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INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

- Have you ever doubted some of the core Christian beliefs?
- Have you ever read a book or watched something on TV that caused you to wonder if what you believe is actually true?
- Have you ever been confronted with alternative beliefs and worldviews at work, school or campus and not known how to engage?
- Have you ever experienced a tragedy that caused you to doubt whether God was good or that he even existed?
- Have you had someone ask you tough questions about your faith?
- Do you have someone close to you that is wrestling with tough questions about God's nature and existence?

I bet that almost all of you can identify with being in one or more of these situations. This resource is called 'The Reason for Everything' for a very good reason. You see, every worldview (secularism, atheism, Christianity) needs to have:

- **Explanatory Power:** How powerfully does this worldview explain reality?
- **Explanatory Scope:** How much of reality does this worldview explain?

In "The Reason for Everything" I want to show the evidence supporting the fact that the Christian worldview is the worldview that most powerfully explains all of reality. If you are a Christian, as you navigate these questions and the evidence that supports a Christian worldview, I hope that you feel greater confidence and faith in your own beliefs. But in addition, I hope that you feel equipped to engage with others as they battle with these very same questions. Finally, if you are not a Christian, I hope that you would consider and weigh these arguments as well as the evidence that supports what we believe.

Before we get started, let's look at one quick verse to encourage us in *how* and *why* we should do this:

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”¹

- *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord”*: This is where it starts. You have experienced life and salvation in Christ. You desire to serve him and make his name great. All encounters that you have with others are going to be because you love Jesus and desire the same for others.
- *“Always be prepared to give an answer”*: This is a command. While not everyone gets excited about discussing faith, doubts and unbelief with others, we are all nonetheless commanded to be prepared. This implies that we would have spent some time preparing our minds and our hearts so that we are ready when God opens doors for us.
- *“For the hope that you have”*: We need to live such lives that the primary thing people see in us is hope!
- *“But do this with gentleness and respect”*: We are not here to show others how clever or how right we are. All too often we can be right and displease God with our attitude. This is about constructive engagement, not destructive engagement. Ravi Zacharias points out that in war, the goal is to destroy our opponents. In apologetics, our goal is not to destroy but to win others over with winsome and powerful engagements.

Finally, don't forget to pray! E.M. Bounds, who wrote a lot of great stuff on prayer said, “Talking to men for God is a great thing; but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men.”²

¹ 1 Peter 3:15

² E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*

*“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message,
so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.*

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should”³

³ Colossians 4:3-4

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BEGINNING?

Chapter 2

The nature of proof

I don't know if you've ever had someone say to you: "Well, if you can prove there is a God, then I'll believe". The late Bertrund Russel, who was an atheist, was once asked, "What if you're wrong? What if the time comes when you meet God, what will you say?" He answered by saying, "God, you gave us insufficient evidence!" So the question is, "Well, what is evidence?" I can prove that Sodium (Na) plus Chlorine (Cl) = NaCl aka table salt, or that the speed of sound is 1192km/h, but how do I prove what people believe about human rights, or what we believe to be good or evil? Tim Keller points out that we all have things we would sacrifice for and even die for that cannot be proven in scientific ways.⁴

Science by definition is always going to look for a *natural* cause for every phenomenon. But there is no experiment that you can run that can prove or disprove that there is something or nothing beyond the natural world. These are philosophical, not scientific propositions. In the late 90s, *The Matrix* was a movie set in 2200 AD and intelligent robots had taken over the earth. Human beings were trapped in little pink capsules, yet they all believed they were living in a normal world, because the robots had uploaded a complex simulation, known as 'The Matrix', into their brains. So how do you prove that we are or are not living in a simulation? Elon Musk believes there's only a billion to one chance we're living in base reality. Even if you answered by saying that you believe you're living in base reality because you can see with your eyes, and feel with your hands, isn't that what things would feel like if we *were* in a giant simulation?!⁵

Most of the things I say in a day cannot be proved by maths and science. It doesn't mean that the scientific method isn't important; it simply means that it can't help us

⁴ Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Sceptical*

⁵ https://youtu.be/2KK_kzrJPS8

with much of human knowledge and experience. Much of what we do cannot be proven in these ways, but what we can do is we look at the evidence, and then look for the best explanation. Finally, if we are indeed looking for truth, we need to have a willingness to ‘go where the evidence leads’.

1. The beginning

In the opening line of Scripture, Gen 1:1, it says: “In the beginning ... God”. Now this verse is making couple of assertions there:

- There is such a thing as a beginning – a point before which there was nothing, no cosmos, no life.
- This didn’t just happen randomly; there was a cause and the cause was God.

Once upon a time, there was no you, no McDonalds, no Fluffy, no stars, no galaxies. But now there are stars, galaxies, beaches, forests, iguanas, dolphins ... and then of course we have you ... and you live and you laugh and you love and create music and art. The big question is: how did all this get here? While there are a number of different answers, all these answers mainly all fall under 2 categories:

1) God, or 2) no-God. As Andrew Wilson highlights, “Either mind created matter, or matter created mind”.⁶

These words, “In the beginning”, were written several thousand years ago when people didn’t believe there was such a thing as a beginning. For most of history, the a-theistic explanation for the universe was that the universe itself was an eternally existing thing. In fact, as recent as Einstein, he would have told you that the universe was a static eternal thing. Now that may seem weird to you and me, but it was only in 1929 that Edwin Hubble began noticing that the galaxies were moving away from each other. The galaxies themselves weren’t moving though. Imagine drawing a bunch of stars on a balloon and then blowing the balloon up. As the whole balloon expands, so the stars will get further away from each other. In other words, space itself was expanding and getting bigger. Now if everything is expanding, that means

⁶ Andrew Wilson, *If God, Then What*

that at some point, you will get to a point, a starting point where it all began. People call it a singularity or the Big Bang. Before that, nothing. After that, everything.

Currently this is universally accepted. But at first, the scientific community didn't want to accept this, because it would make the Judeo-Christian worldview look right. If the universe had a starting point where it began to exist it would require a cause. So if the universe began, what *caused* this explosion? Where did the matter come from? How and why did it happen? Again, we've got two main options: God, or not-God. But which has the greater explanatory power? That mind created all of this, or that nothing did.

I think a strong argument is this: if everything material only came into being at this point, the cause *has* to be something IM-material ... something *immaterial* that is above and beyond our cosmos. Only something that existed before the universe could kick-start the universe ... and that's where the evidence leads us. Award-winning scientist who mapped the human genome, Francis Collins, said: "The Big Bang cries out for a divine explanation. It forces the conclusion that nature had a definite beginning. I cannot see how nature could have created itself. Only a supernatural force that is outside of space and time could have done that."

2. Design

But it doesn't stop there. Not only did this stuff start somewhere, but instead of it being this chaotic explosion that lead to a highly disordered mess of matter, what we have are highly ordered systems like stars, galaxies, DNA and physical laws. In other words, we've got order coming out of chaos. Even atheist Richard Dawkins concedes that our universe has 'an appearance of design'.⁷

So how can we figure out if something is designed or random?

Well, in many ways, we do this naturally. Imagine going to an empty West Coast beach first thing in the morning, and you notice its undulating ripples, dry patches

⁷ www.expelledthemovie.com

and wet patches indicating where the high tide has been. This can be very beautiful, but you may also rightly assume that no-one's been there before you. But if you got there and there was one of these pieces of sand-castle art, maybe a fancy mermaid or a BMW, immediately you would be looking around for the person who made it. No-one had to tell you to do that, you would do that instinctively.

