppose or question the revelation of God in Christ and the Bible. That *can* include studying specific subjects as biblical manuscript transmission, philosophy, biology, mathematics, evolution, and logic, so that you can give discuss with experts who influence the way society thinks about these issues today. But *more commonly* it simply means giving an answer to a question about Jesus, about a Bible passage, or about a specific situation where faith makes a difference. You don't have to read a ton of books to be able to do that, nor do you need to have extraordinary intelligence. But you do have to know the Word of God – and this not just superficially. Everyone is able to make a defense of the Christian faith (just consider what kind of people Jesus chose as apostle) and everyone is called to do so.

Apologetics can both be defensive and offensive. The Bible explains both.

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me (**Philippians 1:7**).

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (**2. Corinthians 10:5**).

You can and should defend your reasons for believing. But you should also “attack” opinions that oppose Christianity. Of course, you need to do this with gentleness (never attack the person, only reproach what has been said) and should be well-prepared beforehand. After all, you want to *convince people to change their views and beliefs* and – if they are not Christians yet – bring them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Roughly there are two major ways of dealing with opposition. You can provide *evidence* for Christianity, i.e. for Jesus' resurrection, the biblical manuscripts, fulfilled prophecy, miracles, etc. Or you can deal with the *presuppositions* of those who oppose Christianity, because presuppositions effect how a person views evidence and reason.

Another interesting issue is how to deal with the use of evidence, reasons, philosophy, etc. when talking to people who don't believe in the Bible the same way as you do. Should you only those criteria acceptable to unbelievers? Are we allowed to use the Bible as a defense of our position? Is reason alone sufficient to prove God existence or Christianity's truth? What part does prayer, using the Bible, and the sinful nature of the unbeliever play in witnessing? How do these factors interrelate to bring an unbeliever to faith?

The questions are easy. The answers are not. That's why we will study apologetics in the months to come.

1.2 Why study Apologetics?

You have come to this class, I assume, because you want to learn more about apologetics.

Q: *But why, do you think, is it important to study apologetics?*

There are several reasons why we need to learn and practice apologetics.

1. The first and most obvious is because the Word of *God commands us to be ready to defend the faith* (recall **1. Peter 3:15**).
2. Second, studying apologetics helps us to *know our faith*. Sadly enough many Christians barely know the basics of their faith, let alone the deeper issues. But even many of the more experienced ones find it difficult to describe the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, His physical resurrection, or the difference between justification and sanctification without using a lot of church terminology that they cannot explain to people who are not familiar with it.
3. Third, apologetics is an attempt to *keep people out of hell*. As Christians, we should be motivated to present the truth of salvation in Jesus. We should not sit idly by and ignore the dilemma of the unbeliever. We need to be able to tell them that *sin is real* because God is real, that breaking God's law has a consequence, but that through trusting in Christ we will be spared from the rightful judgment of God. Salvation is not found in Buddhism, Islam, relativism, or in one's self. It is only found in Jesus Christ. That is easy to say, but we need to be able to explain it so that people can understand.
4. Fourth, we need to be able to *counter the bad image* that Christianity has received in the media and in our culture – particularly here in Ithaca. Many Christians come across as narrow-minded and self-righteous because they have strong opinions that they can't justify. Others obviously don't live according to the standards they preach. The scandals around tele-evangelists and, more recently, the Catholic church have added a lot to the already existing negative opinions of Christianity. Add to that our media are already very biased against Christianity — how should people see the truth of what Christianity is really about if we aren't ready to tell them on an individual basis (without appearing narrow-minded and self-righteous ourselves)?
5. Fifth, apologetics helps us dealing with the constant *threat of apostasy* in the visible Christian church. How many once faithful denominations have abandoned clear scriptural teachings and conformed with the views of the world on certain issues ... because we have to “go with the times”? Just take the open acceptance of homosexual relationships into church as an example – a clear violation of scriptural principles but probably a very popular step in the eyes of the world outside the church.

How would we react if this were to happen in our church? Go along because, after all, we shouldn't be so narrow-minded? Attack the people who advocate this because they are apparently “with the devil”? Separate and go somewhere else because the situation is hopeless once it has come up for the first time? Only a proper understanding of apologetics helps us defend biblical truth within our churches in a way that we can reach those who are about to go astray.

6. Sixth, there are many *false teachings* out there that try to influence the minds of believers and non-believers all over the world.

For instance, *Mormonism* teaches that God used to be a man on another world who now is literally our father and that you have the potential of becoming a god of your own world. *Jehovah's Witnesses* teach that there is no Trinity, that Jesus is Michael the Archangel, that there is no hell, and that only 144,000 people will go to heaven. *Islam* teaches that Jesus was not God in flesh, that Jesus did not rise from the dead. It teaches salvation is partly based on one's works and partly based on Allah's grace. It teaches that The Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel and that Mohammed was greater than Jesus. *Atheism* denies God's existence altogether and teaches that mankind has evolved by evolution. It demands that any form of exercising your faith should be banned from public life and schools.

We must be able to counter these teachings to prevent people from falling prey to them.

7. Seventh, the *rise of immorality* in America is a threat not only to society but also to Christianity. Statistics show that 64% of adults and 83% of teenagers said moral truth depends on the situation that you are in. An increasing number believes that "the whole idea of sin is outdated". A majority of those who believe in God thinks that being generally good is sufficient for getting into heaven.

This is a serious issue because an immoral society cannot last long. Just look at history and think of Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, and the ancient nations of Judah and Israel. And then consider present day Enron, Watergate, and White House interns. We tend to take these issues lightly because we often believe that our economic well-being or (more recently) the war on terrorism are much much more important. But as a consequence, things that formerly were called evil have now become acceptable and – even worse – what is good (like standing up against these things) is now being considered evil ("how dare you tell me what is right"). God tells us

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (**Philippians 4:8**).

We cannot ignore God's Word and believe that there won't be consequences.

8. The eighth reason is that *schools* are not friendly to Christianity. The teachers of philosophy, history, science, and many others are almost obliged to take shots at Christianity, since the biblical truths contradict what nowadays has to be taught in school. Just ask our teenagers who go to public schools here in Ithaca.

Shall we take our children from public schools to protect them from this influence? That doesn't solve the problem because we can't keep them out of this world forever. Instead, we need to prepare them to be ready and get a mature understanding of their own faith, so that they are kept from falling (**John 17:15**). If we do so, we will sometimes see astonishing results (just look at Steve Lambert).

The fact is that Christianity is under attack in the world and we need to fight the good fight of the faith without shrinking back. We need apologetics to give rational, intelligent, and relevant explanations of Christian viability to the critics and the prejudiced who would seek to undermine the teachings of our Lord Jesus(, keeping **Ephesians 6:12** in mind which clearly states that our true opponent is not the person who stands in front of us). If there was ever a time that apologetics is needed, it is now.

1.3 Guidelines for doing Apologetics

Last week we started our new series on Apologetics, that is on “*defending the faith*”. We looked at biblical definitions of what that means and collected a variety of reasons, why we should study apologetics. **1. Peter 3:15** gives one of the strongest reasons: God wants us to be always ready to answer to everyone who has questions, doubts, and problems – whether Christian or not.

As an example we then looked at one of the typical issues that are raised by unbelievers and I asked you to give an answer. In the process we quickly found out that attempts to convince someone who doesn’t believe quickly go down the wrong path. Instead of reaching out to the other we are in danger of starting an argument, not realizing that our well-thought line of reasoning doesn’t catch on with everyone – I purposefully let it happen that way, playing the stubborn opponent and creating some confusion.

Therefore, before we continue, let us look at a few guidelines for doing apologetics.

Although answering questions, dealing with doubts, and defending the faith strongly depends on the situation, your own personality, and the people you’re dealing with, there are certain guidelines that are worth considering.

1. The most important part of defending the faith is *prayer*. It is the Lord who opens the heart and mind, not we (**Acts 16:14**). The issue is not to win an argument, but to win the person and all our well-prepared arguments and intellectual abilities cannot accomplish this if God is not in it. Ask God for guidance (**John 14:14**), for blessing in your understanding (**James 1:5**) and your speech (**Colossians 4:6**), and for opening the other’s minds (**Luke 24:45**).
2. Few things are as powerful when defending the faith as being able to cite a particular verse from the Bible (**Psalms 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16**). The Word of God is quick and powerful (**Hebrews 4:12**) and more effective than anything else. You may not always have a Bible handy, so it is worth to *memorize scripture* and the context in which it is written and *use it*.
3. *Be informed* about cult material, secular material, and other sources of information. It is extremely valuable to know where other people draw their opinions from and where the strengths and weaknesses of certain arguments and theories are. Of course, you cannot know everything, but you can memorize a few facts about Mormonism, or evolution, or philosophy, or whatever else may be needed. You will learn what you need as you witness.

4. *Listen* to what is being said to you – and respond to it. It is by listening that you will then know what to say. Listen for errors in logic, for motives, for hurts, for intent.
5. *Ask questions* that require the others to explain what they believe. When they have to go below the surface, they will quite often discover that their views are based on a lot of unsubstantiated assumptions instead of on solid facts.

An interesting approach is to avoid arguments is to hand out a challenge instead. If someone claims that the Bible is full of errors, pick a few key verses like **Hebrews 9:27, John 3:16** and ask them to explain why they think this particular statement is wrong. *How do you know what you claim? Can you be sure and why?* That requires them to study the meaning of these passages and think about them more seriously. Of course, that doesn't guarantee anything, but it opens the door to talk about the deeper issues instead of resorting to common prejudices

6. *Don't interrupt* – this is just common courtesy. Just because you have an answer doesn't mean it must be heard right away. When interruptions become the norm, learning is thrown out the window.
7. *Do not argue*. Avoid anything that even sounds like you're attacking the person. Others have a right to have their beliefs – even if they are severely wrong.

For the same reason, *do not ridicule* the other person, even if what he says is really absurd. He won't listen to you if you don't take him seriously. How would you feel if you were ridiculed?

Christians are often accused of viewing themselves as superior to others. Make sure that you never look down on other people, no matter what you believe about them, their moral standards, their views of the world etc. You are no better than they – just forgiven. (parable of the servant in debt).

8. *Don't be afraid to make mistakes*. One of the best ways to improve, is to discover your weaknesses, and these are only uncovered when you make mistakes. People who don't make mistakes don't grow anymore.
9. *Study* what you discover you don't know. Get books and *read*. The knowledge of others is invaluable. Write down what you learn. No matter how much or how little you know – you can always improve.
10. *Don't be afraid to take a chance*. This step takes real faith. All you have to do is be available, speak up, and take a chance in defending the Christian faith. *Consciously depend upon the Holy Spirit*. Under his guidance you will be able to reach out to others. You'll be surprised at how well you do. And when you mess up, don't worry, review guideline #8.
11. *Rehearse* – think of a situation, a scenario that you need to have an answer for, and develop an answer. Practice in your mind. Try and corner yourself and then get out of it. This is exactly what we want to practice in this class.
12. Finally – trust in the Lord and keep going – it works.

1.4 How will we study this in this course

This is just a small sample of typical questions. There are many more questions that people may ask and it will be impossible to answer them all beforehand. So we will first have to focus on a few key questions to understand the principles of “practicing apologetics” and then look at some of the other ones that we find most interesting. If there is anew question that comes to your mind, just write it up and give it to me.

We are going to do this a little different from the way I taught Sunday School before. The purpose is not so much that I “indoctrinate” you with a few standard answers but that you learn to figure out a good answer yourself.

So we will turn this class a bit more into an open discussion where we as a group will elaborate a satisfactory answer to a question. We should use our Bibles and of course our God-given common sense and discuss strengths and weaknesses of certain arguments. I am sure that collectively we will eventually come up with a satisfactory answer, so that at least each of us is convinced that he or she now knows how to deal with the question from now on.

Actually, I thought it may be a good idea that occasionally I slip into the role of the unbeliever and try to be stubborn and bring up counterarguments that you will have to refute as well. That makes it more interesting and I believe that this will help us clarify what we really know and believe. I will try to wrap up a session by presenting an answer that I think is satisfactory and, of course, you may point out flaws in these arguments as well.

Unfortunately that means there is not going to be a set of well-elaborated course notes beforehand because we will improvise much more. If you wish, bring a concordance and other resources, and let us use these materials in our studies.

1.5 Common Questions and Issues

The final reason for studying apologetics is that there are just so many questions and issues where we need to find answers. There are questions that others bring to us that we can’t answer, issues and claims that we are confronted with day by day, questions that were always on our minds because we have no satisfactory answers for them, situations that make us doubt because our faith turns out to be to superficial for handling them. We all know dozens of questions that need answers. Let us collect a few of them.

1. The Bible is full of errors
2. The Bible contradicts itself
3. The Bible is not the word of God – it was just written by some men.
 (“The books of Moses were invented by the priesthood in 500 BC”,
 “Israel was never great”, “David never existed”, “Jesus never existed”, ...)
4. The Bible is just a book of stories
5. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are pure fiction
 (“Creation is unscientific” or “Christianity as been proven wrong by science”)
6. Bible is not reliable (“we don’t have originals”, “translations contain mistakes”, ...)
7. Why just these 66 books? No more? No less?
8. The KJV is the only authoritative/correct Bible translation

9. You can't take the Bible literally! ("you have to interpret it", ...)
10. Jesus was just a prophet (, teacher, good man, ...)
11. Jesus is not God
12. God doesn't exist
13. Satan doesn't exist – it is just an invention to scare kids
14. Christianity is hateful (towards homosexuals, other religions, women, catholics, ...)
15. Christians are judgmental (e.g. about abortion)
16. Christianity requires people to have blind faith (shut off their brain, ...)
17. Christians forbid everything that is fun
18. Everyone will go to heaven
19. There is no such thing as hell
20. Why should I be concerned about eternal life? Once I die, I will be put in a box 6 feet under.
21. A loving God will not condemn me just because I don't believe in Jesus
22. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe in God
23. You believe your way, I my way ...
24. All religions lead to God
25. There was no virgin birth ("the bible never says so in the originals")
26. God doesn't love me (because I am sick, poor,)
27. Why does God allow suffering if he loves us [more abstract]
28. There is no (physical) resurrection of the dead
29. I believe in reincarnation
30. Everyone will eventually become like God
31. The Bible doesn't mention the trinity, it has been invented afterwards
32. After salvation you don't sin anymore
33. You can't trust Paul's writing (he was prejudiced against women)
34. Isn't the Bible anti-feminist?
35. Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't God just forgive us and forget it?
36. Why doesn't God show Himself to everyone so they will believe?
37. If creation is correct: Where did Cain find his wife?
38. Is the gift of tongues relevant today?
39. Why did God create evil (Satan) if he is all-knowing?
40. If there is a God – why is there evil in the world?
41. Why do bad things happen to good people?
42. How can you speak of biblical truths when a person hasn't accepted Christ (or is blinded already)? What or where is the baseline, or common spot to begin with?
43. Aren't most of the wars in history caused by people claiming to be Christians (for example, the crusades)?
44. Why should God pick one race, the Jews, to receive special treatment?
45. Why don't you also believe the other "gospel" of the Book of Mormon?
46. Each person finds God in his own way – why isn't one way as good as another?

1.6 Resolving Questions and Doubts

As a warm-up, let us look at some of the questions that we brought up and try to come up with an answer.

1. Everyone will go to heaven **Matthew 7:21–23**
2. I believe in reincarnation **Hebrews 9:27**
3. Why does God allow suffering if he loves us ? **Romans 5:3, 1. Peter 4:1**
This is a difficult issue, no simple answer will do but the verses help
4. Science has proven that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are wrong **Matthew 19:4**
Tricky, as the question raises doubts about the Bible itself. The verse states that Jesus accepted it as truth (internal evidence, enough for a Christian, but needs more for those who don't believe)

In each of these questions we eventually ended up by pointing to the Bible as authoritative source for our answer. People may see your point but they sometime don't accept a quote from the Bible as satisfactory answer for themselves. So they may say to you "you may believe that, but for me that's not convincing enough – why should I trust the Bible in the first place?".