William Dembski is a mathematician and he coined the phrase *specified complexity*.

⁸Basically, he is saying that if we want to mathematically conclude that something is designed and not random, we need 2 things: 1) it must be specified and 2) it must be complex. "Stephen, what on earth do you mean by that?"

To try illustrate this term, imagine flipping a coin 500 times and mapping the results. You would get a *complex* pattern, but no-one would suspect design because it doesn't match an independently given pattern. Now imagine the coin was flipped four times and all were heads. This matches a pattern – all heads. But again, no-one would bet too much money thinking there was design behind it because the pattern isn't complex enough. Now imagine you're in the military and one of your soldiers has been captured. You get a video sent by the captors and a video of him making all sorts of demands on behalf of the captors – or else. As he's speaking he's flipping a coin. After watching the video a couple of times, someone picks up that the heads tails pattern of the coin-tossing is actually Morse code. He's obviously got two coins, a heads-only and a tails-only coin, and he's communicating with you, telling you exactly where he's being kept and how to get him out. Not only is this pattern complex, it's also specified. And therefore we conclude from this that there is design.

This happens to be what we see whether we look through the **microscope** (biology) or the **telescope** (astronomy). Let's take a quick look through the **microscope**, at biology: When we look into DNA, it is packed with code containing billions and billions of letters. And yet it all means something; it is complex programming that informs everything about you. At one stage, scientists believed that there was a high

⁸ William Dembski & Jonathan Witt, *Intelligent Design Uncensored*

percentage of junk DNA. Time has proven though that most of what they used to call junk DNA actually has a function.

Something else we see within the cell is what we call *irreducible complexities*. This is a fancy name for a simple idea. Think of a mouse-trap. When all the parts work together, you've got a mouse trap; take them apart, and you've got some bent wires, a spring and a piece of wood floating around. In other words, a mouse trap is complex, it has function, but the parts on their own have no function. So to give you a biological example, within the cell is something called the bacterial flagellum motor. This motor enables bacteria within the cell to shoot around the cell at hundreds of body lengths per second. The bacteria can also turn in a millisecond powered by this flagellum motor. This motor is 1 millionth the size of a grain of sand and can rotate up to 5 times faster than a formula 1 motor. The bacterial flagellum motor is an example of an irreducible complexity. It is complex, but if you had to take it apart, it becomes a bunch of parts for which there seems to be no purpose. So the question is: how do these things get there? Most of us would argue it takes intelligence to put something like that together.

Ok, enough about the **microscope**, let's look through the telescope and see what we see. Scientists tell us that in the nano-seconds immediately following the Big Bang, that there were about 26 numbers, or constants, variables or physical laws⁹ that had to be operating at such fine precision, that if even one of them were out by 1 in a million (some 1 in a million million), not only would we not have complex life like bananas and humans, but we wouldn't even have stars. To make sense of this, imagine 26 roulette wheels, some of them have a million numbers, and some of them are the size of our solar system. Now imagine spinning the first wheel and the ball landing on the right number. Now imagine doing that 26 times in a row!

This necessitates the question: How did all this happen just so? Another question is: Where did the physical laws that these processes had to obey come from? Surely

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ethansiegel/2015/08/22/it-takes-26-fundamental-constants-to-give-us-our-universe-but-they-still-dont-give-everything/#1bd8a1234b86>

these laws would have had to pre-exist in order for these processes to obey them?! So whether we're looking through the microscope at the biological world, or through the telescope at the world of astronomy, we seem to see things demonstrating high levels of complexity and design.

Some of you may know the *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Douglas Adams, the author and an atheist made this statement which was quoted by Richard Dawkins and placed on the inside cover of his book, 'The God-Delusion'. In this quote, he is trying to show that all this design doesn't necessarily mean that there's a designer. And yet this seems to backfire, because on closer inspection, it seems that their quote does the exact opposite. Here's the quote:

"Isn't it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it too?"

In other words, if we see a beautiful garden, why do we need to come up with mythical creatures like fairies and goblins or gods in order to enjoy it? Now maybe you've been to the Kensington Palace Gardens in London. I don't for one second believe anyone believes in fairies when they walk through these gardens. But here's what people *do* believe in when they walk through a garden like that – *gardeners!* The biggest difference between Kensington Palace Gardens and the Suikerbosrand is gardeners! Both are beautiful, but one clearly grows wild without design, and one is clearly manicured *with* design.

So we've looked at a number of issues here:

- Something coming from nothing *or God*
- Order coming from chaos *or design*
- Living things coming from non-living things *or a living immaterial being*
- Intelligence coming from non-intelligence *or from an intelligent immaterial being*

There are two main alternatives posed for explaining all that we see:

1. Lucky us: As crazy as these odds are, we just happen to be lucky enough to be here with everything just so; kinda like playing poker and just happening to get a royal flush through no intervention of your own. The problem is, statistically you would need to get royal flushes for an entire lifetime. And we all know that after only three royal flushes, someone's going to suspect that the system's rigged!
2. Multiverse theory: They claim that there are an infinite number of universes all with different variables and constants and that we just happen to live in the universe that supports life. The biggest problem for this is that there is simply no evidence for this, which means it is a faith position, not a scientific position.

Now, yes, I'm a Christian, but I do believe that these things are better explained by the existence of a mind than by nothing. Let's not get ahead of ourselves though. All we've done is show that the existence of God is plausible, and is probably the best explanation of the evidence. What we haven't shown is who this God is and whether or not this God is a God of love. So we're going to continue to explore these questions, and see where the evidence leads.

CAN GOD AND SCIENCE BE FRIENDS?

Chapter 3

Richard Dawkins said that “Faith is like a mental illness, a great cop out, the excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence”.¹⁰ Now of course, when it’s laid out like that, who wants to be sitting on the anti-science, anti-intellectual bench... how uncool is that?! So many believe that if I have faith, I cannot engage science; or if I trust science, I cannot believe in anything supernatural. Now is that true?

Part of the problem is that in many circles, faith is spoken of in blind faith terms: “Don’t ask questions, just believe, take a leap of faith”. What so much research is showing us is that for many young people, they are leaving the church in droves because when they bring their honest questions, they simply get told to believe. But we need to know that the Bible is not against us asking important questions. Biblical faith is not about ignoring the facts and clinging to what we believe. We believe that if Christianity and the Bible is true, it should be able to stand up to scrutiny. We’re saying, “Check it out ... if it’s true, it’s true!” Biblical faith is then putting my trust in something that I *know* to be true. Scripture says again and again, ‘Defend the faith’ (2 Co 10:5; Tit 1:9), ‘Give the reason (*apologia*) for the hope that you have’ (1 Pet 3:15). Therefore, faith becomes the logical next step based on what we know to be true.

Back to faith and science, faith is often spoken about as an excuse, a reason not to think and enquire, and that any serious thinker will abandon faith for science. We are led to believe that science is rational, and faith is irrational.

¹⁰ <http://www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/WorldOfDawkins-archive/Dawkins/Work/Articles/1994-12religion.shtml>

1) Science is good

The first thing I want to say is that 'Science is Good'. Science aims to understand and describe the material world, and it does that well! Not too long ago I went in for bladder surgery, and I can say that I love science! Because of science, I am standing here today and not in increasing degrees of discomfort and pain. But ...

2) 'Science cannot explain everything'

In the last chapter we looked at the fact that so much evidence points beyond, or outside the material world, and therefore the question of God is beyond what physics can evaluate. God is in the realm of *meta*-physics (*meta*, Greek for 'after' or 'beyond'). So when people say, "We can only believe what can be scientifically proven", that in itself is a faith statement. God by definition is outside of what can be scientifically proven, but this question itself commits to only looking for natural causes for everything and therefore excludes any other explanations. That's kind of like me walking into our lounge and seeing some leaves and dirt inside after a windy day and wondering how it all got there. And even when all the evidence points to the fact that the leaves must have come from outside, me responding by saying, "No, because the leaves are inside, they must have come from inside!" Therefore, the one who says, "Maybe the leaves came from outside" is actually being more open-minded than the one who says, "The leaves are inside therefore they can only have come from inside". And so we conclude that science, by definition, is not able to explain anything outside of the natural world. Yet ... we believe that science is good, so I don't think we need to do the opposite and stand on the anti-science team either.

3) Christianity encourages science

I think (together with many other people), that God and science *can* be friends. St Augustine said that God gave us two books, his written Word and his natural word, and they should agree. We believe that God made this world, made it ordered, and he wants us to explore the cosmos. He wants us to find amazing cures, he wants us to study medicine. In fact, if you look at history, we see that Christianity encourages

science. There were a whole lot of worldviews around at the time that actually make science very difficult:¹¹

- Animism (like a lot of primitive religions and some eastern religions) makes a god out of nature, claiming there is a god in trees, water and rocks. Such a worldview inhibits scientific investigation because one cannot subject deified objects to objective analyses.
- Buddhism says that the universe is an illusion (*maya*). Therefore, there is no point in doing analyses because those conclusions will be an illusion too. By the way, if you trace most modern New Age type movements back, you will discover their philosophical roots in Buddhism.
- Polytheistic religions like Hinduism explain events by the random actions of the gods. So there's a drought or a baby dies, it was the gods. There's no point in asking why, all we can do is appease them.

Back to Christianity. Did you know, for example, that universities are a Christian invention? All those big ol' fancy Ivy League universities like Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Brown all began as Christian institutions. Detailed scientific analyses was not seen as hostile to faith, in fact it was seen as possible because of faith.

There are obviously a large number of fantastic Christian scientists, but do you know that there are a number of leading scientists who had always believed that God and science could not be friends, and then after years of research, changed their minds?!

Anthony Flew, who was like the Richard Dawkins of the previous generation was an atheistic philosopher and literally spent his whole life devoted to writing about how there is no God.¹² But then he started investigating these things and he started looking at the evidence. He began by looking at science and he started realizing that the evidence pointed outside of the material world. Later in life, at 84 years old, he wrote a book called, 'There is a God'! What would it take for someone like him, after spending his whole life ridiculing Christians, to eventually acknowledge that the

¹¹ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God*

¹² Anthony Flew, *There Is a God*

evidence pointed towards a God?! He was asked if his studies in the origins of life led him to believe in a God; “Yes, I now think it does ... almost entirely because of DNA investigations ... It’s the enormous complexity of the number of elements and the enormous subtlety of the ways they work together. The meeting of these two parts at the right time by chance is simply minute. It is all a matter of the enormous complexity by which the results were achieved, which looked to me like the work of intelligence”.

Francis Collins was awarded the *Presidential Medal of Freedom* which basically means he’s one of the smartest dudes on the planet. Why, because he mapped out the human genome. He used to be an atheist but became a Christian. He wrote a book called ‘The Language of God’ and in it he wrote, “The only reason people believe there is a collision between faith and science is because people haven’t studied the Christian faith”.

So it would seem that far from Christianity being for narrow minded, small brained, dangerous, irrational, science-destroying people, the evidence points towards the fact that instead of the Christian worldview being a hindrance to good science, it has been an encourager of good science and rational thinking!

Why don’t people believe?

If this is the case, why don’t people believe?!? Now I obviously can’t answer for everyone, but Thomas Nagle who is an American Philosopher wrote a book in 2012 called *The End of Naturalism*. In it he said that if you believe this universe came into being by natural means, you’re psychotic. He wrote another book called *The Cosmos* where again he said that if you think this came out of nowhere, that makes no sense! And yet he refused to believe. In light of that he was asked, “Why don’t you believe in an intelligent designer?” He gave his answer in his book, *The Last Word* where he explained, “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want

the universe to be like that.” Aldous Huxely the famous writer who wrote “Brave New World” explained in his book *Ends and Means* why he too didn’t believe: “I had motive for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none ... For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political”. In both of these cases, we are seeing people reject faith, not on grounds of evidence or lack of evidence. In both of these cases they were honest enough to admit that the *real* reason that they don’t believe is because even in light of compelling evidence, they didn’t *want* to believe! This conclusion is not based on evidence, but rather on a prior commitment to not wanting there to be a god!

4) The Bible is WAY ahead of its time

So, let’s get to the Bible: Is the bible anti-science? What we actually find is that when it comes to science, the Bible is WAY ahead of its time! First of all, you need to understand that Genesis was written over 3000 years before the birth of modern science, almost 3500 years before any Big Bang theory. Now I know there’s still lots of debate about time scales, but if you lined up the order of events in Genesis and lined up the order of events according to scientific discovery, they are exactly the same! There is not a single account of creation from any other ancient society that even comes close. Robert Jastrow, an astronomer and founder of NASA’s Goddard Institute of Space Studies and an agnostic had this to say: “Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same.”

Let me blow your mind some more: The oldest book in the Bible, Job, was written about 4000 years ago and talks about the earth spinning on nothing (Job 26:7). This was written at a time when people didn’t even know the earth was a planet! And yet we now know that our planet hangs and spins on nothing but gravitational force alone. Job 38:16 tells us that there are springs at the bottom of the ocean. We only discovered that in the 1970’s when we could build a submarine capable of

withstanding the pressure. Up until then, we thought the ocean was only fed by rain and rivers.

Then we've got the 'stupid' (so-called) chapters in Leviticus (11-15) in the beginning of the Bible where God seems to put these 'ridiculous' laws on his people. These chapters seem like a long random list of God choosing what is clean and unclean. Chapter after chapter talks about skin disease and bodily fluids. They talk about the fact that if you're any of these things you're seen as unclean and that anything you touch is unclean for a period of time, and if anyone touches you they are considered unclean too. They go on to say that if anyone dies from any of these issues, you have to take all of their possessions outside of the camp and burn it. How ridiculous and backwards!? Yet 3300 years after these laws of Moses, a man in 1860 named Louis Pasteur would find out that there are not only large living organisms around us, there are minute ones called germs. This birthed a whole new field of science called microbiology. Today we know that there is nothing worse than infection and the spread of disease and that you don't mess with bodily fluids. If you're at an accident scene, no one touches you without latex gloves because of microbes and bodily fluids. If you're in hospital, they don't touch you, especially where there's bodily fluid – they make the whole environment sterile, because they know how dangerous it is. Do you know it was not until the late 1800s that doctors even washed their hands before performing surgery!? And yet, 3300 years before science came to those conclusions, God gave us these laws saying, "Just trust me ... you won't catch up to the wisdom of God for 3300 years, just trust me!"