I think that the trustworthiness of the Bible as final authority is the foundation on which all further arguments will have to rest, so this is the first question that we will have to study – *why do we believe that the Bible we have can be used as authoritative resource for settling arguments?* As long as the others don't believe in the Bible at all, you will have a hard time answering any question to their satisfaction, since you don't have a common foundation to start with. But if you can agree on using the Bible for resolving a question, you have a good chance for making progress.

2 The Bible – our final Authority

Discussions about faith will always lead to questions about the Bible. The Bible is the foundation for what we believe and lays down the truths that we rely upon. For us, it is the key resource for settling questions, the final authority when we can't agree.

However, for unbelievers, the Bible is not a very significant book. They may respect it, but certainly will not accept its authority. That means in discussions, we cannot bring up biblical arguments as long as the other person doesn't believe in the authority of the Bible. The reason is that people think that

- The Bible is just another book, like the Koran, the book of Mormon, etc.
- The Bible is an unreliable document that was changed over time and we don't even know that the Bible we have now is the original
- The Bible is a book full of stories that were invented by men – usually with very selfish motives. It is full of errors and contradiction and certainly not relevant for today anymore.

So, can we use the Bible in a discussion at all? What is so special about that book that we view it as authority? There are several aspects to this question.

- What is so unique about the Bible? What distinguishes it from other books?
- How reliable is the document we have in our hands today?
- Is the Bible really from God? What evidence do we have for that? What about the claims that it has errors?
- How should we interpret what we read in the Bible?

For all these questions there are internal and external answers – answers that we find in the Bible itself and answers that we can base on external evidence. The former will be sufficient only for those who already accept the Bible as the Word of God. But they also point us in the right direction when we look for external answers, since quite often the Word of God points to clearly visible evidence that we only need to check (e.g. prophecy as challenge). That evidence can then be provided to unbelievers. We should be aware, however, that all the evidence in the world cannot convince those who don't *want* to believe (**Luke 16:29–31**). On the other hand, the word of God does not return empty (**Isaiah 55:11**), so it is our task to provide both the word and the evidence in a gentle and loving way and let God do the rest.

Before we look at these questions, let us review a few passages that describe the Bible.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (**Isaiah 40:8**)

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (**2. Timothy 3:16–17**)

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (**Hebrews 4:12**)

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2. Peter 1:16–21)

2.1 What is unique about the Bible?

What distinguishes it from any other piece of literature, from any other religious book, from any other historical document?

- *Unique in its Continuity*

Written over 1500 years by more than 40 authors with very different background

Written in very different places ranging from desert (Moses) to a palace

Written in very different situations (war, peace, persecution)

Written in a variety of styles and languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic)

Touching hundreds of subjects

yet a single unfolding story about the one true living God

- *Unique in its Circulation*

More than one billion copies sold world-wide

Still more than 10 million copies are sold every year (compare this to ANY other bestseller)

- *Unique in its Translation*

More than 2200 languages and “dialects” (reaches more than 90% of the world population)

First translations were already made in 250BC (Septuaginta: translates Hebrew Old Testament into Greek)

- *Unique in its Survival*

It survived time: There are more manuscript copies of the Bible than of all the other historical documents combined. The variations between these documents are extremely small, despite time differences of hundreds of years.

It survived persecution: there have been many attempts to destroy scripture or to stomp out Christianity (recall Nero as the best-known, Diocletian in 302). None of them succeeded.

It survived criticism: People have tried over and over again to refute the Bible, to label it as invention by men, to question authorship and dating, to prove it historically wrong, etc.

All “evidence” against the Bible has failed so far (was disproved by later findings) ... and there are more people believing in it as authoritative Word of God than ever before.

- *Unique in its Teachings*

It presents prophecy: many were made, many took place exactly as predicted, some are still open, **none failed**

Example: Christ’s birth (Timing: Daniel 9, City: Micah 5:2 Circumstances: Isaiah 7:14) – see p.13 for more

Other books claim divine inspiration yet none gives predictive prophecy.

(God himself gives that challenge: Deuteronomy 18:22)

It presents history: following one people from its beginning until the time of captivity. No other book is as complete

It presents characters: as they are, without omitting the weaknesses (e.g. 2. Samuel 11, 12, 1. Corinthians 1:11/15:12). The early church is not described in idealistic terms.

- *Unique in its Influence*

The most influential book in *literature*, most cited,

The most influential book in *civilization*. Many constitutions adopted major components from the law, all Western societies are strongly influenced by Jesus’ teachings - even if the people don’t believe.

No other book had such an impact 2000 years after the last chapter was written. We hardly know any other that even survived that long, let alone is still being used.

2.2 Historically, how reliable is the Bible we have today?

This is not about divine inspiration but about the reliable as a document that states certain facts. Can we trust the text that we read? Are the documents we have really the same as the original text? Is it accurate in what it describes?

2.2.1 How was it written?

Most of the originals were written on *papyrus*, which lasts longer than today's paper but nevertheless decays. Finding a document older than 1000 years is a rare event - it must have been preserved in a special way.

We don't have any originals at this point, only copies

Reading the Greek and Hebrew "original" today is quite difficult. Greek was written without breaks, since anyone who could write or read knew immediately where to put them (papyrus was expensive). In the Hebrew, vowels were dropped.

Chapter and verse markings were introduced much later. For the Old Testament they were standardized about 900AD, for the New Testament in the 1550's. Note, there are deviations if you look up a foreign bible (some count the preambles to the psalms, for instance).

2.2.2 Why these 66 books - no more, no less? Who decided and why?

It is important to notice that the church did not *determine* what should be in the Bible (as many claim, alleging to a desire to establish power) but tried to discover this. God, as we believe, wrote the books, so he made sure that we could recognize his authority in the writings. The church did recognize the authority in all the books we have in the Bible today but not in other books.

There are several criteria that help us find out if a book is from God

- *was it written by God or a spokesman confirmed by God?*
- *does it tell the truth about God or contradict it?*
- *is there evidence that it has power to change lives?*
- *was it accepted by people of God?*

The New Testament canon was recognized as early as AD 367, the Old Testament no later than 150BC. For instance, Jesus recognized the *law*, the *prophets*, and the *writings* as such (**Luke 24:44, 11:51**) (so he recognized the already existing canon) and many specific passages as well.

Q: *What about Esther and the Song of Songs?*

Esther: although mention of God was (deliberately?) omitted, one can clearly see God's hand in the story described. God is in control and directs seemingly insignificant coincidences to protect his people. One of the best sources for recognizing God's actions in what we experience – it is not necessary to point that out explicitly.

Song of Songs: One of the greatest descriptions of love, which is God's greatest gift to marital life. There is nothing impure about love, passion, and desire. The fact that people have devalued love to something selfish only makes "the original" more valuable.

Some people are offended by verse 4:2 – it's too explicit for them and the book was on "the index" (mature readers only) for quite some time. But there is nothing offensive to that passage.

Q: *What about the Apocrypha?*

Reasons to exclude a book are *inaccuracies* (historical, geographical), *doctrines that are inconsistent* with the other scriptures, lack of divine characteristics (prophecy, teaching, expression of relation to God), focus on legends and folklore.

The *apocrypha* (“hidden/concealed” books) enjoyed only local and temporary recognition but were excluded very early because they don’t meet *all* the acceptance criteria.

1. Esdras (150BC) *too much legendary material with no religious value*

2. Esdras (100BC) *7 apocalyptic visions, very confusing instead of edifying.*

Tobit (early 2nd century) *pharisaic material, wrong doctrine (“almsgiving atones for sin”), picked up by catholic church in the middle ages*

Judith (middle 2nd century) *a novel of little religious value*

Additions to Esther (100BC) *adding the lacking reference to God to the book (prayers). Questionable letters supposedly written by Artaxerxes.*

These passages are clearly later additions, trying to fix a “deficiency” that made the inclusion of the book of Esther in the canon questionable to some people (who don’t understand Esther). Not found in early manuscripts of Esther

Wisdom of Solomon (AD 40) *many noble sentiments but authorship more than questionable*

Sirach / Ecclesiasticus (180BC) *Wisdom literature, similar to Proverbs. Useful, but not of the same power.*

Baruch (AD 100): *claims to be written by a scribe of Jeremiah but contains material that indicates a past disaster, probably the destruction of Jerusalem AD 70. Analysis of style and content points to a date AD 100, not 580BC.*

Additions to Daniel *(story of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon) legendary material of little religious value. Song of the Hebrew Children, borrows from Psalm 148. Neither of these is found in reliable manuscripts of Daniel.*

1./2. Maccabees (1st century BC) *a valuable historical book but of little religious value.*

- Philo, Josephus, and all of the early Church fathers did not recognize the apocrypha.
- Jesus quoted from almost all of scripture but not from the apocrypha.
- All protestant Churches reject the Apocrypha as canonical scripture
- Even the Catholic church did not include the apocrypha in the canon until 1546 and it is suspected that including them was solely motivated by counter-Reformation efforts.

2.2.3 How to determine the reliability of ancient literature?

People say, “the originals of the Bible may have been inspired, but what we have today is not the original”. Can we trust the documents we have to be close to the original text, to be accurate with respect to what it says, and to be consistent in itself?

There are 3 tests we can apply

Bibliographical Test: *how reliable are the copies with respect to the originals*

Internal Evidence Test: *Is the document consistent in itself? What does the document say about itself?*

External Evidence Test: *Do other reliable historical materials (not just texts) confirm or deny what the document says*

Note that none of the three tests alone is sufficient for a claim of reliability. The first test only proves that we actually know what the original text says. The second states that the text describes a “workable theory” of how things are, since it cannot be proven to be wrong within itself or without credibility. The third test ties the content of the text to observable reality.

In all sciences it is common practice to hold on to a theory as long as it is consistent and is accurate with respect to the data we have. This holds particularly for historic documents. If a document is consistent in itself and not in conflict with external evidence, one should give it the benefit of doubt, as it is much closer to the time it describes than critics who evaluate it today. If we abandon this principle, which is said to go back to Aristoteles, we would not be able to trust any ancient document, since often we have no other material that describes what really happened.

2.2.4 What Bibliographical Information do we have about the New Testament?

We have *5586 Greek manuscripts* (some complete, some partial) and more than 20,000 manuscripts of early translations

The earliest fragments date from the late second century, *only 100 years after the originals* were written. The oldest complete manuscript is from the early 4th century.

For comparison: Homer’s Iliad is second in the number of manuscripts. we have 643 manuscripts, with the first complete copy from the 13th century (1700 years after the original)

For other well-known ancient texts (Herodotus Histories, Plato, Caesar Gallic Wars, Tacitus Annals) we often have less than 10 manuscripts and still claim to know the original.

- Scribal differences between manuscripts are marginal, although they range from AD 200 to 1500. God made sure that the copyist were very meticulous.
- There are plenty of reliable dating methods that don’t use carbon dating (material, letter form, ink color, divisions, etc.)
- Translations (Syriac: Aramaic, Vulgate: Latin, Coptic) were made early, manuscripts date as early as the 4th and testify to the accuracy of the Greek copies.

The early church fathers (AD 70-325) quoted exhaustively (not always verbatim) from the bible. There are more than 36,000 quotations that point to the meaning of the original text.

Conclusion: *If we are able to determine the original content of any historical document then we can certainly do so for the New Testament. People who don't trust the New Testament shouldn't believe in history at all.*

2.2.5 Internal Evidence Test of the New Testament: Are there inconsistencies?

Evaluating ancient texts for accuracy is not easy, since one must try to understand correctly what the document actually says. Modern day critics have to take into account that language was used in a different way and that the culture didn't dictate the same standards for writing up things. For instance, a chronological order is not always used, numbers are not always accurate but rounded, writers use different reference points (Jewish time / Roman time), etc.

Q: *How to resolve* **Luke 8:26–39** vs. **Matthew 8:28–34** and **Matthew 27:5** vs **Acts 1:18**

The answer to these question reveals, that we have to take certain guidelines into account when interpreting ancient texts. Here are a few important ones.

1. *The unexplained is not necessarily unexplainable.* It just points to the limitations of the human mind. Scientists today haven't figured out earthquakes, tornadoes, fusion energy – no one would claim that these things can't exist.
2. *Fallible interpretation does not mean the original revelation was fallible.* Even the most brilliant and devoted scholar – both in the religious as in the scientific world – will make mistakes. Contradictions between the interpretations of the Bible and the “interpretation of” science are to be expected. But that doesn't prove contradictions between the real world and God's word.

Example: the Greek *Μελιτα* in **Acts 28:1** may not have been Malta, but an island south of Corfu.

3. *The context of a passage is extremely important.* Just imagine quoting a fragment of **Psalm 14:1** “there is no God” out of context.
4. *Difficult passages should be interpreted in the light of the easy ones.* This is just common sense. Certain things are more obscure. Their interpretation should be based on what we already understand. For instance, **James 2:14-16** does not teach salvation by works, because we already know that we are saved by faith **Romans 4:5**, **Ephesians 2:8–9**. So James talks about something else but justification before God – it's “justification” before men who cannot see our faith.
5. *Don't base teachings on obscure passages.* For instance, the interpretation of the Greek for “daily” in **Matthew 6:11** is unclear. We can't build any teaching on that passage if that teaching is not supported by other passages as well. (similarly **2. Peter 3:12**).
6. *The Bible writings contain human characteristics.* Obvious figures of speech, exaggerations should not be taken literally. **Luke 18:25** needs a lot of context to be understood properly.
7. *An incomplete account is not necessarily false.* **Luke 8:26–39** only speaks of one demon-possessed man whereas **Matthew 8:28–34** speaks of two. That doesn't mean Luke is wrong – only focuses on the more prominent person. Humans do that all the time. We focus on the important aspects and omit irrelevant details.
8. *New Testament citations of the Old Testament don't have to be exact/verbatim.* Citations were often taken from the Septuagint which gives a different wording, when

translated into English, than translations of the Original. For me, the NIV and the KJV are very different texts – and they obviously don’t contradict each other.

9. *The Bible does not always approve of what it records.* The Bible often simply states what happens: lies (Genesis 3), adultery, murder, polygamy – and often uses that to make a point / open our eyes.
10. *The Bible uses everyday, non-technical language.* This doesn’t mean its descriptions are wrong. Actually, language idioms of the time tell a story much clearer than scientific language of the 21st century, which is made for experts only – not for “the common folks”.
11. *Bible authors use round numbers and exact numbers.* We do the same. The feeding of the 5000 could easily have been one of 5634.
12. *The Bible uses different literal devices.* Only the context can tell us whether we should take a passage literally or figuratively.
13. *If a copy contains an error that doesn’t mean it was in the original.* God’s word is the original text. Copies are made by humans, which were not inspired – although God made sure that copying errors are at a minimum.
14. *General statements are not universal promises.* What holds generally may have individual exceptions. God promises us peace and prosperity (**Proverbs 16:7**) if we follow him, but there have always been God-fearing people that had to go through incredible hardships like Jesus, Paul, many Prophets.
15. *Later revelation supersedes previous revelation.* God doesn’t reveal everything at once but in fragments that we can digest (just imagine giving a High School student the complete contents of the Archive of theoretical and experimental Physics at once). Later revelation makes clearer what earlier revelation only hinted at. It sometimes even changes the rules, because we have matured enough that we can enjoy more freedom.