So can God and science be friends? I think so! If you're not a Christian and you're into science, God doesn't have to be that person you sometimes see at the shopping centre and try and ignore. There's nothing about checking your brain at the door when you enter Christianity. And if you're a Christian, science should not be a conversation stopper. I know there are some very angry people on both sides of the debate that make conversation very difficult. However, we should gather confidence from Romans 1:20 that says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, *being*

understood by what has been made". Studying the world tells us a lot about who God is, his creative abilities, his beauty and power! Christians should be the ones leading the world in figuring out how he made and ordered it, how he made the mind and the body, and how that should cause us to marvel and worship him. God and science CAN be friends!

ARE HUMANS SPECIAL?

Chapter 4

I recently read an article about a girl called Monroe Christine.¹³ She is owned by two men, one of which is a reality TV star and the other is his partner. They picked her mother out of a catalogue. She will forever be known as a girl who was born on reality TV while the men who paid for her watched and made repulsive comments about the delivery. Her baptism as a baby was filmed interspersed with footage of her biological mother weeping at the ultrasound and screaming in labour. One day she will watch the episode of her birth and wonder why she has the life she does. Monroe's childhood will continue to be a marketing commodity. Her parties, her wardrobe and her growing up will continue to play out on TV until the show is deemed unprofitable or a better idea comes along. The article written about this ends off with these questions: "Who is a person and who is an accessory? Who is an end and who is a means? Who is a girl and who is a pet? That is the question."

But should this story shock us? I've got a black Labrador who I paid for. I don't need to clothe her, but I feed her, discipline her and love her. Now if it were possible to have a TV series tracking her birth and growing up – even if I specifically bought her *for* the TV series – I think most people would find that adorable and inoffensive. And yet, when a human is treated in the same way, many of us find that offensive. So we're asking this question: Are humans special? Do they have inherent dignity, value and worth?

1) We all believe in human dignity

I believe most people live as if there is something special and meaningful about being human. If a lion eats an impala, no one is put on trial. And even if a lion kills another lion, maybe we're grossed out, but again, no one is arrested for that. But if an animal kills a human, it's a tragedy right? And if a human kills another human, that is considered greater tragedy! We live in a world where we want to eliminate

¹³ <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/06/her-name-is-monroe-christine>

human suffering as much as possible. But the question before us is, “WHY?” How did we get here? Why do we live like this? Why are we repelled by racism, sexism and bad treatment of the poor and the disabled? Where did these beliefs come from? Can Christianity account for these beliefs? Can a naturalistic worldview account for the value of human life?

Part of this enquiry is the question, “What does it even mean to be human? If we’re just part of the natural order, what makes us different, does anything define us as human?”

- ¹⁴Some would argue that it’s our intelligence that makes us different, that sets us apart. But what about those who are cognitively impaired? Do they have less value? Yet most of us would very quickly say that they too have equal dignity and value.
- Others argued that it is the fact that we are economic beings. What makes us unique in the natural world is the fact that we trade and barter and buy and sell and save and spend. Admittedly, if an alien had to zoom down and try determine the difference between us and other animals, this would seem to be it. Our economic movements and activities seem to define most of our lives. And yet, does that mean that those who are materially poor have no dignity? Of course not.
- Finally, some have said that what sets us apart from the rest of the natural order is self-determination; as the poem *Invictus* says, “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.” In other words, to be truly human means that we decide, we have a unique type of will, we set personal goals. I admit I have yet to see my Labrador with a life-goals org chart. And yet we would still fight for the dignity of those who’s freedom has been taken away from them, those who seem to have no choice in life, like those who are in slavery or the unborn. So it can’t be in these things! So is there a better way of determining what makes us human and where did this idea of human dignity come from?

¹⁴ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*

Out of all the worldviews out there, the one that is our greatest current challenge is the secular worldview, naturalism, which attempts to explain that the Reason for Everything is really a set of natural, random evolutionary forces with no need for God or gods to interfere with us. So I am going to take some time to ask this question: If there is no God, can we say that humans have dignity and worth? I want to come out and show my hand on the front end by saying there is no such thing as human dignity without God.

2. There is no such thing as human dignity without God

I want to argue that a purely naturalistic worldview leads us to conclude that humans have no special value. If we are simply the products of unguided random evolutionary forces, there is nothing that sets me apart from a cockroach. If Hitler, for example, wanted to exterminate 6 million Jews, or if I want to exterminate my ant problem, what's the difference? If anything, if evolution is about the stronger out-performing and out-lasting the weaker, then surely we should have given Hitler a medal instead of making him out to be some kind of mega-villain!

Now maybe you think I'm being a bit snarky or condescending, when in fact there are many intelligent thinkers who hold to atheistic worldviews who realized that this was the natural outcome of their world-view: If there is no God, humans have no inherent value and worth. Let me give you a few examples:

- Bertrand Russell said in his *Marriage and Morals* that anyone who was mentally deficient should be sterilized.
- Richard Dawkins goes as far as to say it is IM-moral *not* to abort a baby diagnosed with Downs Syndrome.¹⁵
- Charles Darwin himself, the godfather of evolution, understood that if he was right, we need to treat human beings the same way as we treat other animals: "Man scans with scrupulous care the character and pedigree of his horses, cattle, and dogs before he matches them, but when he comes to his own marriage he

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/aug/21/richard-dawkins-immoral-not-to-abort-a-downs-syndrome-foetus>

rarely, or never, takes any such care ... Both sexes ought to refrain from marriage if they are in any marked degree inferior in body or mind”.

- Hitler (I know every time I mention Hitler it sounds like a cheap shot, but he actually modelled his ideas on atheistic and evolutionary thinking) also followed this line of reasoning. See how he arrives at his conclusions: “Nature is cruel, therefore we too can be cruel.” In other words, ‘There’s no real difference between what we’re doing and what nature is doing ... so chill!’ This time in *Mein Kampf* he wrote, “If nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with the stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one; because in such cases all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher state of being, may thus be rendered futile ... He who does not wish to fight in this world, where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist”.
- Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor, made this observation: “I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some Ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers”.¹⁶ In other words he is saying that it wasn’t just a bunch of evil men who got together to plan the Holocaust, but it was when some clever philosophers realized that without God, life is meaningless and humans have no special value that a worldview gave rational possibility for something like the Holocaust to exist.

I am not for one second saying that if you do not believe in God that you will treat humans the way Hitler did. What I am saying is that if you do believe in human dignity, *why* do you believe in human dignity? Where did that belief come from? Why do you put your dog down but prolong the life of your gran? On what basis do you behave this way? Do you have a worldview that makes sense of this? The point is this: if there is no God, it is an enormous leap of faith to say that we are just products of blind natural forces ... AND ... every person has a dignity that needs to be preserved. This requires faith because there is simply no evidence for these positions.

¹⁶ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7322711-if-we-present-a-man-with-a-concept-of-man>

3. Christianity imparts the highest value and greatest worth

In fact, not only would I argue that apart from God, there is no such thing as human dignity, but that Christianity imparts the highest value and greatest worth. The Scriptures show us in Genesis 1:26-27 that once God had created the rest of the natural order, declaring it 'good', he came to Adam and Eve and made us in his image. In other words, the things that ultimately separates humanity from the rest of the created order is that God's image has been personally invested in us. But what does that mean?