The transition from a very strict worship format with animal sacrifices in Jerusalem to today’s form became possible because of Jesus’ atoning death and our “ability” to understand that. That doesn’t mean the Old Testament contradicts the New Testament. Parents do that to their children too. We first tell them to be home before dark and later relax that. Does that mean we’re inconsistent?

If we apply these principles carefully, we realize that all misunderstandings about the text can be resolved using the above guidelines. Here are a few examples

- **Matthew 12:40** (three days and three nights) vs. **Acts 10:40** (on the third day)
- **John 1:18** and **Exodus 33:20** vs. **Genesis 32:30** (not God, but a representative)
- How did Judas kill himself (**Matthew 27:5** vs. **Acts 1:18** – methods vs. result)

Well, people may admit that the Bible is consistent, but may still claim that the people who wrote it just accumulated unverified legends. Fortunately, the Biblical authors made sure that there is no misunderstanding about their sources. They were either *eyewitnesses* or did extensive research (**Luke 1:1-3**, **2. Peter 1:16**). They testify to the accuracy of the account they give (do not rely on here-say).

Scholars today agree that the writers were who they claimed to be and that they did write during the first century (style and other literary features indicate that).

Conclusion: *There is no basis for a claim that the Bible is in any way inaccurate in itself. It does not contain contradictions or here-say. Claims to the contrary are mere presuppositions that cannot be substantiated.*

Note that an internal evidence test cannot convince people that the content is true in an absolute sense. People may still claim that the authors made everything up but they have to admit that the Bible is *consistent* and that there is not way to prove it wrong just by looking at what it says *unless we have supernatural insight that gives us the right to say "this cannot have happened"*.

However, people still have the right to doubt, saying they find this hard to believe and that they need more to be convinced. After all, we do the same thing for the Book of Mormon, the Koran, evolution theory etc.¹ At this point we have to look at external evidence. Does it support what the Bible says?

2.2.6 External Evidence Test of the New Testament

External evidence can only falsify a theory. Scientifically, if serious attempts to disprove a theory fail, then this is an indicator that there is some truth to it. It is never possible to prove something unless we are in a closed system where we have complete knowledge about what can and cannot happen. For this reason the absence of supporting evidence for everything that a theory says does not mean a theory is wrong as long as there is no conflicting evidence. However, the lack of *any* supporting evidence makes a theory unpalusible. It must be tied to reality at least to some extent.

Early Christian writers (Eusebius, Papias, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, about AD 130) already comment on the authors of the New Testament documents and their accuracy. They believe in the reliability of the Bible. This is important because for them this was recent history and there was a chain of witnesses from the Bible authors to these writers.

[Unbelievers must declare all of them to be liars]

Non-Christian sources from the first two centuries refer to events mentioned in the Bible (read from Tacitus). Josephus, the late 1st century historian already refers to

¹Note that part of our argument there is that these contradict what the Bible says. To be able to make this statement, we must prove that the content of the Bible is rock solid.

Often it is easier to give additional arguments why the Book of Mormon, the Koran, evolution theory etc. do not describe the truth. Otherwise an outside observer would see two conflicting theories and only know that *one* of them must be wrong.

Why shouldn't that be the Bible? Because there is plenty of evidential support for what the Bible says, but only very superficial support for the other that doesn't survive a thorough, unpreoccupied analysis. For instance, evolution theory is full of missing links. Instead of gradual shifts there are major steps in the development. Furthermore, the theory isn't even mathematically plausible: if one adds up the steps between primitive cells and a human being and assumes they happen by chance and selection, 15 billion years would by far not be enough time. All this points to singular events rather than a collection of small steps.

the existence of the Bible, to James, John the Baptist, and Jesus as historical figures. The Talmud does similar.

Archeology attests to the accuracy of the New Testament writers. It confirms the Roman Census under Augustus and many other historical events mentioned by Luke. In some cases archeologists had to revise theories that conflicted Luke, since newer excavations proved that Luke was right.

Conclusion: *There is no external evidence against the facts described in the New Testament but plenty of evidence for it. This makes the authors very credible in everything we cannot check*

Most of the above arguments dealt with the New Testament and unfortunately there are quite a few Christians who trust in the New Testament but disregard the Old Testament, particularly the creation accounts in Genesis 1–11. So let us briefly look at the evidence for the reliability of the Old Testament.

2.2.7 How about the Reliability of Old Testament Documents

- The copying quality of the Hebrew manuscripts is simply astonishing compared to any other document of that time. Comparing the Isaiah scrolls found at Qumran (dated 200BC) with the oldest copy one had so far (980AD) revealed that 95% of the text were word-by-word accurate, while the 5% differences were accounted for mostly by spelling differences and slips of a pen. There were *no changes in meaning at all*.

Given that there were 1200 years between these documents this is more than amazing. Even today, people would modify a document over the decades, probably even in its meaning, unless they believe it is absolutely mandatory to be completely accurate (and even then errors would happen).

historical names of non-Jewish kings over a 1600 year span are preserved phonetically accurate in correct chronological order. You can't get this right by chance (odds are $7.5 \cdot 10^{23}$) – only by meticulous accuracy.

- There are more than 700 manuscripts and ten thousands of fragments (many of them found in Qumran and Cairo), dating from 300BC to the 14th century.

if one dives into the subject it becomes quite fascinating to see how good the material is that we have today – one sees how well God preserved his Word. Just reading about Qumran alone is fascinating.

- Early translations confirm the meaning of the Hebrew text we have.

For instance, the Septuagint (about 250BC) is a Greek translation for Jews that were scattered far from home and didn't understand Hebrew as well. Except for the Torah, which is extremely accurate, it occasionally paraphrases the Bible in the same way the "Message" does today. The purpose was teaching faith, not literal accuracy where this didn't seem necessary.

The fact that this translation confirms the text we extract from the available manuscripts make sit very likely that the older manuscripts that were used in the translation (and thus the originals as well) state the same as the copies we have now.

Conclusion: *If we can trust the text of any document older than 2000 years then we certainly have to trust the Old Testament text as well*

Although it is more difficult to find a correct reading of Old Testament manuscript than for the new testaments, there are quite a few good guidelines for doing so (just read that).

2.2.8 External Evidence Test of the Old Testament

Archeological and historical evidence for the Old Testament is more scarce than for the New Testament, but this is the case for all of history older than 2000 years. As with the New Testament we can only hope to find confirmation through direct evidence and lack of evidence to the contrary. One should, however, be aware that ancient archeological evidence is fragmentary and subject to the interpretation of the individual archeologist and to acceptance of the archeological community.

We should be careful not to claim that certain evidence “proves” the Bible, particularly when we don’t have much factual evidence and run danger of over-interpreting them. In the same way, however, we must also question evidence that seems to contradict the Bible and see what really has been found.

- Archeology confirms many specific historical accounts, e.g. of Sodom & Gomorrah , Jericho, Saul’s and David’s wars, etc.
- Although archeology is not in complete harmony with the Bible (there are still seeming contradictions, i.e. things that appear very unlikely) No historical account in the Old Testament has ever been *proven* wrong by findings.
- Historical documents confirm much of what the Bible writes The often “use” the Biblical accounts, which points to the fact that people knew about what had happened. This testifies to the truth of the earliest chapters of Genesis

: The flood is found in the Gilgamesh Epos, the tower of Babel in the Ur-Nammu monument, all of the Patriarchs are mentioned.

Note however, that the Babylonian/Sumerian accounts often *add* to the simple accounts of the Bible. This is a common thing in history even today. Simple accounts spread and become stories and later legends. People tend to add to the original to make a point and often names and other details get mixed up.

It never happens the other way around. Claims that the Old Testament writers extracted from legends are in conflict to the writing practices of these times.

Conclusion: *All available historical evidence shows that the Old Testament accounts are truthful. This makes it plausible that even the issues that we can’t check are accurately described.*²

²Note that for this argument we do not need to believe in the inspiration of the Bible

2.2.9 Internal Confirmation of the Old Testament

- Both Jesus and the New Testament writers take it for granted that the law was given by Moses and that the accounts of the Old Testament are facts.

**Mark 7:10, 10:3–5, 12:26; Luke 5:14, 16:29, 24:27; John 7:19,23
Acts 3:22, 6:14, 13:39, 15:1, 26:22, 28:23, 1. Corinthians 9:9, 2. Corinthians 3:15, Hebrews 9:19, Rev 15:3**

- Jesus confirms many passages of the Old Testament, quoting scripture and referring to Moses, the Prophets, and the writings.

All New Testament sources, the gospels, acts, epistles, and revelation, cite from the Old Testament.

Conclusion: *If we believe in the New Testament we also have to accept the Old Testament. It doesn't make sense to disregard only the Old Testament.*

So, all the evidence indicates that the *Bible is the most reliable book in history*

- Although originals are missing, we can determine its complete content
 - *We know more about the Bible than about any other historical text*
- There are no contradictions or inconsistencies
 - *No alleged contradiction has withstood the test of science*
- External evidence confirms what the Bible says
 - *Not a single description in the Bible has been proven wrong*

This means that any reason that people bring up for claiming that the the Bible inaccurate applies to *all* other historical documents as well. This means, that if you cannot trust what the Bible says then you cannot trust history at all. Scientifically it would make sense to believe in history and not in the Bible.

2.3 Is the Bible really the Word of God?

There are people who accept that the Bible is a reliable and very useful historical document but who reject the idea that it has any authority beyond that. They may accept the moral teachings of Jesus, they draw conclusions from the history of Israel and quite often develop very high ethical standards on the basis that history teaches us insights about good and bad behavior. But when it comes to claims that the Bible shows us the only way to God then they refuse, stating that no book in the world can give us that kind of knowledge. For them, the Bible was written by men and thats it.

However, knowing that the Bible is more than just a word of men is crucial when it comes to matters of faith. After all, the Bible contains not just historical facts, but also a lot of revelation about God and claims to authority about what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. It doesn't spell out all the details (**John 21:25**) but focuses on the essential issues, which in turn are sufficient for all the choices we have to make (**John 20:31**).

The Bible certainly claims to be the inspired word of God. There are plenty of explicit references to that.

All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2. Timothy 3:16).

... and the scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35b).

... your word is the truth (John 17:17b, Psalm 119:160).

Other verses are Exodus 17:14, 32:16, Leviticus 1:1, Number 1:1, Deuteronomy 31:24–26 Jeremiah 30:2, Hebrews 1:1, 2. Peter 1:21, Revelation 1:11, 10:4.

2.3.1 What is inspiration / inerrancy?

If the Bible is inspired by God, then the logical conclusion is that it must be *inerrant* – the absolute truth and free of any error. But what exactly does that mean? In what sense is it inspired – what exactly is inerrancy?

Q: *How could we define inspiration and inerrancy?*

Roughly *inerrancy* means that when all the facts are known, the Scripture in their original autographs, properly interpreted, will be shown to be completely true in *everything* they say. They are God's word and God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18).

A definition of *inspiration* is a little more difficult, as it involves imagining *how* God made sure that *men wrote exactly what God wanted them to write*. Peter tells us that holy man spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2. Peter 1:21). But what does that mean? Let us look at a few common views of that.

1. *Universal/Naturalistic inspiration*: the writers had received unusual spiritual insights from God but wrote as they determined best.

In a sense this means the Bible is the word of men without much authority.

2. *Thought (Dynamic / Concept) Inspiration*: God conveyed the general ideas, the writers chose the specific words to describe them.

This means that specific words in the Bible don't count, only the general ideas.

3. *Encounter inspiration*: reading the Bible makes us encounter God and receive insight.

This means that only the reading is inspired and there is no authority in the writings.

4. *Dictation inspiration*: God dictated every word, using the writers as stenographers.

This is in strong conflict with the fact that the personality of the authors shines through in the writings

Q: *If these are wrong, what is a correct understanding of inspiration?*

1. *Men wrote exactly what God wanted them to write.*

God made sure that the Bible does not contain errors

2. *Yet God allowed the writers to preserve their own personalities and styles.*

The Gospels emphasize different aspects of Jesus' life because they write for Jews (Matthew), Gentiles (Luke), those who want to know details (John) and those who want a quick account (Mark). Paul writes deep theology and is sometimes polemic, James is practical.

This often results in different descriptions of the same fact or teaching. Compare for instance **Matthew 16:16** with **Mark 8:29** and **Luke 9:20**.

3. *God allowed the writers to break the rules of grammar (that doesn't make the content wrong), to use figures of speech (parables, metaphors, satire **Matthew 19:24, 23:24**), to use unprecise descriptions, nonscientific language, and even unprecise records of what Jesus actually said.*

All this doesn't make any of the biblical texts wrong. The point is that God wants to bring certain messages across to the readers of His word and the above are a means to accomplish that. For instance, Jesus certainly spoke in Aramaic, so the writers had to translate into the Greek. Jesus spent hours in talking with people and the writers had to focus on the essence of what had been said. All this helps communicating an *accurate meaning* much better than accurate content could ever do.

Thus in theological terms, the inspiration of the Bible is best described as *verbal and plenary*: every word in the Bible is there because God allowed it to be there, and *each and every part* of the Bible is inspired with nothing being omitted, In other words, God ensured that the original writings were correct, complete, and consistent with his will.

This view of inspiration is most relevant when it comes to issues that cannot be checked by other means. Whereas we can validate many historical and scientific descriptions in the Bible, there are also plenty of statements about God and his dealings with mankind, matters of right and wrong, our past (creation or evolution), our future (annihilation, reincarnation, or judgment) etc. In all these areas we "only" have the Word of the Bible. If the Bible were not inspired, then all these statements wouldn't matter at all – and that is exactly how the world sees it. But since the Bible *is* inspired, accepting these statements as infallible truths makes all the difference in the world.

2.3.2 Objections to Inerrancy

People who don't believe in the authority of the Bible find the idea of inspiration and inerrancy hard to swallow and come up with all kinds of arguments why they don't have to believe that. Here are some of the objections that need to be addressed.

- *The Bible doesn't teach inerrancy – it is a recent invention.*

This objection comes from those who believe that the only purpose of the church is to exercise power and to control people. Claims to inerrancy would be a good way to accomplish this.

While it is true that the Bible nowhere states that "all scripture is inerrant", the doctrine of inerrancy is a simple logical conclusion from **2. Timothy 3:16** and **John**

17:17b (and **Hebrews 6:18**). The church has recognized right from the beginning and all claims to the contrary are unsubstantiated.

- *Inerrancy can't be true because there are errors in the Bible.*

This is a common argument, but – as we discussed a while ago – nobody could ever prove any part of the Bible wrong. There are no contradictions, no inconsistencies, and no biblical description of events where we have evidence that they didn't happen exactly as described.

- *Inerrancy is not important – so why make a big fuzz over it?*

This objection is made by those who don't want to be confronted with specific commands by God. They may accept the authority of the Bible when it comes to religious issues but when it comes to questions about how we are to live (particularly moral issues like faithfulness, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, greed, war, etc) they don't like biblical teachings to interfere with their views.

However, if the Bible itself points out in **Matthew 5:18**, **John 10:35b** that every single word in scripture is important and if the Bible teaches inerrancy, then *inerrancy is important* – and this for a good reason. If it were not, we could disregard any verse of the Bible that we don't agree with.

- *Inerrancy is true only for religious and moral issues.*

This argument is brought up by people who believe that there is a conflict between science and what the Bible teaches and who like to believe in evolution where the Bible teaches creation.

The most serious flaw in that argument is that **2. Timothy 3:16** makes no distinction between religious and moral teachings on the one hand and scientific/historical teachings on the other. It simply says “all scripture”. And in **John 3:12**, Jesus points out that we can hardly believe in heavenly things if we don't accept what the Bible says about earthly issues.