To help us understand this, think about when you have kids. I've got two boys. I have people coming up to me all the time telling me that one or the other looks like me, even though they both have their own unique appearance. But as I've gotten older, I've had more and more people who knew my father come up to me saying that I look more and more like him. Now this doesn't mean we look like God physically, but if I could take a shot at defining what God's image means, it is this:

"God has uniquely invested something in us that is designed to reflect the attributes and person of God to the world around us"

And we are called to live in this ... to grow in this. Much like the moon has no light of its own, the moon is most beautiful when it reflects the light of the sun. So we are most human when we live out this God-given dignity, reflecting God's attributes and personhood to the world around us. This is why Christians have been and should continue to be at the fore-front of fighting slavery and sex-trafficking, fighting for the rights and dignity of the least of these, orphans, widows, fighting for the lives of the unborn and the disabled.

4. The Cross is the greatest demonstration of human value

One final word on how the Christian worldview ascribes the highest value to humanity. One's value is determined by how much you're willing to pay for it. The other day I heard about a guy who could prove that he had the actual baseball that

Babe Ruth hit a home run with in a very important game. What ordinarily sells for a handful of dollars now sold for over \$800 000. The fact that God's Son was willing to lay down his life for you is ascribing infinite value to you and every human being on the face of the earth. While not everyone gets treated as if they have dignity, God paid the highest price for that which he deemed is of highest value.

Grace

Then there's something else that raises the bar even more. The way the world works is that you have value when you perform, when you have cool stuff, lots of money, good looks and lots of power. That's when you get special treatment and VIP access. But lose any of that and suddenly you're not a VIP but a VAP (very average person) and all the special treatment and access disappears. God says that you don't have to do any of that to earn value or receive VIP treatment from God. He bestows this upon us at no cost to ourselves. In the Christian world we call this grace. I believe one of the biggest shifts in the human heart is when you realize that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. No other worldview gives you that!

WHY IS THE WORLD SO MESSED UP?

Chapter 5

Probably one of the single biggest questions about God's existence has to do with the existence of evil in the form of pain, suffering and difficulty. In short, why is the world so messed up? For many people, the presence of pain, suffering and evil is incompatible with the existence of a loving, powerful, personal God. While there is certainly a philosophical angle to this question, the bigger aspect to this question is the emotional side. So yes, we may battle intellectually with this question, but for most of us, the intellectual challenge is eclipsed by questions like: "Why did God allow _____ to happen?" You fill in the blank ... cancer ... death ... financial loss. So because we've either seen or experienced intense suffering, something in us begins to conclude that a good God does not exist.

Do a little thought experiment with me.¹⁷ I want you to imagine, going out to WITS or The Glen with a video camera and a mic, asking dozens of people this question: "What is wrong with the world?", or, "Why is the world so messed up?" While you will certainly get a whole variety of answers, once boiled down, these answers will fall into 1 of 2 broad categories:

- "There's something wrong with the world": Some people may say things like: hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, or even things like cancer and disease. These are things that have nothing to do with people's bad choices; they happen in the natural world and collectively kill hundreds of thousands of people every year. All of these really point to the fact that there is something wrong with the world.
- "There's something wrong with us": Other people may say things like: corruption, human trafficking, violent crime, broken families etc. All of these really point to the fact that there is something wrong with us.

¹⁷ Andrew Wilson, *If God, Then What*

As you ask people about why they believe the world is messed up, here's an answer you probably won't get: "Nothing – everything is perfect!" So I think people are quite happy to acknowledge that this world is messed up, and that people are messed up. Put those two things together and you get a whole lot of suffering and pain. But then the next step is made: because of all this suffering, there is no God ... because if God is good and loving, how could he allow all this to happen ... THEREFORE, God does not exist.

1. "There is something wrong ..."

While I understand the emotive sides of this kind of reasoning, I want start off by talking about the words, "There is something wrong ..." The minute we say 'There's something wrong with ...', we're implying what C.S. Lewis calls 'a sense of ought'.¹⁸ In other words, things are *this* way, but they *ought* to be *that* way. Without necessarily meaning to, we are implying a morality, the fact that there is something wrong with some things, therefore there is something right about other things. When we say Hitler was wrong, we're not just saying we don't like it, we're saying he *is* objectively wrong! When we dig a little deeper, we see that this sense of wrong and right is something that somehow seems to be a natural part of us.

Confession time: I am least Christian in the traffic. Have you ever been in heavy traffic, there's no accident, it's just the wrong time of day and there's nothing you can do about it. So you breathe, you pray, you ask God for patience and you settle in until ... you see in your rear-view mirror a little car who decides he's not waiting around for this. Next minute, this little car zooms past you, happy as a kite in the emergency lane. At that point I'm highly conflicted. On one hand I'm thinking, "That's not fair! The rest of us are perfectly unhappy over here. What gives you the right to do that?!" (On the other hand, I secretly wish I could follow suit!) Then of course the next person does it, followed by the next person, then the next person and so it goes. All this while you're screaming inside of your head, "That's not fair! But the really big question is, where does this concept of fairness come from? My kids have

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

known about it from the day they were born: “Daddy, he’s not giving me a turn with the car” ... or ... “Daddy, he ate all the sweets and didn’t share!” Now I didn’t have to teach them that. They didn’t learn that because I taught them fairness with spreadsheets and pie-charts. Somehow, this idea that some things are right, and that some things are wrong seems *hardwired* into them.

The moral argument

But before we can even say, “There’s something wrong *with* “, can we even say, “There’s something *wrong*?” This is not just a Christian problem. Every worldview needs to be able to provide a framework that adequately explains the presence of suffering as well as the presence of morality, because in order for you to say suffering is wrong, you need to have an objective morality. So how does a naturalistic worldview explain this idea of right and wrong? One of the explanations is that we see morality and right and wrong in nature. For example, we see elephants mourning their dead, or we see stories of mother impalas facing down a lion to protect their young. In other words, because we see these behaviours we call moral in nature, we shouldn’t be surprised when we see right and wrong in humanity. But we also see a number of other things in nature: ground squirrels routinely eat their babies, mallards gang rape and drown other ducks, cichlids (a type of fish) eat the eyes of other cichlids, on being born the stronger spotted hyena will fight and kill its baby sibling.¹⁹ And yet I suspect that if we routinely ate our babies or ate each other’s eyes the world would be up in arms saying it’s wrong, even if we said, “But ground squirrels do it!”

Another way people try and explain it is that over hundreds and thousands of years, our brains developed ideas about what was best for society. In other words, our behaviour is not about what’s wrong and right, but simply what helps us survive and be comfortable. And yet, Andrew Wilson points out that we still seem to do so many things that contradict this idea. Like people who beat their children (who carry their genes) but give money to charities on the other side of the world to people who don’t. Or why people who have plenty of resources still want more. Or why a guy

¹⁹ Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*

who's had a vasectomy still wants to have sex with anything that moves.²⁰ Or why people will jump in an ocean and risk their lives for someone they don't even know.

And so the problem still exists. If we're going to say there's anything wrong with the world, we have to be able to say that there is such a thing as wrong and right. CS Lewis said it like this: "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" It seems to be that if we want to say there's something wrong with the world or cancer or tsunamis or pedophilia, we seem to be appealing to a sense of right and wrong that cannot be explained simply by looking at evolution and nature.

2. "There's something wrong with ... "

And yet we still deeply believe there's something wrong with the world and there's something wrong with us. Let's talk about those quickly:

There's something wrong with the world

When we say, "There's something wrong with the world", we are referring to *natural evil*. But let's think about it: we don't actually have a problem with viruses and earthquakes and tornados per se, we only have a problem with them when they kill people. There could be a hurricane right now in Antarctica somewhere and it wouldn't bother us unless someone were in danger. In other words, the real issue we have with natural evil is death, which is a real problem. According to latest statistics, one out of every person dies. And yet, Darwin observed that, "Nature is red in tooth and claw", which is another way of saying that nature is ruled by violence. If this is so, death should feel like the most natural thing to us. But having said that, why is it that whether your grandfather of 97 or your child of a few days old is taken, why do we feel like this is *wrong*, that you feel robbed?! Surely that points to the fact that maybe death *is* wrong?!