Furthermore, many of the biblical teachings cannot be associated with only one of the two sides. For instance, Jesus' teaching on divorce in **Matthew 19:14** is closely tied to his affirmation of creation. And how shall we separate the historical and the spiritual in the resurrection accounts?

Again, if we accept this view, we could disregard any verse of the Bible that we don't agree with, so it is pretty much equivalent to not believing in the Bible at all.

- Believing in inerrancy is *arguing in circles*: you believe in inerrancy because the Bible teaches it, and you believe what the Bible teaches because you believe in inerrancy.

This is a serious objection that must be properly addressed.

2.3.3 Evidence for the Inspiration of the Bible

As discussed above, the Bible itself assures that it is inspired in a verbal and plenary. For the believer, it is sufficient that the Bible says so. This confirms their trust in God's word. But for others, this is arguing in circles. They need "external" evidence, pointing to the fact that there is something so special to the Bible that it *must* have been inspired by God – since it is hard to explain these issues otherwise.

There are two kinds of evidence for the inspiration of the Bible – the fact that it is *special* among all the books ever written and the fact that it has *supernatural content*.

We discussed the uniqueness of the Bible already, so let us briefly review that.

- An astonishing unity despite being written over 1500 years by 40 very different authors.
- An incredible circulation both concerning the number of copies and the number of languages into which it is translated.
- Its impact on literature and civilization
- Its survival through time, persecution, and attempts to disregard it
- Its incredible factual accuracy

All these are indicators that there is something special about the Bible – something that only God could have caused. But there is more evidence to the fact that the Bible is from God.

1. Astonishing evidence: Scientific foreknowledge. The Bible contains accurate scientific information about things that the writers could not have known. Some of these concern fairly recent scientific discoveries or insights, so even a skeptic’s dating of biblical sources can’t explain this type of evidence away.

Astronomy: In **Isaiah 40:22** we read “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth”. The Hebrew word Isaiah used for *circle* is the word *khug*, which means literally something with roundness, a sphere. But the people of Isaiah’s day thought the Earth was flat – actually they did so until the late middle ages, 2000 years after Isaiah was written. Later it was discovered that the Earth was not flat; rather it was a khug. Isaiah had been correct all along, even when the people of his day emphatically stated the opposite. In **Job 38:31,33** God asks Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades - can you loose the cords of Orion? . . . Do you know the laws of the heavens?. For a long time people didn’t really know what God was trying to tell Job here. Only in the 20th century astronomers discovered details about the stars that we see as constellations in the sky. And in fact, the Pleiades are just a bunch of stars that appear to be in the same spot in the universe – but in reality they are extremely far away from each other and not connected at all: you can’t bind them together because there are lots of other stars “in between”. In contrast to that the stars in Orion are quite close to each other, and in fact linked in the sense that they move along the same path through space.

Oceanography: In **Ecclesiastes 1:7** we read All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place where the streams come from there they return again. This statement, considered by itself, may not seem profound at first glance. But when considered with additional evidence and other biblical passages, it becomes all the more remarkable. **Ecclesiastes 11:3a** states that if the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth. **Amos 9:6b** tells us that He...calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the Lord is His name.

What is explained here is what science calls the *hydrologic cycle*: water is dumped into the ocean, condenses into clouds, which bring rain mostly to the mountains, from where the water then flows back into rivers and into the oceans. The idea of a complete

water cycle was not fully understood or accepted until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first substantial evidence came from experiments of Pierre Perrault and Edme Mariotte. More than 2,000 years prior to their work, however, the Scriptures had indicated a water cycle.

God told Noah in **Genesis 6:15** to build an ark that measured 300 cubits in length, 50 cubits in width, and 30 cubits in height. This is a ratio of 30 to 5 to 3, length to breadth to height. Until approximately 1858 the ark was the largest seagoing vessel of which we have any written record. As it turns out, the dimensions 30:5:3 are the perfect ratio for a huge boat built for *seaworthiness* and not for speed. In fact, shipbuilders during World War II used that 30:5:3 ratio to build the boat that eventually was nicknamed the ugly duckling a barge-like boat built to carry tremendous amounts of cargo. It had the same ratio as the ark.

How did Noah know the perfect seagoing ratio to use in building the ark? Upon whose knowledge did he draw? Brunel and others like him had many generations of shipbuilding knowledge upon which to draw, but Noah's literally was the first of its kind.

Medicine: Moses told the Israelites (**Leviticus 17:11-14**) that the life of the flesh is in the blood. He was correct. Because the red blood cells can carry oxygen (due to hemoglobin in the cells) life is made possible. We know today that the life of the flesh is in the blood. But we didn't know that 200 years ago. People felt that the blood was where evil vapors were found, and that getting rid of the blood would make a person well again. Today, of course, we know that is not true. Think of how often blood transfusions have made life possible for those who otherwise would have died. Today we know the truth of the matter. How did the biblical writer know it?

While the Old Testament placed no restrictions on the eating of fruits and vegetables, severe limitations were given for the eating of certain meats. Among land animals, only those that had a split hoof and chewed the cud were approved as edible (**Leviticus 11:3**). Of the water-living animals, only those with fins and scales were acceptable (**Leviticus 11:9**; of interest is the fact that poisonous fish have no scales). Birds of prey were prohibited, as were almost all insects.

Perhaps the best known among these biblical injunctions was eating the meat of a pig. To the Jew, pork was considered unclean, and thus was inedible. Today, we know there is good scientific reasoning behind such a prohibition. The pig is a scavenger and will eat almost anything. In so doing, on occasion it ingests the parasite, *Trichinella spiralis*, which is the cause of trichinosis in humans. Left untreated, this disease can be debilitating and even deadly. Pigs also are known carriers of the tapeworm *Taenia solium*, and of the parasite *Echinococcus granulosus*, which causes tumors in the liver, lungs, and other parts of the body.

Raw or undercooked pork can be quite dangerous when consumed by humans. Pigs can provide safe meat if they are fed properly and if the muscle tissue is cooked correctly. But even then it is not as safe as beef or lamb (there is plenty of research about the long-term side effects of eating too much pork). Interestingly, even today in some

countries (like Germany) raw pork is considered a delicacy in spite of the knowledge we possess about the potential dangers of eating it. It's human arrogance, believing that by extremely strict laws (8 hour limit from grinding to selling), proper investigation of the raw meat, irradiation etc. you can avoid all problems.

Hygiene: In **Deuteronomy 23:12-14**, Moses instructed the Israelites always to bury human waste products. Today, of course, with centuries of experience behind us, we know that this is an excellent sanitary hygienic practice. But the common course of action in Moses day, and for centuries to follow, was to dump waste products in any convenient place.

History has recorded the folly of this kind of action. In Europe, during the Middle Ages, Black Plague swept over the continent on two different occasions, slaughtering more than 13 million people in the process. Europeans routinely dumped waste of all kinds out their windows and into the public streets where decomposition took place and microorganisms flourished.

One of those microorganisms the one we know today as *Yersinia pestis* grew in the waste products and contaminated the fleas associated with those waste products. The fleas, using rats as their hosts, subsequently traveled into the people's houses. Once inside a dwelling, the fleas then jumped from the rats onto the humans, biting them and infecting them with the plague organism. As this cycle was repeated over and over, millions perished. Yet if the people simply had obeyed God's injunction, as given by Moses to the Israelites, all of the death and horror of two separate epidemics could have been avoided. How did Moses know to instruct the Israelites regarding such public health hygiene laws, when none of the nations surrounding God's people enlisted such practices and would not for centuries?

Of course, there are still a lot of people claiming that we read too much into these passages (the Hebrew is pretty unique here), that the text's were written much later than we believe (we refuted that), that this was common knowledge at the time (absolutely no evidence), or that it was just a lucky guess (one, two – but over and over again?).

But all these claims only express that they don't like to look at evidence that could contradict their belief system – while they have no problems accepting a scientifically unproven and even unlikely theory like evolution theory. Occasionally, however, people's eyes get opened by looking at the fact, they get curious and check the Bible out — and then the Word speaks to them by itself.

2. Strong Evidence: Predictive Prophecies. But there is more evidence than just scientific foreknowledge. In **Isaiah 41:21-23** God himself issues a challenge:

Present your case, says the Lord. Set forth your arguments, says Jacob's King. Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know that you are gods.

One of the most impressive internal proofs of the Bible's inspiration is its prophetic utterances. It is the highest evidence of divine revelation. The one thing that mortal man cannot do is to know and report future events in the absence of a train of circumstances that naturally suggest certain possibilities. So if the Bible is inspired of God, one would expect it to contain valid, predictive prophecy.

And in fact, this is what we find. The Bible contains prophecies about individuals, lands, nations, and even the predicted Messiah. Its prophecy — completely foretold to the minutest detail, and painstakingly fulfilled with the greatest precision — has confounded its critics for generations.

Q: But what is prophecy? What should we require to make sure it's genuine?

1. First, it must be a specific, detailed declaration, as opposed to being nebulous, vague, or general in nature like today's psychics, astrologers, or horoscopes to which so many people fall trap. There shall be no possibility of accounting by shrewd guesswork for the accuracy of the fulfillment. It must be more than a good guess or a conjecture. It must possess sufficient precision as to be capable of verification by means of the fulfillment.
2. The prophecy must be stated in clear, understandable terms. Prophecies must be sufficiently clear in order for the observer to be able to link pronouncement with fulfillment. If a prophecy is not understandable enough so as to allow the observer to depict its fulfillment, then what good would the prophecy be?
3. There must be a sufficient amount of time between the prophetic statement and its fulfillment. Suggestions as to what might happen in the future do not qualify as prophetic pronouncements. Rather, the prophecy must precede the fulfillment in a significant fashion, and there must be no chance whatsoever of the prophet having the ability to influence the outcome.
4. True prophecy should not be based on past (or current) societal or economic conditions. There should have been nothing in previous history which makes it possible to forecast a like event in the future.
5. A clear, understandable, exact prophecy must have a clear, understandable, exact fulfillment. It is not enough to suggest that a certain event came true with a high degree of probability. The fulfillment must be unmistakable, and must match the prophecy in every detail. (**Deuteronomy 18:20-22**)

So, does the Bible employ predictive prophecy? And if it does, can the predictive prophecy be proven true? The answer to both questions is a resounding yes. The Bible contains numerous (more than 6000) prophetic predictions. Many of these are fulfilled already and this to the precisest detail – others are still open for the future, and none ever failed.

Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any. (**Isaiah 44:8**)

Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. (**Isaiah 48:6-8**)

Consider just a few brief examples.

1. The Bible foretells the destruction of the city of Tyre with miraculous precision. Ezekiel predicted that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would destroy the city (Ezekiel 26:7-8). Many nations were to come up against Tyre (26:3). The city would be leveled and scraped clean like a bare rock (26:4). The city's stones, timbers, and soil would be cast into the sea (26:12). The surrounding area would become a place for the spreading of fishermen's nets (26:5). And, finally, the city never would be rebuilt to its former glory (26:14).

History records that each of these predictions came true. Tyre, a coastal city from ancient times, had a somewhat unusual arrangement. In addition to the inland city, there was an island about three-fourths of a mile offshore. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the mainland city in 586 B.C., but when he finally was able to inhabit the city in about 573 B.C., his victory was hollow. Unbeknownst to him, the inhabitants had vacated the city and moved to the island a situation that remained virtually unchanged for the next 241 years. Then, in 332 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered the city but not with ease. To get to the island, he literally had his army scrape clean the inland city of its debris, and he then used those materials (stones, timbers, and soil) to build a causeway to the island. But even though Alexander inflicted severe damage on the city, it still remained intact. In fact, it waxed and waned for the next 1,600 years until finally, in A.D. 1291, the Muslims thoroughly crushed Tyre.

2. King Josiah had his life's work foretold (his name even being provided within the prophetic utterance) more than three hundred years before he was born (1 Kings 13:2).
3. The Old Testament contains more than three hundred Messianic prophecies. Testimony about Jesus was the chief purpose of prophecy. To him all the prophets gave witness (**Acts 10:43**). Here is a brief list of some key prophecies and their fulfillment
 - (a) born of the seed of a woman (**Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4**)
 - (b) born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:22-24**)
 - (c) of the seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah (**Genesis 22:18, Genesis 21:12, Numbers 24:7, Genesis 49:10; Matthew 1:1-3, Luke 3:32-34**)
 - (d) son of God (**Psalms 2:7; Matthew 3:17, Luke 9:35**)
 - (e) of the royal lineage of David (**2 Samuel 7:12, Jeremiah 23:5; Luke 1:32, 3:23, 3:31**)
 - (f) born in Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1**)
 - (g) shall be called Lord (**Psalms 110:1; Luke 2:11, Jeremiah 23:5**)

- (h) a king (**Psalm 2:6, Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 27:37**)
- (i) zeal for God (**Psalm 69:9; John 2:15–17**)
- (j) Proceeded by a messenger (**Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23**)
- (k) Miracles (**Isaiah 35:5–6; Matthew 9:35** and man others)
- (l) During the Roman reign (**Daniel 2:40,44; Luke 2:1**)³
- (m) Betrayed by a friend (**Psalm 41:9; Matthew 26:14,49**)
- (n) For 30 pieces of silver (**Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15**)
- (o) Money thrown into the house of God (**Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:5**)
- (p) Used to buy the Potter's field (**Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:7**)
- (q) Silent before his accusers (**Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:26**)
- (r) Hands and feet pierced (**Psalm 2:16; Luke 23:33, John 20:25**)
- (s) Hated without cause (**Psalm 69:4; John 15:25**)
- (t) Garments parted ad lots cast (**Psalm 22:18; John 19:23–24**)
- (u) Bones not broken (**Psalm 34:20; John 19:33**)
- (v) Side pierced (**Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34**)
- (w) Darkness over the land (**Amos 8:9; Matthew 27:45**)
- (x) Buried with the rich (**Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57–60**)
- (y) Would not see decay (**Psalm 16:10; Matthew 28:6, Acts 2:31**)
- (z) Ascended into heaven (**Psalm 68:18; Acts 1:9**)

Time and again biblical prophecies are presented, and fulfilled, with exacting detail. **Jeremiah 28:9** wrote: when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that Jehovah hath truly sent him.

While skeptics may disregard the uniqueness as a sign that the Bible is from God, they have a hard time explaining its supernatural content. That doesn't mean you can convince them with these hard facts, but at least you can force them to reconsider their own position. They may give you some lame excuses why they don't want to accept the evidence you presented (after all it would require a major shift in their world view to accept it) but there is a chance that they will think about it later and begin changing their views.

³Actually the prophecies in **Daniel 9:24–26, Nehemiah 2:1–8** are precise enough to predict the time-frame AD 30–33

3 Jesus – More than just a great Teacher?

The person of Jesus is the most central aspect of our Christian faith. Without Jesus, there would be no salvation. Without Jesus, there is no way to God. Jesus is the way and the truth – and the only way and the only truth.

Because of this, the person of Jesus is one of the most disputed issues when it comes to matters of faith, beliefs, and religion. While most people believe in some form of deity – often with a very vague understanding what that should mean – only a few believe in Jesus the same way we do. You may make up your own image of what God could be – the fact that there are so many religions in the world proves that – but with Jesus there is no more ambiguity. The Bible describes very clearly who he is, what he has said and done, and most of all his atoning death on the cross. You can either believe that or not – there is no middle ground, no zone in between where you may believe “a little”, you either accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, or you don’t.

This is what makes true Christianity so narrow-minded in the eyes of the world. “*how can you believe that there is just one way to God? How can you claim that you have the truth and I don’t?*”. Jesus never came to unify the world – he came to save people. And because of this “either / or”, there is no room for mixing Christianity with any other belief. If Jesus is the truth and the only truth, then every other belief must be wrong. This sounds intolerant – but so is any other law of nature.

Many people, including some that call themselves Christians, have tried to circumvent the person of Jesus by diminishing him in some way, posing questions that express doubt about who he was or deny his relevance. You find an incredible amount of things that people claim about Jesus, but most of them are a variation of but a few fundamental lies that Satan tries to sow among humankind.

1. *Jesus never existed*
 - He is just a fictional person
 - Even if Jesus existed, we don’t know anything about him
2. *Jesus is not God*
 - Jesus was just a great teacher and preacher
 - Jesus never claimed to be God (the Bible doesn’t say so)
 - Jesus was an idealist who believed to be God
 - Jesus misled people by deliberately fulfilling the key prophecies about the Messiah
3. *Jesus was never resurrected*
 - He never died in the first place
 - He died but was made to disappear
4. *Salvation through Jesus is a lie*
 - There is no resurrection of the dead, no eternal life (life ends with death)
 - Everyone is going to heaven, I don’t have to believe in Jesus for that
 - A loving God will not condemn me just because I don’t believe in Jesus
 - I don’t need salvation because my good deeds outweigh the bad
 - I am a good person

5. *The whole issue is way to complicated – I don't understand so I can't believe*
 - Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't God just forgive us and forget it?
 - Why death and resurrection?

How do we answer these questions?

Well, we spent more than two months on presenting evidence that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and thus is the final authority for all these questions. It tells us all about Jesus, all about who we are, our nature, and our destiny. Where it makes statements about salvation and Jesus, we can be sure that this is so, so we can draw most of our answers directly from the Bible.

In addition to that there are extra-biblical sources that confirm the Biblical account of Jesus. We don't need these sources, since we know already that the Bible is true, but it helps people who doubt to look at these as well – even if you already established the reliability of the Bible.

3.1 Salvation

But before we look at the historical person of Jesus, let us deal with the issue of salvation as such, that is the last two questions. Why do we need salvation and why can't it happen any other way than the way that God provided? In the coming weeks we will then look at Jesus as a historical person, prove that Jesus is in fact God, and finally show that resurrection is a fact and not just a crooked belief of a few misguided Christians.

3.1.1 Why do we need salvation?

What does the Bible say about us? What is our nature? Are we good? Do we need salvation or not? And if we do, why?

- *We were created perfectly but do not live up to it*
 - So God created man in his own image (Genesis 1:27)
 - All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)
 - There is no-one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10)

There is no exception, we have all sinned, we cannot keep God's law perfectly. The Bible says so, but there is even stronger evidence if we dare to scrutinize our own life. If we *evaluate our own life honestly and thoroughly we simply know that this is true*. No one who ever did this will ever be able to say again that he is basically a good person. This insight is very difficult to bear, and the next one is even worse.

- *We're responsible for what we do – there is no excuse ... so we must face the consequences*
 - For the wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23a)
 - Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27)
 - They will be punished with everlasting destruction (2. Thessalonians 1:9)

We cannot undo our offenses once they are done and a holy God cannot tolerate sin in His presence. *God cannot just let anybody go to heaven* and pollute a holy

environment. This is just against his very nature. So everlasting destruction is the only possible consequence. The Bible is very clear – *life doesn't end with death* but there will be everlasting destruction. *Not annihilation* but eternal destruction. The Bible isn't very specific about what that exactly means, but we can be sure that this will be a horrible existence, separated from God - the very essence of our being – an agony without end.

Isn't that a bit too much for a small sin? That again would be a longer issue to discuss, but quite pointless. God knows what is just and if he says that this is the only just penalty, then this is so. Let's leave it at that, since otherwise we would spend days trying to find out why this is just. We may come up with partial explanations, but in the end we have to trust God in that.

- *God desires to save us*

– ... but the gift of God is eternal life

(Romans 6:23b)

The point is that although God is just, he also loves us and wants to spare us the consequences of our sins. However, he has to do so without becoming unjust.

3.1.2 If you were God, how would you save mankind?

God found a way for us to escape that judgment. A way that is both loving and just. Some people say, the way he did it is too complicated for them to understand, so they either reject it or believe without ever understanding.

This doesn't have to be so because, after all, *God is very logical too*. So, just for the sake of argument, how would you save mankind if you were God?

Well, let us look at the situation and what it demands.

- *Justice requires a penalty for sin*

– Sin is real – you can't just ignore it and let things happen

God *cannot just forget everything* – transgression without penalty would invite people to sin even more. After all, there is no penalty, so why restrain myself?

That doesn't work – there have to be consequences.

- *We are not capable to save ourselves*

– Good deeds don't outweigh the bad, so the penalty must be paid

The dilemma is, that we can't save ourselves from the consequences. Once we have sinned, we can't undo it. Some people believe they can work their way out of that problem, with *good deeds outweighing the bad*. But that simply doesn't work. It doesn't even make sense. Let me illustrate why:

Just imagine you had run a red light and injured a pedestrian who was just crossing the street. So you show up in court and tell the judge "I promise, from now on I will obey all the traffic rules. And besides, I am a volunteer firefighter. So would you please let me go without penalty". What do you think the judge would answer?

Probably something like “It’s nice that you want to obey all the traffic rules from now on, but that is what you were supposed to do in the first place. And although I appreciate what you do for your community, that doesn’t help the person you hit with your car.”

Or imagine that you – God forbid – cheat on your wife and tell her “I can’t let go of that other woman, but I promise to bring you flowers and other gifts every day”. Would that solve the problem?

- *Love desires to save us*

- The penalty is adequate but more than we can bear
- So someone must be willing to pay the penalty for us

God saw the dilemma right away. He knew that we can’t save ourselves and that the penalty is more than we can bear. But God also loves us and he doesn’t want us to go through that. What can he do?

For our finite minds that is a problem that is extremely difficult to solve. For us it is almost impossible to be loving and just at the same time. So we usually chose one or the other. We try to be loving to the offender, drop the issue and let things happen – forgetting that this is unfair and unloving to the victims. Or we cry for justice, severe punishment, and revenge – forgetting that the offender is still a weak human being.

So the penalty must be there, but it cannot be on us. So who can take it instead? There must be a substitute, willing to take the penalty instead of us. Justice is done and we are spared.

... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23b)

- *Who is capable of paying the price for all of us?*

- It must be a human who is free from all sin
- It must be God

- *So God had to become man*

- so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:28)

It must be a human, because only a human can substitute for what humans must receive and only a human is capable of dying. That person must be free from all sin himself, since otherwise he can only pay for his own sin. It must be God, because only God can carry the sin of all people.

This is why Jesus had to die for us – there is no other way to do it.

So God had to become man and in fact, this is what happened

Q: *Does that mean that everyone is saved now?*

This is clearly not the case. According to **John 3:17–18** those who refuse Christ stand condemned already. Why is this so? Why does something “insignificant” such as believing or not make all the difference in the world?

God doesn't force us to come to him. We're all invited, but if we don't come, we have to stay outside (**Luke 14:16–21, Matthew 22:2–10**). God cannot accept anything unholy in heaven and as long as we don't receive his forgiveness, we're not fit to enter his kingdom.

As an illustration: would you enter into a marriage with someone who at the time to make wedding vows answers only with "maybe", or "no, I don't believe in making a commitment"?

3.1.3 If God became man – what would we expect?

Now if God became man, we would have to expect certain things. There must be something special so that everyone can see what has happened.

- *A unique entry into human history* **Matthew 1:18,24-25**
 - Virgin birth is evidence that God took a role in his conception

- *A perfect life without sin* **Hebrews 4:15**
 - Otherwise he wouldn't be able to pay for *our* sins.
 - Overcoming our own failings by resisting temptation
 - Setting an example for us

- *Speaking the greatest words ever spoken* **Matthew 13:54b**
 - Teachings that have a lasting and universal influence
 - Comforting words that satisfy the spiritual hunger of humanity

- *Supernatural acts as evidence for his deity* **John 11:38–44**
 - Miracles of love and healing, not show-effects

- *Overcoming our most feared enemy – death* **Matthew 28:5–6**
 - He must go through death and be buried to prove it
 - He must rise from death and prove that he is alive

These expectations explain why the Bible stresses certain facts. The *virgin birth is important*, not just a stumbling stone for those who doubt. *Miracles were important* both as evidence and as signs of his love for people. *Death and resurrection are necessary* to prove that there is victory over death.

And the most important thing is – this is exactly what happened: the Bible says For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)

Next time we will talk about Jesus – the man that we saw here on earth and the fact that he was more than just a man.

3.2 Jesus: Man and God

Now that we have established our need for salvation and that God had to become a man to pay the penalty for our sin himself, we have to ask ourselves – did that really happen. Did the promised Messiah already appear or do we still have to wait for God to come down to earth and save us, as the Jews believe.

Is Jesus the promised Messiah, the Son of God, God and man at the same time? Or was he just an ordinary person – exceptionally gifted, but still just a human being? Did he exist at all or is he just a myth, invented centuries after the fact, as some theologians want to make us believe today.

So, today we're going to look at the person of Jesus. What do we know about him? Let us first look at the man Jesus and then at the question whether he was really God.

3.2.1 Was Jesus a Historical Person?

For us as Christians the question is not so much whether Jesus really existed – we have no doubt about that – but what evidence we have for our belief. Well, there is plenty of evidence from a variety of different sources

The Bible gives clear evidence for Jesus' existence. The gospels describe his birth and date it at the time of the Roman census decreed by Caesar Augustus (**Luke 2:1–7**) and in the last years of Herod the Great (**Matthew 2:1, 19**). They describe his life, acts, and teachings at great length. Luke points out (**Luke 3:23**) that he was about 30 years old, when he began his public ministry. John tells us (**John 2:20**) that this was in the 46th year of the construction of the temple (roughly AD 26). The events of his public ministry span about three years. All gospels describe his death on the cross at the beginning of the Jewish Passover, while Pilate was the Roman governor. All four gospels clearly describe that he rose on the third day.

For a Christian that should be enough evidence for the fact that Jesus was a real person. After all, we have established that the Bible is absolutely reliable when it comes to historical events. But for the sceptic, there is more – evidence from outside Christianity.

Secular historians make especially good witnesses for the fact that Jesus was a historical person. No one can claim that they made it up for reasons of their own, because they have nothing to gain from that. Secular historians have nothing to do with Christianity and are often even opposed to it. Nevertheless, many of the early Roman historians refer to him as a real person.

As early as AD 52, *Thallus* wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean from the Trojan wars to his own time. In his third book he was trying to explain a sudden darkness that enveloped the land in the afternoon at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. Thallus doubts neither of the two events, but he tries to find a naturalistic explanation (solar eclipse), which however doesn't work out (it's the time of a full moon).

Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55–120) is generally viewed as the greatest historian of ancient Rome, known for his integrity and accuracy. His *Annals*, one of his two most acclaimed works, cover the period from Augustus' death in AD 14 to the time of Nero (AD 68). They mention the existence of Christians in Rome and allude to the death of Christ under Pontius Pilate to explain who they are.

Plinius, governor in Asia Minor in AD 112, writes to the Roman emperor to seek counsel how to treat Christians, since there were so many that he was putting to death.

He as well tries to explain their belief and points out that he found it impossible to force them to curse this Christ (as a means to humiliate them), even if it cost them their lives.

These are just three examples of Roman writers who view Christianity as some mischievous superstition but nevertheless attest to the existence of Christ.

Jewish References to Jesus Christ certainly cannot be accused of being biased in favor of Christianity. The Jews still don't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They have no reason to write about him if he wasn't a real person.

Yet *the Talmud* clearly refers to him and his crucifixion on the eve of Passover and the fact that the Jewish authorities were involved in this. It mentions 5 of his disciples by name. It mocks him as "Son of the virgin", pointing out that was not the son of Mary's husband.

Flavius Josephus (AD 37–100), the famous Jewish historian, wrote about Jesus in his *Jewish Antiquities*. He refers to his family, his teaching, his crucifixion under Pilate, and that Christians believe in his resurrection.

Non-biblical Christian Sources write about Jesus as early as AD 30–50. They provide the earliest testimony to the conviction that Jesus actually lived, died, and rose again. It is believed that many of the writers of the New Testament, particularly Luke and Paul, have read some of the material and used it in their writings.

These early witnesses paid with their lives for what they said, so they certainly had no reason to make it up.

First and second century writers provide additional testimony. People like Eusebius, Papias, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus (about AD 130) confirm the biblical account. For them this was recent history and there was a chain of witnesses from the time of Jesus to them, which they could track down.

Other Historical Evidence: just recently, people have found an ossuary used for burying only during the first and second century. It's inscription mentions James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus. The latter is highly unusual, because one hardly mentions a brother, so this brother must have been very important. Most scholars believe that this is one of the strongest historical evidences for the fact that Jesus lived exactly in the time and family that the Bible describes.

3.2.2 Was Jesus God?

People confronted with the above evidence may admit that Jesus really existed, but will then go on to say that was just a man, not God. They state that he never claimed to be God, or that he deliberately misled people, or that he himself believed to be God but obviously was not. Can there be any truths to these arguments?

Did Jesus claim to be God or not?

- The gospels record many statements where Jesus claimed to be God,
– e.g. **Mark 14:61–64**, **John 8:24,58; 10:30**

It is not the case that we just read this into his statements. The Jews understood these claims very well and even tried to kill him for that.

- **John 10:33**, also compare **John 8:24,58** with **Exodus 3:14**
- **John 5:18** even spells this out for us
- Jesus made a lot of indirect claims too:
 - forgiving sins (**Mark 2:5–7**),
 - claiming to be life (**John 14:6**),
 - claiming to judge the world (**John 5:26–27**)
- Jesus allowed himself to be worshiped (**Matthew 14:33**, which is reserved for God
– compare this with **Acts 10:25–26**, **Revelation 19:10**)
- Jesus was willing to die for his claims (**John 19:7**)

So Jesus clearly claimed to be God and everyone at the time understood this very well. The question is now – was he who he claimed to be? Just for the sake of argument, let us assume he was not. Then he either knew that he was telling a lie or he was sincerely deluded about who he was. We will show that both alternatives cannot be true.

Could it be that the claims were false and Jesus knew this?

To answer this question, let us put aside what we as Christians know about Jesus and apply common sense reasoning that is accessible to unbelievers too. If Jesus knew that his claims would be false, what does this tell us about his person?

- He would be a *hypocrite*, because he was telling others to be honest whatever the cost, while at the same time living a colossal lie.
- We would even have to say that he is *evil*, deliberately telling others to trust in him for their eternal destiny, while knowing that they would be doomed if they did.
- He would also be a *fool*, because he knew he would die for his claims (**John 19:7**) and never stopped provoking the Jews.

Could all this be the case? After all, we know that he was a *great teacher and preacher* with profound insights. He did not just give moral instruction but practiced what he told in all areas that we can observe. He even forgave his enemies while dying at the cross (**Luke 23:34**). Can an evil, foolish deceiver actually set such a powerful example in all areas of his life and still consciously lie about his most important teaching?

It is *not very likely*, because there is no human being on this planet who consciously can live such a strong contradiction. His disciples were with him for three full years. At some point or the other they would have discovered that there is something wrong about him.

And it *doesn't even make sense*. Jesus had nothing to gain from lying about his true nature. He didn't want to be made king, he allowed himself to be tried and sentenced to death

for this lie. He kept silent all the time. What could he possibly gain from going through with that lie to the very end and dying at the cross? If he knew he was wrong he would have given up at some point and saved his life.

Could it be that Jesus was just sincerely deluded about who he was?

So, if Jesus didn't consciously lie about who he was — maybe he was really a good person, very idealistic, actually believing he was God, but surely wrong about it. After all, it is possible to be both sincere and wrong.