²⁰ Andrew Wilson, *If God, Then What*

There's something wrong with us

Let's talk quickly about the fact that, "There is something wrong with us". In a previous chapter we spoke about human value, worth and dignity. But this is not what we always see around us. I think we see two realities: 1) Humans are amazing, creative, capable of great things and lots of good; 2) Humans are also capable of creating a lot of pain and hurt. Can we have a worldview that affirms and explains both?

Now maybe you say that there's something wrong with Hitler or pedophiles, but not me. Let's try one more thought experiment (thank you Andrew Wilson for the idea)²¹. Imagine you got rid of the worst kind of evil person, genocidal maniacs, pedophiles and sex-traffickers. Now that you've done that, have you eliminated all pain and suffering? The answer is clearly no. So now let's get rid of the next level of evil people, all corrupt government officials and people who beat children. Now have you eliminated all evil, pain and suffering? The answer again is no. As you work your way down the totem pole of evil people, you will eventually discover that there is still evil and pain and suffering in the world and you're in the next category to go!

And so it seems that there's not just something wrong with other really evil people, but something wrong with all of us. And this is something that we as a human race have been unable to figure out and change about ourselves. In fact, this seems to be something that's been in us from the day we were born. Parents of young children know that no one needs to teach your toddler to bite mom's arm, pull their brother's hair or throw their toys everywhere. Somehow that just seems to come naturally. And at the same time we have to somehow teach them to be patient and loving – and that doesn't seem to come too naturally! Even now, sometimes doing the wrong thing seems to be the easiest thing to do, almost like it's a default, while choosing to do right often feels like the more difficult thing to do. Sometimes lying feels easier than telling the truth and taking the rap. One of the ways we acknowledge this truth is with the throw-away phrase, "Well, nobody's perfect". And yet that simple phrase reveals so much about the human condition, because *nobody* is perfect! Alistair

²¹ Andrew Wilson, *If God, Then What*

McGrath points out that because of all the suffering many will choose to believe in humanity in preference to God. Yet it is this humanity, unrestrained by any fear of God, that has been responsible for a series of moral, social, and political catastrophes, even when religiously motivated. “The common denominator here is humanity, not divinity”.²²

I think we can agree on these points:

1. There is something wrong
2. There is something wrong with the world
3. There is something wrong with us

I think the Christian worldview is the only worldview that allows us to make best sense of 3 statements:

1) There is something wrong

“And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”” (Genesis 2:16-17). This verse clearly shows us that morality didn’t evolve with nature. When we appeal to a transcendent morality, or a moral law, we are appealing to the moral law-giver, God. Paul argues in the New Testament that there is a sense of morality that is common to all people: “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them” (Romans 2:14-15). This is why we’re not saying that if you don’t believe in God you can’t be moral; rather that while we may disagree about some specifics, we all live as if there are things that are right and things that are wrong.

²² Alistair McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism*

2) There is something wrong with the world

Romans 8:22 says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time”. In other words, the Bible says, “Yes, there *is* something wrong with the world; your instincts are correct. Diseases and tsunamis and death are not just part of the natural order, they are wrong”.

3) There is something wrong with us

Genesis chapter three records the story of the fall of man and we have already looked at the evidence that we have all struggled with sin and brokenness since.

Four worlds

You might still ask the question: “But why?! Why does God let this happen? Why did he make things this way?” I don’t necessarily know the whole answer, but I believe that here’s at least part of the answer. Ravi Zaccharias points out that there are four types of worlds God could have created when it comes to evil and morality:²³

1. God could *not* create
2. He could create an amoral world; in other words, a world without good or evil
3. He could have created a world where only good is possible
4. He could create *this* world

Ravi then goes on to point out that option 4 – *this* world – is the only world where love is possible. Love is not possible if this world does not exist (option 1). In option 2, we would not know the difference between love and hate. In option 3 we would be robots, coerced into love. Only where there is free choice is there the possibility of love, but also the possibility for evil.

²³ <https://youtu.be/XMKvPwab-mo>

3. Suffering will end

One last word on suffering and the Christian worldview. The fact that we feel like suffering, sin, death and evil is 'wrong' is maybe a clue that we long for a world where there is none. This is exactly the vision offered in Revelation 21:4, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." This doesn't change the current experience of pain, but like labour pains are soon forgotten after a baby is born, so will the memories of our pain give way to greater joy.

WHY IS THE CHURCH FILLED WITH HYPOCRITES?

Chapter 6

This is not normally a topic covered by classical evidential apologetics. However, in 2007, the Barna group did extensive survey asking non-Christians why they didn't become Christians. Some of the answers were about issues like creation and morality; but higher than any of these issues was this question: "Why is the church filled with hypocrites?" This is not a philosophical, intellectual or scientific issue, it's a behavioural issue. I saw this meme on Facebook the other day: "Sometimes the nicest people you meet are covered in tattoos, and sometimes the most judgmental people you meet go to church on Sundays". When people look at the behaviour of Christians, their experience has too often been that we're mean-spirited, judgmental and self-righteous. In addition, they look at the atrocities throughout the history of the Christian church, the crusades, the inquisition torturing people who differed with them, the witch trials, the church's response to slavery, the recent survey coming to light about the Catholic church covering up so much pedophilia and mega-church pastors making headlines for all the wrong reasons. For many people, *this* is their biggest obstacle to coming to faith. So how can we engage?

1. Admit it

Perhaps one of the best things we can do is simply to admit it. Some of these charges are true. Many who called themselves Christians throughout church history have done some incredible damage in the name of Jesus. Author Donald Miller in his book *Blue Like Jazz* was studying at a liberal university. Him and his friends decided to set up a confession booth on campus. When people came in to confess their sins, instead of them getting the opportunity to confess their sins, Donald Miller and his friends would confess to them the sins of the church. We need to remember that the first group of people Jesus called to repent weren't the 'sinners' out there, but the religious people who had gotten it so wrong.

We need to understand that there are two main reasons why we've got such a muddy track-record when it comes to this:

1. Churches are often filled with people who aren't Christians

I don't know if this comes as a shock to you or anyone else out there, but not everyone who goes to church is a Christian. For thousands of years churches have been filled with people who attend regularly, try not say bad words, don't watch bad movies, don't smoke, don't drink, they give their tithe ... but they do not personally *know and love and walk* with God. We would call these 'cultural Christians'; they have an outside veneer of Christianity, but their hearts have not been transformed.

Even Jesus predicted this. In Matthew 7:22-23 he said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!'" In other words, 2000 years ago Jesus said that there were going to be *many* who said they were Christians, who did all the right religious things, but were still evil-doers and hypocrites.

But there's also something else we can and must admit. Hypocrisy is not reserved for 'those evil hypocrites', you know, 'those *other* hypocrites'. There's also me, the hypocrite. I don't always live up to the ideals I claim; I don't always practice what I preach and I can and should admit to that!