But, we have to keep in mind that Jesus lived in a fiercely monotheistic society. So telling others that he was God couldn't just have been a harmless fantasy of an otherwise very rational person. Even today we would consider everyone who claims to be God to be severely deluded and not quite right in his mind. But at Jesus' time these claims would have indicated *lunacy* in the fullest sense. After all he faced constant opposition and still went through with his claims.

Could it be that Jesus was just *insane*?

Again, let us look at the rest of Jesus' life. Since the Bible records so many things that Jesus had said, we know that his words were full of *practical wisdom and deep insights* into the human nature. We know that his words made people feel at home and were full of *authority* (**Matthew 13:54b**). People noticed that he had power. He showed deep *love and concern* for other people. Furthermore he was astonishingly *creative and quite unpredictable*.

No lunatic has ever possessed any of these qualities. If you're insane in one aspect of your thinking, then this certainly affects other areas too. No way that you can see only power, wisdom, practical thinking, authority, love, *and* creativity in such a person. Even a schizophrenic person cannot hide his insanity all the time. Someone who is close will eventually see that.

If Jesus was insane, then at some point or time this would have become evident to others. After all his disciples, all down-to-earth men, followed him for three years and believed in what he said (**Matthew 16:13–16**). They certainly didn't see anything.

Do we have evidence for his deity?

So, common sense reasoning tells us that Jesus could not have been wrong in his claims to be God. And since we know for sure that he made these claims, there is only one logical conclusion, which is that *Jesus actually is God*.

But we don't have to stop here. There is also plenty of evidence for his deity.

- The *New Testament writers* say he is God
 - God himself testifies in **Luke 3:22**
 - Peter: **Matthew 16:15–18, Acts 2:36, 2. Peter 1:1**
 - Paul: **Romans 9:5, Phillipians 2:6, Colossians 1:15–17; 2:9, Titus 2:13**
 - Thomas the Apostle: **John 20:28**
 - **Mark 1:1, Hebrews 1:3,8, John 1:1,14; 1. John 5:20**
- There is also *external evidence* for his deity.

We know that more than 300 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus – such as the virgin birth, Bethlehem, Davidic line, the triumphal entry, His death on the cross, and his resurrection. We talked about that extensively.

It was a well-established fact that these prophecies referred to the Messiah. The link wasn't established after the fact but was common knowledge among scholars (**Matthew 2:5–6**).

The gospels record *many miracles* as evidence for his authority. He healed people, fed multitudes, walked on water, calmed a storm, raised people from the dead – no human being ever had this power.

Summary: All the above considerations leave only one conclusion. Since
– Jesus *claims to be God* and it is impossible that he was lying on purpose or was deluded,
– the Bible, which we already established as infallible Word of God, says he *is* God, and
– there is plenty of evidence for his deity,
there is only one possibility: **Jesus is God**

3.3 Resurrection: Hoax or History?

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

If the dead are not raised “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”.

(1. Corinthians 15:12–14,17–19,32)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to our hope in eternal life. Without resurrection, our faith is pointless. Why worry about an afterlife that doesn't happen? If there is no resurrection, there will be no judgment and no eternal life. We don't have to fear punishment and we can't gain anything.

People who do not believe in the resurrection have no reason to live according to God's word. Even Paul says so. It doesn't make sense to resist our human nature if there is no afterlife. If we cling to a hope that is not true, we are truly to be pitied – and this is how many unbelievers look at Christianity. Christianity is boring and takes away all the fun. We restrain ourselves for nothing. Why shouldn't we simply enjoy life in the fullest – after all, this is all we got!

There are people who believe that Jesus Christ was a real person. They even believe that he is God – but they still cannot accept resurrection as a fact. It is too fantastic to be true. For them, the Christian claim that there is life after death is one of the most wicked hoaxes foisted upon the minds of men. Christianity lets people hope in something that will never happen and forego all the joys of life for this empty hope. And they are right in seeing it that way ... if there is no resurrection.

3.3.1 Why is *physical resurrection* so important?

As Paul explained in **1. Corinthians 15**, the resurrection of the saints is one of the key pillars of our Christian faith. Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:32–36**) is wholly and entirely founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection is evidence for the fact that Jesus has overcome death and opened the door to eternal life. Jesus himself had predicted his death and resurrection as sign (**Matthew 12:38–40, 16:21, 17:9, 17:22–23, 20:18–19**) and the Jews very well remembered this after his crucifixion (**Matthew 27:62–65**). Old Testament prophecies pointed to the resurrection as a sign of the Messiah (**Psalms 16:10**).

The fact that the grave could not keep Jesus proves several things. First, *he is the Messiah*. Second, he has the power to do everything he promised, even through death, which again proves that *he is God*. Third, the *resurrection of the saints*, at this time already questioned by the Sadducees, *is a fact*, not a myth. Furthermore, it was the cause for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which would come to believers permanently after Jesus had left this earth.

Without the resurrection it would have been impossible to establish the Kingly position of Jesus. Up to the day of His resurrection, even his disciples considered him a mere man, although unusual and with exceptional powers from God. Even they hadn't fully understood the significance of all he did and said. And when Jesus was crucified, they thought that all was lost. They didn't understand the necessity of His death as atonement for our sins and nobody else would have believed that if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead again and shown himself to hundreds of witnesses.

If you don't believe in resurrection, it is hard to put your trust in Jesus. After all, you have nothing to hope for. That is why people who reject the possibility of miracles and supernatural events (and try to explain them away), cannot fully accept Jesus – let alone commit their life to Him – unless God changes their hearts.

Some people imagine resurrection to be something that happens only to the soul or the spirit. However, if Jesus hadn't risen in the same physical body that was placed in the tomb, then His resurrection would lose its value as proof for the three things mentioned above. Without a physical resurrection we would have no evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead. If he had appeared to his apostles without the physical body they knew – how should they have known it was him and not some apparition, ghost (**Luke 24:37**), or imagination?

So, for the Christian it is important to know that Jesus did in fact rise in bodily form. If he rose as he promised, then we can be raised from the dead as well and life doesn't end with the physical death. Christ's resurrection justifies our hope in eternal life and this makes all the difference in the world.

3.3.2 Is resurrection for real?

So, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important for our faith, can we know for sure that it really happened? Do we have any evidence for that?

Fortunately, all four gospels record what happened on the third day (**John 20:1–8**). A few women, among them Mary Magdalene, went to the tomb early in the morning and found

it empty. Peter, John, and some other apostles checked it out and saw that the grave was in fact empty. For John that was proof enough – he saw and believed.

Q: But does an empty grave really prove that Jesus rose from the dead?

We believe so. But people have come up with all kinds of other explanations to circumvent the claim that Jesus actually rose from the dead. They accept the story that the grave was empty, but still say that Jesus was never resurrected. For them, this is just a myth that people constructed out of the real events. “People don’t come back from the dead”, they say, “so there must be some other explanation for the empty grave”. There are a few typical arguments that we may run into.

1. Jesus never died in the first place – it just seemed that he was dead.
2. He died, but somebody removed his body from the grave. This is probably the most popular theory, which got started by the Jewish authorities right after the resurrection (**Matthew 27:62–65, 28:11–15**).
3. The women, and subsequently everybody else went to the wrong tomb.
4. He rose from the dead, but not in bodily form – so his body still decayed.
5. The testimony of the witnesses is not valid. All of Christ’s post-resurrection appearances were just hallucinations.

We will discuss each of these arguments more specifically after we have looked at the factual evidence. But they tell us what we need to be able to prove. To show that Jesus was really resurrected from the dead, we have to find evidence that he was really dead in the first place, that his body didn’t just disappear after he was buried, and that he rose with a material body – not just a spiritual one. Only then can we be sure that he actually overcame death.

3.3.3 Evidence for resurrection

There is plenty of testimony, both from the Bible, which we already established to be trustworthy, and from History. Let us begin with the Biblical Testimony

- **Jesus was dead.**

All four gospels describe what happened to Jesus until he died. First he was flogged, then he had to carry his cross to Golgatha, then he was nailed to the cross and left hanging there in the desert sun until he died (**Matthew 27:26–35,46–50**).

Flogging itself is already a brutal procedure. The Romans didn’t just use a simple whip, which already would have been very painful, but a device that scourged the victim with long pieces on metal and bone. Imagine what a single stroke with such a *flagrum* causes to the skin muscles and bones. Since the Romans showed no mercy and didn’t necessarily stop at the Jewish limit of 40 lashes, victims of a Roman flogging often did not survive. So Jesus was probably half dead after that and he certainly didn’t receive medical treatment.

Add to that the beating Jesus received from the Soldiers and it is no wonder that Jesus couldn't carry his cross all the way to Golgatha. So the Romans grabbed a man, Simon from Cyrene, to carry the cross for Jesus (**Mark 15:21**). Probably someone had to drag Jesus to Golgatha too.

The crucifixion is another brutal punishment that the Romans inflicted on their victims. It was so brutal that many Roman citizens didn't even want to know what it really was like. For the same reason, many Christians have a very idealized understanding of what crucifixion is about. We think of the nails that pierced Jesus' hands and feet and think that is already gruesome. But that is the least part of the torture.

Imagine hanging on a cross just with your hands and feet with all the rest of your body pulling down. You can't move much, hardly hold your position, you can hardly breathe, it is hot and you are thirsty (**John 19:28**), your throat is dry and breathing becomes even more difficult, your wounds – inflamed by exposure and lack of treatment – torture you, probably they pop open again and you start bleeding everywhere, your joints begin to dislocate because of the weight of your body, now you lost control over it completely, pressure in your head and stomach, the sun burns your skin, now the pain becomes intolerable and you have the feeling that you can't breathe at all. Death suddenly becomes your friend but it takes hours until it is over.

Q: Could Jesus have survived that?

All four gospels say he did not. In fact, **John 19:31–35** records that he died even earlier than expected. Since the Jews wanted the bodies to be removed before the Passover, the Roman soldiers came and broke the legs of those crucified. This way the victim loses all control over his body and dies quicker – there is little mercy even in that. But when the soldiers came to Jesus he was already dead.

He wasn't just unconscious – the Romans made sure that he was dead by piercing his side with a spear. The fact that there was a sudden flow of blood and water didn't just prove that he was dead but even tells anatomists *how he had died* – rupture of the heart.

In **Mark 15:42–46** we read that, when Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for the body of Jesus, Pilate was quite surprised that he was already dead. He asked the centurion if that was so and the centurion confirmed it. He probably had seen hundreds of executions, so he knew what he was talking about.

So one thing is for sure – when Jesus was taken from the cross and placed in the tomb *he was surely dead*.

- **Jesus rose from the dead.**

Again all four gospels are very clear about that (**Matthew 28:1–7, Mark 16:1–6, Luke 24:1–8, John 20:10–17**). They describe how the women went to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and the grave empty. An angel was there and told them that Jesus wasn't there anymore but had risen. In **John 20:5–7** we read that the linen and burial cloth, folded up and separate from the linen, was still there. One

thing is for sure – whoever was in that grave before didn't need the linen and burial cloth anymore – because he was alive.

Q: Could it have been that the disciples stole the body instead?

This is hardly possible. After all, the tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers and the disciples were too afraid to try to sneak past them, break the seal and take the body away. Besides, as devout Jews they were probably busy with their Passover duties. Furthermore, they wouldn't have taken the time to unwrap the body and fold the burial cloth before sneaking the body out again. Finally, the apostles didn't believe what the women told them (**Luke 24:9–12**), which doesn't make sense if they stole the body.

But we don't just have an empty tomb with a body missing. Jesus was alive. Hundreds of people have seen him in the next 40 days. Right after the disciples left the grave, he showed himself to Mary Magdalene (**John 20:10–17**), to the women who returned from the tomb (**Matthew 28:9–10**), to Peter (**Luke 24:34**), to the disciples on their way to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13–33**), to the apostles (**Luke 24:36–43, John 20:19–29**), later even to more than 500 believers at the same time (**1. Corinthians 15:6**).

So Jesus didn't just disappear after he died – *he rose*.

- **Jesus rose in bodily form.**

The Gospels are clear about the fact that Jesus did rise in the same body that was placed in the tomb. Fortunately we have the account of Thomas, who wasn't present at the time when Jesus showed himself to the apostles the first time (**John 20:24–28**). Thomas is a down-to-earth character. He only believes what he sees with his own eyes. He even said that he wouldn't believe unless he was able to touch Jesus – and this is what finally convinced him that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead.

Q: Why, do you think this story is reported in the Bible?

It is written for all those who doubt that Jesus rose in bodily form. Thomas checked it out. He touched him and then he exclaims “My Lord and my God”. What was standing in front of him was the Jesus he knew, the Jesus he had watched die, now alive again. There is no doubt about it.

Luke gives another important account. In **Luke 24:36–44** Jesus appears to His disciples but they believe they see a ghost. After all, Jesus is dead, isn't he? But Jesus, seeing their trouble, invites them to touch him “a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see I have”. What can be clearer than that? And to top that he even asked them to give him something to eat. And the fish they gave him, didn't drop to the ground, as it would have when given to a spirit without physical body, but it was eaten by Jesus.

In **Luke 24:30–31, John 21:1–14, Acts 1:3** we have further accounts that emphasize Jesus' physical presence after his death.

So the Bible clearly states that Jesus did in fact die and rise again, and that he rose in bodily form. We wouldn't need any more proof, but it is sometimes helpful to know that there is a lot of external evidence which confirms what the Bible says.

- Ignatius (AD 50–115), Bishop of Antioch attests to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and that he rose again after three days. He relies on accounts of eyewitnesses that he personally spoke to.
- Both Jewish and Roman historians record that there were many eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

The Jewish historian Josephus records Jesus' crucifixion and that he had been seen by many eyewitnesses afterwards.

Tertullian (AD 160–220) writes that the Jews almost forced Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Syria, to sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion. He also states that Christ's ascension is far more certain than the alleged resurrection of some other well-known person (Romulus). That is as close to a historical proof as one can get from a Non-Christian.

Plinius, governor in Asia Minor in AD 112, writes to the Roman emperor that Christians were willing to die for their testimony, since he doesn't know how to handle the fact that he had to put so many of them to death.

- Ten thousands of researchers have gone through the records to see if they couldn't come up with at least one piece of evidence against the resurrection. They found nothing. Instead they found over and over again accounts of steadfast first- and second-century Christians who accepted contempt, opposition, persecution, imprisonment, torment, and even death. These early Christians had every reason to check out the basis for their beliefs. Some claimed to be eyewitnesses, others could track down a chain of people back to those witnesses, each checking out the reliability of the one before him. The fact that none of them wavered in his testimony indicates that they didn't just rely on some fictitious narration but on something that they had found to be the truth – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Consider also the immediate consequences of the resurrection on the people who were eyewitnesses and on society.

Think of the transformation of a band of defeated cowards hiding behind locked doors one day **John 20:19–23** into a company that no persecution could silence anymore. No fabricated myth would have accomplished such a dramatic change.

Think of the church that got started on account of their testimony. For centuries it suffered from severe persecution, but no attempt to erase Christianity has ever succeeded. There would have been no Christianity if the belief in the resurrection wouldn't have a thorough foundation on truth.

Think of the many Christians over the past 2000 years whose life was radically changed after they turned from unbelief to Christ. No other reason than that Christ is actually

alive can sufficiently explain that. No indoctrination, no matter how thoroughly can account for so many transformed lives.

- Consider the fact that the Jews tried to disprove the resurrection right from the beginning. They persecuted Christians (**Acts 9:1–2**) to make them deny Christ. If resurrection had all been a lie they would have found out somehow where the body of Jesus Christ really was. But they couldn't produce the body – because it wasn't there. Paul encountered mockery in Athens (**Acts 17:32**) when he talked about the resurrection of Christ – why not in Jerusalem? Because it was a known fact that the tomb was empty and that the body could not be found.