2. Church is a place for sinners, not perfect people

One of the other things that Jesus said is, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). This is something we don't always get, and something culture around us doesn't always understand. Often the Gospel is misunderstood as taking bad people and making them into good people. So they assume that being Christian = being a good person, when often the opposite is true. The Gospel is not what *we* can do for God (good advice), but what *God has done for us* (good news). This is why Jesus, when speaking to religious hypocrites, could say, "The tax collectors and the prostitutes

are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matt 21:31). The Gospel is for those who need grace and mercy and know it. So let me ask you a question: If this is true, what will a church filled with people like this look like? I think you know the answer, such a church is going to be *messy*! In fact, often when people become Christians, sin starts coming to the surface and things get even more messy. Even the apostle Paul said in Romans 7, “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do” (v15). This means that in a church like this we are going to have some mature, loving, grace-filled people, but effective churches are going to be filled with people who are messed up, seeking, figuring things out, on a journey and from all sorts of backgrounds.

So when it comes to people who are on this journey, we often need to ask the question, “From where did this person start?” C.S. Lewis uses the following illustration to help us think through this:

“Christian Miss Bates may have an unkindler tongue than unbelieving Dick Firkin. That, by itself, does not tell us whether Christianity works. The question is what Miss Bates’s tongue would be like if she were not a Christian and what Dick’s would be like if he became one. Miss Bates and Dick, as a result of natural causes and early upbringing, have certain temperaments: Christianity professes to put both temperaments under new management if they will allow it to do so. What you have a right to ask is whether that management, if allowed to take over, improves the concern.”²⁴

When we admit to these two things, that the church is filled with people who are not Christians and that the Gospel is for sinners not perfect people, we get to admit to the reality of hypocrisy without defending anything. At the same time we also get the chance to point towards the true nature of the Gospel – which is a good thing!

²⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 177-178

2. But what about Christianity's violent past?

As you encounter people who refer to the hypocrisies of the church, they may talk about the crusades where 'the church' slaughtered tens of thousands of innocent Muslims, or they may ask about Northern Ireland and the violence between Catholics and Protestants, or the violence between Christians and Muslims in North and South Sudan, or when accused women were burned and drowned as witches.

Something we need to realize that many of these wars were driven by nationalistic ideals, not Christian ideals. Let's look at the Crusades for example. Up until Constantine in the fourth Century, the main religion of the Roman Empire was paganism. If you were a Christian before then there was a good chance you would get arrested or thrown to wild animals. Constantine comes along and makes Christianity the primary religion of Rome. Now, what happens when the most powerful guy in the world says that everyone must be a Christian?! Think about it ... you sign on the bottom line. And if you really want to butter him up, you go with him to church and go along with whatever seems to make him happy. We've already mentioned that the church is filled with non-Christians; so now you've got this situation where Church and state are inseparable. This is not about the advancement of the kingdom of God as Jesus spoke about it, but the advancement of Empire and the expansion of European rule. And if you dig beneath most other historical conflicts, you will see similar political agendas and ideologies using religion as means for their true end. It honestly just gets really messy and confusing when you hide your nationalistic ideals behind the name of Jesus.

These atrocities go against everything that Jesus taught

Now I don't know if Constantine and some of those guys were or weren't genuine but confused believers. Either way, I know they mixed religion and politics into a really potent cocktail. But here's something I *do* know: These atrocities go against everything Jesus taught. More often than not, true Christianity (the kind lived and taught by Jesus) was persecuted over history, precisely because it went *against* Empire and political ideologies. Jesus continually warns us against using coercive

power. In fact, in Matthew 5:44, he goes as far as to say, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”.

I want to tread gently and very carefully now. But so often, ‘religion’ is blamed for so many wars, death and violence. But if you had to go to *The Guinness Book of World Records*, and the subject ‘Crimes, Mass Killings’, the greatest massacre ever done by a government of one sovereign against the government of another is 26.3 million Chinese during the reign of Mao Tse Tung between 1949 and 1965.²⁵ Some have published the figures up to 70 million Chinese. Hitler killed 6 million Jews. Khmer Rouge in Cambodia: 2 million of their own people. Between Lenin and Stalin in Russia, they killed between 20 and 65 million people. Why am I telling you this? All of these leaders based their ideologies on atheistic ideologies. Again, this is not to say that all atheists will do this – most atheists are moral, wonderful people. But the point I want to make very carefully is this: these tragic events in Christianity’s past are the *unnatural* outworking of Christ’s teachings while violence done in the name of atheism is a *natural* outworking of some other religious views as well as the worldview that says there is no God. It is the outworking of the belief that it’s the strong eliminating the weak and that nature is red in tooth and claw.

3. A different way

When people came to arrest Jesus, Peter takes out a sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest’s servant. Jesus takes the ear and puts it back; and then goes off not to kill, but to be killed for the sins of humanity, for the evils of others. Admittedly, we don’t always get that right. True Christianity does not burn witches or burn people at the stake for believing something different. True Christianity loves the stranger, fights for the rights of neighbours who are different to them; true Christianity washes their feet and prays for their enemies.

So, if you’re a skeptic and you believe the church is filled with hypocrites, I agree with you. But as Mark Clark points out, that doesn’t mean Christianity isn’t true or

²⁵ Gregory Koukl, *Tactics*

that it isn't working.²⁶ On the contrary, it may mean that it *is* working! At the end of the day, we are all going to face question: "What did *you* do about the offer of salvation through Christ?" Not, "What did *others* do?"

²⁶ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God*

HOW DOES SEX AND GENDER MATTER?

Chapter 7

For many people, a massive obstacle to faith is what they believe is the church's teaching of sex, sexuality and gender. Often the church and God is labelled anti-sex, anti-homosexual, regressive, backwards and closed-minded. The tide of culture is basically that sex is an appetite; if you feel like it, you should have it. Some would still throw love into it, as long as you love the person and you're not hurting anyone. And so when we talk sex and gender, we get to this clash between Christianity and culture today: Who gets to define marriage? Who gets to define boundaries? Who gets to define what's ok and what's not ok?

I believe that all of life's tough questions are raised in Genesis 1, 2 and 3. Everything else in the Bible is simply building on the platform of these three chapters. Even when it comes to sex, sexual identity, marriage and gender, the Scriptures speak.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"²⁷

1. Gender and gender identity

Right from the beginning we see God creating these opposites: light and dark, day and night, sun and moon, land and water, plants and animals, creatures of the earth and creatures of the sea. And then we've got humanity as the pinnacle of God's creation, male and female created in the image of God. Already we see this idea that male and female *together* display the image of God. They are equal in dignity, equal in worth, and yet we see this complementarity about them. There's this togetherness, that somehow together, more of God is displayed, more about what he is like, more about his love, more about his life.

²⁷ Genesis 1:26-27

Secondly, and more controversially, what we also see here is this binary, male and female, same but not same, like but different. What I've just said would be called unfair by most of culture, some would even call it hate speech, because this is certainly not where culture's is at the moment. Not too long ago, Bruce Jenner (a gold medal Olympic athlete and father of six children) came out as Caitlyn Jenner. This has become a reality TV show and Caitlyn is a massive celebrity. You may be aware of some of the debate in European and American schools, shops and restaurants about who can go into whose public bathrooms. I've heard of schools who draw a line with an M on one side, and an F on the other. They then ask 5 and 6 year old children to come up and plot along this gender continuum where they believe they are. So how do we engage and think about these issues?

Firstly, let's distinguish between sex and gender. When we talk about sex, we're talking about one's biological sex which is determined by the presence of male or female chromosomes (presence of XX or XY chromosomes). This is not really where the debate is. However, when it comes to genetics, we see exactly this binary, that one's DNA is only ever male or female.