It is a good thing to be skeptical and check out things before you believe them. The Bereans did that (**Acts 17:11**) and were highly commended for this. But once the facts are clear it is irrational to reject the logical conclusions.

And this is exactly what refusing to believe in the resurrection is about. It is irrational, not based on facts but on the *dogma that there cannot be any supernatural events*. This however is a presupposition that is hard to justify. It would be the same as saying “*there are no subatomic particles – it's just a myth physicists dreamed up to get money from the government. We can't see them so they don't exist.*” and completely rejecting any plausible evidence to the contrary. It doesn't make sense to argue that way, because it is detached from common sense and instead based on an absolute claim that cannot be substantiated.

Summary: Since

- *the Bible*, the infallible Word of God, *attests* to the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ,
 - there are *hundreds of eyewitnesses* which couldn't all have been liars or lunatics, and
 - there are many *visible consequences*, which can only be explained if resurrection is for real
- there is again only one logical conclusion: **physical resurrection is a fact**

3.3.4 Specific refutation of the objections

Now let us go back to the specific objections that people raised. We have enough evidence to prove them wrong. But if that shouldn't be enough to make people at least think about the possibility that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, we can even show that these objections don't make sense – given the historical facts that we know about these times.

The Swoon Theory: This theory claims that resurrection is a myth because Jesus never died in the first place. He only swooned – didn't show any visible life signs but was still alive when he was placed in the tomb. After several hours, he was revived by the cool air of the tomb, got up, took off his burial cloth and departed.

Q: *Could that be a plausible explanation for what happened?*

After all, medical knowledge wasn't that great at the time so the people who thought that he was dead could very well have been wrong. Aren't we told in **Mark 15:44** that Pilate was surprised that he was already dead? Doesn't that mean that most victims of crucifixion would still be alive at this time and Jesus, suffering from all the loss of blood and

pain, probably just had passed out completely? And isn't it plausible that he did recover in the tomb after resting in the cool for several hours? Wasn't it pure ignorance on behalf of his disciples to assume that nobody could survive crucifixion and that he must have been resurrected from the dead when they saw him alive again?

If we look at it from this angle, the theory seems to have some truth in it. But a closer look reveals that the theory – apart from being contradicted by all the evidence we presented – has several major flaws. Let us try to answer a few questions to find out how plausible the theory is in the light of what we know.

- *Did Jesus have a chance to survive crucifixion?*

I described crucifixion to you. It is a procedure so brutal, that even those who were taken off before they died seldomly recovered. Once you're on that cross for more than an hour, your chances of surviving are almost zero – even under the most favorable circumstances.

Were the circumstances favorable for Jesus? This can hardly be said.

In **Mark 15:15,19** we read that Jesus was flogged and beaten on the head again and again before he was led out to be crucified. Many victims of flogging did not survive at all – shall we assume that he just shrugged it off and was still in perfect condition, when he was nailed to the cross? According to **Mark 15:21** he couldn't even carry his own cross anymore! And then he was on the cross for more than 6 hours (**Mark 15:25,34–37**).

It is difficult to imagine that even the most powerful of men, after enduring all this, would not succumb to death.

- *But suppose for the argument's sake that he was still alive, when the Romans checked on him – could it be that they mistakenly declared him dead?*

The argument here is that the Romans didn't have enough medical knowledge to know whether a man is dead or still weakly alive. There is a certain amount of modern Western arrogance in that argument – as if there wasn't any medical knowledge in the ancient times. Can we rightfully claim that soldiers who had seen hundreds of dead and half-dead people, wouldn't know the difference?

Several executioners had examined Jesus before he was taken off the cross. One even pierced his side and saw a sudden flow of blood and water (**John 19:34**) – something you wouldn't see if a person is still alive. The Romans knew that as well as we know that today. How can anyone who wasn't at the scene, claim 2000 years later, that all this is nonsense and that Jesus wasn't dead after all? That simply doesn't make sense.

- *But, let's assume that in some miraculous way he did survive and nobody noticed – how did he get out of the tomb again?*

Given that nobody realized that he was still alive, Jesus couldn't have been too vigorous when he was placed in the tomb. After all, he had been tortured severely, beaten on the head, lost an incredible amount of blood, was dehydrated, his ligaments were torn

from hanging on that cross – and he had not received food, drink, or medical attention for more than 24 hours.

Now let's assume that the cool air did bring him back to consciousness again. How would he free himself from the many yards of grave clothes that were tightly wrapped around him? Even a healthy man will have trouble getting out of these. And if he got out of the grave clothes, how did he overcome the next obstacle – the stone that the three women together felt incapable of moving away (**Mark 16:2–3**). Where did he find all this strength after having suffered so severely? It is hardly realistic to believe that this is possible.

- *Well, let's go on with the argument and assume that he did get out. Could he have been completely well the next day?*

It was just a little more than a day after Jesus was taken from the cross. He had been so weak that he was taken for dead. He obviously was wounded severely. What would we do today with a person whose body had been so abused so badly just a day before? We would keep him in a hospital for at least a week with all the medical attention possible. Just think of the soldier (Jessica Lynch) that was sneaked out of the Hospital in Iraq – she spent more than a week in a hospital in Germany before they even started to think of moving her back to the US . . . and you can be sure that Jesus was treated worse than she was. Can anyone believe that he was capable of moving around as if nothing had happened?

But according to **Matthew 28:9–10**, Jesus appeared pretty healthy when the women saw him. They worshiped him – so apparently there wasn't any need to attend to his wounds. In **Luke 24:13–31** we read that he walked 7 miles with the disciples to the village of Emmaus and then showed himself to the apostles. Does that sound like a person who had been tortured less than 48 hours ago? How likely is that?

- *Even if all the above could be explained, where did he go afterwards?*

His disciples saw him for 40 days and then he disappeared. Nobody ever saw him again, not even his closest friends. If even one person had seen him after Pentecost, even the slightest rumor that Jesus would still be alive on earth would have sent people searching. The Jews would have tried to find him to prove that all this rumor of resurrection and ascension is nonsense. Others would have hoped to see another miracles. The young church would have fallen apart because many people would have doubted Peter's preaching. The early Christians, so rich in legends about fictitious and real characters, don't have a single legend about Jesus still being alive at that time.

So Jesus must have withdrawn into total solitude while His church was rising around him, shaking the world in its foundations. He had no contact to any person in the world. He was absent from all of it, didn't even once desire to go into the world of people and find out. Why? How come he changed his character so suddenly into somebody who has no similarity to the Jesus we know before the crucifixion and the Jesus that appeared to his disciples? Does that seem plausible?

Looking at all the above arguments the swoon theory wouldn't make sense even if we wouldn't have all the evidence for Jesus' death and resurrection. And the evidence we have speaks so strongly against the swoon theory, that no rational person can honestly believe in it.

The Theft Theory: This theory is the most popular attempt to deny the resurrection. According to this view, the disciples came during the night, stole the body from the tomb, and made it disappear. Later they spread the rumor that Jesus had risen from the dead and used the empty tomb as proof for their false claims.

Matthew 27:62–65, 28:11–15 records that this theory came into being immediately after the resurrection of Christ. The Jewish leadership was well aware of Jesus' claims that he would rise on the third day – probably much better than his disciples were at the time. They asked Pilate for guards as a protective measure and when that failed, they wanted the soldiers to tell that the disciples must have stolen the body. Initially they were quite successful, at least among the Jews. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others, when they write about the crucifixion also state that the disciples had stolen the body and deceived the people by delaying the public announcement until the 50th day, when the decayed body of Jesus had become unrecognizable.

Q: *Can there be any truth to this argument?*

Let's do a careful logical analysis again. While the empty grave doesn't necessarily prove the resurrection, it is a fact that needs to be explained. Someone must have interfered – the only question is who? There are only two possible answers – the empty tomb was *either a divine work or a human one*. We will show that the latter is impossible, so it must have been God whose work we see here.

So let us assume that the body of Jesus Christ was removed by somebody. Who could have done this? Jesus' friends or his enemies? Did either of these have any reason or the power to do so? And if they actually did, wouldn't they have behaved differently in the following months and years? Let us take a closer look.

- *Much precaution was taken in securing the tomb against theft.* In **Matthew 27:62–65** we read that the chief priests and Pharisees explicitly asked Pilate to prevent that from happening. The tomb was sealed and a Roman guard was posted.

Isn't it great that God allowed this to happen? Without the soldiers present at the tomb, it might have been possible that somebody stole the body. But because of the guard, the empty tomb is a much stronger evidence for what really happened.

- *Nobody took the body by force.* This is quite obvious because the soldiers didn't report that they were attacked. And besides, no unarmed person would dare attacking a Roman guard – after all, they were trained soldiers.
- *Nobody could have sneaked past the soldiers while they were awake.* After all, they were standing right in front of the grave and would have noticed anybody who was trying to get in.

- *The Roman guard could not have fallen asleep.* Military discipline among the Romans was extremely high, definitely higher than military discipline that we see in today's armies. It is well documented that the punishment for quitting post, sleeping on duty, and many other violations was *death*, not just some minor penalty. Various historical writers describe that the fear of punishment produced faultless attention to duty, especially during night watches.

Anyone who believes that even one of the guards at the tomb fell asleep over night has not the slightest idea of what he is talking about. You have to assume that all of the soldiers present were irresponsible weaklings who didn't care about their job and had nothing to fear. You may see such sloppiness in TV series that ridicule military life, but when it comes to the Roman army, nothing could be further away from the truth.

- *Even if the soldiers were asleep, nobody could have taken the body out of the tomb without them noticing.* We have to keep in mind that there was a large stone in front of the tomb. Moving that stone would certainly have awakened at least one of the guards.
- *The guard's testimony that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:13-15) is nonsense.* If they were sleeping, how could they have seen the disciples? And if they were awake, why should they allow the disciples to take the body? It simply doesn't make sense. Besides, admitting that they had fallen asleep or that they had allowed the body to be stolen was suicidal. They would have come up with some other story.

But the fact that they made exactly this nonsensical statement shows that they knew it to be wrong, that their superiors wouldn't believe them anyway, and that the chief priests would keep them out of trouble.

- *The grave clothes give a silent testimony that the body wasn't stolen secretly.* No one, who sneaks past a Roman guard, sleeping or not, to steal Jesus' body would have taken the time to unwrap the body, fold the clothes properly (**John 20:6-7**) and then leave with the body. They would have left as quickly as possible. But the orderliness of the scene indicates that this didn't happen – it is inconsistent with the whole concept of secretly snatching a body out of the grave.
- *The disciples didn't have the courage to steal the body.* When Jesus was arrested, everyone deserted him and fled (**Mark 14:50**). Peter even denied that he knew Jesus (**Mark 14:66-72**). It makes little sense that just a day later the disciples would assemble so much courage to go to the tomb, try to subdue the entire guard, and take the body out of the grave. They wouldn't even try that, because they had no reason to hope that they could get past the guard unnoticed.
- *The disciples did not even have a reason to steal the body.* They couldn't do more for their Lord than had already been done. And they certainly didn't have the desire to steal the body, spread a lie about his resurrection, and then try to make money by starting a church.

After all, they didn't understand the significance of the resurrection before they received the Holy Spirit, so they wouldn't know why they should claim that it happened if it did not. And secondly, starting a fake church within the Jewish society certainly wouldn't promise them any earthly rewards. They couldn't make money out of that but gave up everything they had, went to prison, 11 out of 12 apostles and many other disciples paid with their lives — for something they believed to be a lie?

The whole idea that the disciples took the body is totally inconsistent.

- *Nobody else could have taken the body.* The Jews had no reason to do so in the first place. But even if they did, they would have produced the body as soon as the disciples started preaching the resurrection. How much easier could it get for them to discredit the Apostle's teachings?

Joseph of Arimathea wouldn't have moved the body without telling the apostles either before or afterwards. He was a secret follower and he wouldn't have been silent about what he knew after the word about the resurrection was out. And besides, he surely couldn't have done it alone.

The Romans, too, had absolutely no reason to move the body. Pilate wanted peace, not some new teaching that would stir up unrest.

In conclusion, the facts of the case and common sense reasoning speak clearly against the theory that Christ's body was moved. Isn't it great that God allowed the Jews to have guards placed in front of the tomb? This way we really know for sure that Jesus' body couldn't have been stolen. Without the soldiers present that might have been a possibility. But the way things are, we can be sure that Christ's body wasn't stolen, but resurrected by God.

The Hallucination Theory: This theory is an attempt to disregard the Biblical testimony without explicitly stating that the Biblical account is wrong. It doesn't question that the disciples had seen Jesus appear to them, but it claims that these appearances weren't for real — they were just hallucinations. After all, the disciples had been under a lot of stress. They had lost their beloved Lord, remembered that he had predicted to rise on the third day, and then their mind was just playing tricks with them — they saw him, because they so deeply desired to see him.

At a first glance, the hallucination theory appears plausible to some degree. After all, these things do happen. We hear of a mother who lost her son in the war, sits at home meditating over the past, and suddenly thinks she sees him come through the door and even has a conversation with him. There is a movie about a brilliant mathematician who talked to an imaginary friend for years. Even mass hallucinations do happen.

Q: *So, could it be the case that the disciples just had visions?*

A closer look shows that the hallucination theory has some serious flaws.

- *Only particular kinds of people are prone to hallucinations.* You have to be highly imaginative (that's why some brilliant people cross the border to madness), emotionally somewhat unstable, and nervous or under a lot of stress.

But Jesus appeared to a variety of people of different psychological make-up and in different moods. Mary Magdalene (**John 20:10–17**) was weeping, to the women returning from the tomb (**Matthew 28:9–10**) were afraid, Peter (**Luke 24:34**) was full of remorse, Thomas (**John 20:24–28**) was down to earth and didn't want to believe, the Emmaus disciples (**Luke 24:13–33**) were distracted, the disciples in **John 21:1–14** were busy fishing, and the 500 believers mentioned in **1. Corinthians 15:6** were certainly not all of the same mindset.

- *All eyewitnesses testified to the resurrection for the rest of his life.* If all these people had only hallucinations, they must have continued to live in that mindset for the rest of their lives. Otherwise they would have recounted their testimony and disregarded it as a vision when they were threatened for their beliefs.

While somebody could claim that this may be the case for a handful of disciples, the transformed lives of Peter, Paul, Stephen, James, and many others show that this could not have been the case for *all* of them. People who are continuously subject to hallucinations do not become moral heroes, they do not appear as down-to-earth characters, strong leaders with practical wisdom.

- *There were many appearances and hundreds of witnesses.* They all saw the same Jesus and they all agree in their testimony. Mass hallucinations are extremely rare. You rarely find even two people who had visions about the same person and agree on what they saw. It is even more difficult, if the visions happen on different occasions

Does it make sense to assume that 11 apostles, including the sober, doubting Thomas fell into a self-deception at the same time and envisioned exactly the same fairly complex event that we read about in **John 20:24–28**? Is it possible that the same happened simultaneously to 500 people? Is it possible that hundreds of people have exactly the same vision at the most different times and places but appear to be quite rational in all other situations?

- *Jesus' appearances appealed to different human senses.* The disciples saw him, talked with him, touched him, watched him eat. It is extremely unlikely that even two people would agree on what they experienced if the appearances had been mere hallucinations.
- *Hallucinations require people to be in some anticipating spirit.* Deep inside they must *want* to see what they believe to have seen. But Christ's followers were caused to believe *against their will*. They had other things on their mind. On three occasions (**Luke 24:13–33, John 20:15, 21:4**) the disciples didn't even recognize Jesus before he revealed himself.
- *Hallucinations usually recur regularly over a long period of time.* They either recur more frequently until a point of crisis is reached or less frequently until they fade away. Both did not happen. The appearances stopped suddenly after 40 days, when the Lord ascended to Heaven (except for Paul, who had his only vision much later). They didn't fade, and there was no point of crisis that made them go away. Not even one of the early eyewitnesses ever saw Jesus again.

- *If all appearances were just hallucinations, Jesus' body was still in the tomb.* The Jews could easily have produced the body when all this talk about the resurrection came up.

All in all, the biblical facts, common sense, and all insights of modern psychiatry speak against the hallucination theory and it would be irrational to hold on to it.

The Wrong Tomb Theory: The basic idea of this theory is fairly simple. The women, and subsequently everyone else, went to the wrong tomb. The neighborhood of Jerusalem is full of rock tombs and you need precise notes to find a specific grave. Given all the confusion on the day of the crucifixion the women weren't careful enough to take precise notes where they laid him. After all, they could only watch from a distance. So when they went back after the Sabbath, they probably went to the wrong tomb, found it empty, and were really confused. A gardener, working in the tomb guessed their intentions and tried to tell the that they had made a mistake. He said "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is not here – see the place where they laid him", and probably pointed to the right tomb. But the women were frightened and fled the scene.

Q: *Isn't that what (Mark 15:47–16:8) writes? Could they have gone to the wrong tomb?*

Again, this theory is plausible only as long as you read the biblical accounts superficially.

- *The women knew exactly where the tomb was.* Both **Matthew 27:61** and **Luke 23:55** record that Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene observed carefully where the tomb was. They weren't at a distance. Matthew writes that they were sitting opposite he tomb. Luke makes clear that the women followed Joseph of Arimathea to the grave. One of the women was His mother – don't you think she would remember exactly where he was?
- *Peter and John ran to the tomb independently (John 20:3–8).* They didn't wait for the women to lead the to the grave, but ran. That means they knew where it was, too. How come they ran to the wrong tomb too? Even if they did made a mistake, it is inconceivable that they would end up at the same grave where the women had been.
- *If everyone went to the wrong tomb, Jesus' body was still in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.* When the new teaching about the resurrection came up, the Sanhedrin could simply have gone to the correct grave and produced the body. That would have silenced the disciples forever.
- *The gardener could have solved the problem.* It is hard to imagine that he wouldn't remember what happened that morning when the apostles started preaching the resurrection. Why didn't he tell his side of the story?

The explanation is simple. There was no gardener in the first place. **Matthew 28:1–10** tells us that the young man was an angel of the Lord. And why should any gardener have worked in a cemetery at such an early hour? Why would he be *sitting* inside the tomb (it is way too early for a break)?

- *Certainly Joseph of Arimathea would have solved the problem.* Even if everyone, the Jews, the Roman guard, the woman, and the disciples had gone to the wrong grave, Joseph of Arimathea definitely knew where his tomb was. He was the owner, and he would have gone to the grave to check out whether all this talk about the resurrection would be true.
- *The gospel of Mark is quoted incorrectly.* (**Mark 16:6**) records that the young man said “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here – see the place where they laid him.” If the text is quoted correctly, the whole idea that the young man pointed to some other grave doesn’t make sense. He explicitly says that Jesus has risen – that’s the reason why he is not in the grave anymore.

The Wrong Tomb Theory makes little sense. It doesn’t arise from evidence but contradicts both evidence and common sense. Like all other theories that try to explain away the resurrection it arises from a disbelief in the possibility of God interfering with the natural course of events.

3.3.5 Summary

1. *The Bible*, the infallible Word of God, *attests* to the physical resurrection of Christ.
2. There are *hundreds of eyewitnesses* which couldn’t all have been liars or lunatics.
3. There are many *visible consequences*, which can’t be explained unless resurrection is for real.
4. All theories that try to refute the resurrection are inconsistent – they don’t make sense.

If we take all this together, there remains only one logical conclusion: **The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a proven fact.**

4 When presenting the evidence is not enough

In the past months we have addressed many of the fundamental questions that unbelievers raise about the Christian faith.

We have collected plenty of evidence for the reliability of the Bible. We have shown that it is *the most unique book ever written* – unique in its continuity, circulation, translation, and survival and most unique in its teachings and influence on this world. As a historical book, it is *by far the best documented one* – although there are no original manuscripts, we can say that we know almost for certain what they contained. Despite hundreds of claims to the contrary the Bible is *free from errors and inconsistencies* – its historical descriptions are accurate and any attempt to prove it wrong has failed. But most of all, it is full of scientific foreknowledge and predictive prophecies that clearly prove its supernatural content.

All the evidence together allows only one logical conclusion: *the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God*. It is true in everything it says and therefore the final authority for answering the basic questions of life and faith.

Next, we studied the key issues of our Christian faith – our need for salvation, the person of Jesus Christ, and the resurrection. We showed that *all human beings are sinners* and need to be saved from sin and its deadly consequences. We reasoned that essentially *there can be only one way to provide salvation*: someone had to die for our sins to carry the penalty and to come back to life to demonstrate victory over death – and this someone had to be God and human at the same time. We proved that *Jesus Christ as we know him from the Bible is that person*. We collected evidence for the fact that he was a historical person and that he was God as well – the fulfilled prophecies about him and the miracles he performed are proof enough. Finally we proved that *he really died on the cross and rose again* and that we can have eternal life because of that.

The evidence is plentiful. *But is it enough to convince everyone to believe in Jesus Christ as their savior?* Obviously not, since otherwise the whole world would believe by now.

Q: *So, why do people refuse to believe if the evidence is so clear?*

There are many reasons why people don't believe in Jesus Christ.

More and more people have been brought up in non-Christian environments – they have parents who believe only superficially or not at all, they are exposed to anti-Christian indoctrination in school, the society around them is opposed to Christianity. Ithaca is a perfect example of such an environment but by far not the only one. The problem started in Europe more than a hundred years ago and has spread all over the world ever since.

As a result, the mindset of many people has been infected with strong anti-biblical beliefs. They *claim that the Christian faith is irrational* and that it has been proven wrong by science. They bring up all kinds of arguments against the Bible and Christianity that have little to no substance, just because they find them easier to accept than the fact that there is a God who has the right to tell them what is right or wrong. Bringing up evidence will hardly change their minds because they find the consequence – believing in Jesus Christ – unacceptable.

More and more you also find people who simply don't care. While only a hundred years ago you had to come up with very good reasons why you didn't believe in God, in today's

world it is almost viewed as the most natural thing. People don't feel obliged to justify their unbelief, because for them it is common knowledge that the material world is all there is – why investigate something that is obviously not true? There is nothing that can be gained from that.

Sadly enough, there are also people who had very negative experiences with church or with individual Christians. They came to church but were rejected or ignored because they didn't meet the “standards” (dress code, behavior in church,...). They felt that Christians only wanted to convert them but didn't care about them as person. Christians looked down at them with a “holier than thou” attitude. Their opinions were not tolerated at all. People Christians spoke the truth to them, but but they did not do so in love (**Ephesians 4:15**). And all too often the actions of Christians do not match what they say. Too many Christians come across as pushy, cold, narrow-minded, or even as hypocrites – because that is exactly what they are. As a result, people disregard the Christian message, because *their own experience proves to them that it cannot be true*.

Whatever the cause, in the end it boils down to one and the same reason. People don't believe in Jesus Christ because they don't *want* to believe. Deep down in their heart they say **there is no God (Psalm 14:1)** – at least not as the Bible describes him. This conviction may be masked extremely well, but if we take all the excuses away, we end up at the *presupposition that God does not exist* or that God, even if he were to exist, *does not intervene* in the natural order of the universe. And it is this presupposition that they must become fully aware of before they are ready to consider the evidence to the contrary (**1. Corinthians 2:14**).

4.1 What is a presupposition?

A presupposition is something *assumed in advance*, something that we take as a given and do not question. To a certain degree, presuppositions are inevitable, since we cannot reason without having a starting point. There are certain principles that we simply *have* to assume, since otherwise all reasoning would be pointless. For instance, we have to assume that contradictory statements cannot be simultaneously true – since otherwise everything would be true.⁴

However, there are also presuppositions that are nothing but prejudices. The environment we live in makes us believe that certain assumptions are “facts of nature” but they are actually in conflict with reality. A very common example is the assumption that certain types of people are inferior to us because of race, national origin, wealth, intelligence, beauty, etc. Presuppositions that fall into this category keep a person from living in reality.

Therefore, we must be constantly and consciously be aware of our presuppositions. We ask ourselves if our assumptions about the world are supported by evidence and allow ourselves to be corrected if they are in conflict with the evidence that we see. This becomes more and more difficult the older we get – after all, these assumptions have carried us through life for a long period of time. But if we we are not willing to correct presuppositions that are in conflict with evidence, we only prove that we are stubborn, because we try to make reality match our presuppositions instead of the other way around. With such people you can

⁴Unfortunately, it has become increasingly popular to make truth subjective and to allow for contradictions. It is almost impossible to discuss anything on this basis.

reason only for a certain time until you find out that the discussion is really pointless. No matter how much evidence you bring to them, they will not change their mind (for example, Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses are strongly indoctrinated – they come to convert you, not to listen to counterarguments). Even if you prove to them that their presuppositions are unsound, they insist on keeping them. For them, the only thing you can do is pray and demonstrate your faith by the way you live (**James 2:18b**).

4.2 Dealing with Presuppositions

Knowing a person's presuppositions is extremely important when discussing issues of faith and God. If a person is open, it is sufficient to let the evidence and the Word of God speak for itself (**Hebrews 4:12**). But in many cases, we have to realize that a person is *not* open to that, because the idea that there is a God who is actively involved in the world is so foreign to them, that they will not accept any evidence for that fact. It simply cannot be, so the evidence must be wrong. Miracles don't happen, because the supernatural does not exist – that is one of their basic axioms.

Q: How do we deal with such people?

We have to address their presuppositions first. Before we can discuss the Biblical facts, we need to discuss their world view and seek to change the very foundation of how a person perceives facts. Have them define their views first and then approach them on this basis – then they are much more ready to follow your argument because you present to them what they need most. Here is an example of how this works

Allen: *I am an atheist and evolutionist. Prove to me there is a God.*

Paul: *I do not think I can with your presuppositions.*

Allen: *Why not?*

Paul: *Because your presuppositions will not allow you to examine without bias the evidence that I present to you for God's existence.*

Allen: *That is because there is no evidence for God's existence.*

Paul: *See? You just confirmed what I was stating.*

Allen: *How so?*

Paul: *You are convinced that there is no God, therefore, no matter what I might present to you, you must interpret it in a manner consistent with your presupposition; namely, that there is no God. If I had a video tape of God coming down from heaven, you'd say it was a special effect. If I had a thousand eye-witnesses saying they saw Him, you'd say it was mass-hysteria. Even if I DID have incontrovertible evidence, your presupposition would force you to interpret the facts consistently with your presupposition and you would not be able to see the proof.*

Allen: *I see your point, but I am open to being persuaded, if you can.*

Paul: *Then, I must ask you, what kind of evidence would you accept that would prove God's existence? . . .*

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Once people are aware that they actually have presuppositions that may prevent them from accepting the truth, they are more open to what you will tell them – provided you do it on their terms. This, of course, requires you to be very flexible in your discussion, because you can't just pull out a tract or follow some standard approach. Instead you have to present

your case, listen to their counterarguments, explain to them why these counterarguments don't work (similarly to the way we refuted claims about errors in the Bible or arguments against the resurrection) and take it from there. Eventually, most of the issues that we addressed before will come up and need to be discussed, but you have to wait until they are open to follow your line of thought.

Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well in **John 4:7–26** is an example of this form of reasoning. He engages the woman in a discussion and makes her reveal more and more of the way she thinks – until she is ready to hear the full truth. In **Acts 17:22–33** we see how Paul addresses the people in Athens on the basis of their superstitions. There is no guarantee that you will lead people to Christ this way. But at least you catch their attention and place a seed that later may grow.

4.3 Make them aware of what is at stake

People who believe that there is no God are not easily convinced that they are wrong, even if they sincerely listen to all your arguments. After all, giving up presuppositions that one has held for years is not easy. Your evidence may not change their convictions, but it may shake their foundations – making them less sure that their presuppositions are actually correct and showing them that faith in Christ is more rational than they believed.

At this point you may want to give them a challenge to think about. Make them aware that their assumption that the Bible is wrong is on very shaky ground. Make them aware of what is at stake.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Make them aware that they have no evidence for the claim that this statement is not true and ask them to weigh the consequences. What do they risk if they are wrong – what do the gain if they are right?

Q: *So what can they win or lose if one does not believe in Jesus Christ?*

- If they are right, then their world ends after your death and they gain nothing.
- If they are wrong, they will suffer eternal condemnation and lose everything.

Q: *What if they do believe in Jesus Christ?*

- If they are right, they will receive eternal life after death and win everything.
- If they are wrong, then their world ends after your death and they lose nothing.

Weighing risks against possible outcomes is a very rational approach to making decisions that can have significant consequences (businesses, politicians, and the military use mathematical game theory for this purpose). Impossible risks with unbearable consequences can only be taken, if one is sure that one cannot lose.

Of course, it is not fear that should lead them to accept a God that they don't believe in. But all these considerations may make them more open to look more closely at the evidence and what the Word of God claims. And once they are more open to Biblical truths, there is a chance that they will be convinced by it (**Isaiah 55:10**) and accept Christ into their heart.

4.4 And again, Guidelines for doing Apologetics

Let us wrap up by reviewing some of the guidelines for defending your faith.

1. The most important part of defending the faith is *prayer*. It is the Lord who opens the heart and mind, not we (**Acts 16:14**). The issue is not to win an argument, but to win the person and all our well-prepared arguments and intellectual abilities cannot accomplish this if God is not in it. Ask God for guidance (**John 14:14**), for blessing in your understanding (**James 1:5**) and your speech (**Colossians 4:6**), and for opening the other's minds (**Luke 24:45**).
2. Few things are as powerful when defending the faith as being able to cite a particular verse from the Bible (**Psalms 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16**). The Word of God is quick and powerful (**Hebrews 4:12**) and more effective than anything else. It is worth to *memorize scripture* and the context in which it is written and *use it*.
3. *Be informed*. It is extremely valuable to know where other people draw their opinions from and where the strengths and weaknesses of certain arguments and theories are. Of course, you cannot know everything, but you can memorize a few facts about evolution, or philosophy, or whatever else may be needed. You will learn more as you witness.
4. *Listen* to what is being said to you – and respond to it. It is by listening that you will then know what to say. Listen for errors in logic, for motives, for hurts, for intent.
5. *Ask questions* that require the others to explain what they believe. When they have to go below the surface, they will quite often discover that their views are based on a lot of unsubstantiated presuppositions instead of on solid facts.
6. *Don't interrupt* – this is just common courtesy. Just because you have an answer doesn't mean it must be heard right away. When interruptions become the norm, learning is thrown out the window.
7. *Do not argue*. Avoid anything that even sounds like you're attacking the person. *Do not ridicule* the other person, even if what he says is really absurd. Avoid even the appearance that you may feel morally superior.
8. *Don't be afraid to make mistakes*. You will learn from them.
9. *Study* what you discover you don't know. Get books and *read*. The knowledge of others is invaluable. Write down what you learn. No matter how much or how little you know – you can always improve.
10. *Don't be afraid to take a chance, but consciously depend upon the Holy Spirit*. Under his guidance you will be able to reach out to others.
11. *Rehearse* – think of a situation, a scenario that you need to have an answer for, and develop an answer. Practice in your mind.
12. Finally – trust in the Lord and keep going – it works.