But when we talk about gender or gender identity, we're talking about how one experiences the world either as a male or a female; so it's one's psychological and emotional experience of gender. The million-dollar question around gender and gender identity at the moment is around what happens when one's gender identity does not match one's biological sex? What happens when one feels female but you're biologically male and vice versa? The current tide of culture is, "Let them be ... I'm not going to force gender stereotypes on my child I'm not going to make my kids play with barbies and cars and guns and baking trays ... I'm going to let my child decide what gender they want to be". So the voice of culture is: *you are what you feel*. And the argument goes that self-perception is sacred and must never be challenged. But does this pan out?

A recent study by genetic researchers at Israel's Weizmann Institute of Science found that there are at least 6500 genes containing sex-specific instructions for

males and females.²⁸ So even if one does go for sexual reassignment surgery, and go for all the cosmetic procedures, vocal training, hair growth or hair removal, biologically, the person has not changed from being a man into being a woman or vice versa. No matter what sexual reassignment surgeries people undergo, or what hormonal supplements they take, they will always have the genetic sex they did at conception. There is also a ton of research that shows that in 3 out of 4 cases, the gender identity conflict resolves on its own.²⁹

Another question is: When do we match the body to the mind, and when do we try and match the mind to the body? The current debate is all about matching your body (external) to how you feel (internally). But we don't always do that when we want to help people though: Someone who is anorexic may weigh 45kg, but looks in the mirror and due to emotional and psychological factors, believes that he/she is fat and overweight. Now in this case, we try and match the mind (internal) to what is objectively true (external). That is how we love and help people in this situation.

2. God's Design for Marriage

One of the reasons God made us binary is because he's got a plan for all of this called marriage.

*"But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." **Genesis 2:20b-25***

²⁸ <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/10/20169/>

²⁹ Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*

This last bit is one of the most quoted passages in the Bible because in it we see God's design for marriage. Jesus and Paul quote it all the time because each time they are going back to the beginning before sin and brokenness entered the world, entered culture, entered our psychology and even our bodies. This is where God takes male and female, both made in his image, same but not same, equal but different, and he says, "Go!" In Genesis 1:28, after creating us, God said, "Be fruitful and increase in number". In other words, part of the reason God made things the way he did is for reproduction. It's not the only reason, but part. Just like he made seeds for plants and pollen and seeds for flowers, He wants to bring these opposites together and make more people. Since then, every single one of us came from a biological woman and a biological man.

But once again, we encounter another collision with culture over this. The dominant cultural narrative is, if two people love each other, whether it's male-male or female-female, how can we deprive another person of love and happiness? One of the arguments raised is that since we see some animals who seem to have same-sex relations with one another, that makes it normal and we shouldn't be surprised when we see it in humanity. Well, if we're going to take our cue from nature, where do we start and stop? A male buffalo will round up the females and have his pick and gore to death any male who challenges him. The female praying mantis devours the males who are mating with her. Should we do that?

Beneath all of this is an assumption: *If I have an urge within me, that urge must be normal and natural and moral.* But how do we determine which urges within me are ok which are not? Are all urges in me ok? What if what comes naturally to me is to have more than one wife? What if I am attracted to my sister or young boys? TED is a famous video and ideas platform. TED's catch phrase is *Ideas Worth Spreading*. A recent TED talk saw a Dutch psychologist urge her listeners to "break the taboo" around pedophilia,³⁰ arguing that it's a sexual orientation that people are born with. She said, "I truly do believe that every person is longing for love at some point in their life. And what if this love that you really wish for will forever be impossible? That

³⁰ <https://blog.ted.com/tedx-talk-under-review/>

must be a really lonely situation to be in”. Can you see the logic? Because someone is lonely, plus because they have these urges which feel natural to them, let’s break the taboo.

I think part of the issue is how we think about freedom. We think true freedom is the absence of boundaries, that boundaries are primitive and get in the way. But if we thought about this just briefly, we would realize that we actually need boundaries to flourish and be truly human. I recently went trout fishing and managed to catch lots of trout. Most of the time I practice catch and release because a trout thrives within the boundary of water – take it out of the boundary of water and it dies. Tim Keller rightly says that, “Freedom is not the absence of restrictions but the presence of the right restrictions”.³¹ And so when we have the right boundaries in relationships, life and marriage, we flourish.

3. The gift of sex

One of the things that God gave us to flourish in marriage is sex (Gen 2:24-25). I love how Pastor Chris Brown put it: “God gave Eve to Adam and his first words were ... ‘See you in half an hour’”.³² Here’s God’s goal for marriage, that you become one flesh, one life, an entanglement of who you are emotionally, spiritually, physically and socially. This is the only way, and still the only way, when something male joins with something female that new life is formed. And to encourage this experience, God made this experience good! God decided to add those nerve endings and make your brain release chemicals that increase relational bonding.

But culture has in many ways said *sex is God*, that you are most human when you are sexually fulfilled, and you should do everything in your power to satisfy this appetite. In other words, there is something core to human experience that you are missing out on if you are not fully actualizing your sexuality.

³¹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*

³² <https://www.northcoastchurch.com/messages/28-sex-and-the-marriage-bed/>

Unfortunately, the dominant narrative for the church has been, “We don’t talk about that in church ... “ So through our silence, or our continual “*Sex is bad sex is bad sex is bad*” narrative, we’ve left a massive vacuum in our discourse on sex. What we see here is that God is the one that created sex as good and powerful. He celebrates it, he designed our same but different bodies to fit, he designed our pleasure centres. And he gave us these boundaries, not to limit human flourishing, but to create safety and security for maximum human flourishing creating strong, safe families.

4. Grace and truth

Very briefly: here’s one last thing we haven’t done too well in. We haven’t done too well in engaging people who fall outside of these categories, when it comes to those who experience same sex attraction, who have opted for sexual reassignment surgery, when it comes to those who have had a child outside of a stable marriage relationship or entered into same-sex relationships. Usually the overwhelming voice of the church is: “You are not accepted or you are not acceptable” where the overwhelming voice of the Gospel is “You have *all* fallen short, and you are *all* accepted by me; not on the basis of your morality, but on the basis that my Son died for you and made you acceptable to me.”

The Apostle John says that Jesus came full of grace and truth (John 1:14); not 80%-20% or 50%-50%, but 100%-100% grace and truth. John tells the story of a woman caught in the act of adultery. In other words, she fell outside of God’s boundaries and outside of the culturally accepted norms. (By the way, the man was noticeably missing from the event.) The Pharisees came with truth, the Jewish Law, and wanted to stone her. Jesus comes and famously says, “If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). One by one the Pharisees left, recognizing the unavoidable power of Jesus’ words – they too were sinners and they too had fallen short. Jesus continues to say, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? ... Then neither do I condemn you ... Go now and leave your life of sin”. Notice that when Jesus comes in grace and truth, he leads with grace, and only *thee*en, in the context of grace, speaks truth.

The Gospel says that *none* of us earn God's favour, but that Jesus fully satisfied the requirements of the Law and imputes it to us. And then ... and only *then* do we begin walking many chapters of transformation with God where He deals with our hearts, our loves, our identity, our language and yes, our sexuality. Romans 2:4 says that it is God's *kindness* that leads us to repentance. In other words, it is divine kindness not condemnation that brings about real change and transformation in our lives. In the right time, God applies his truth and he supplies his grace for whatever chapter he is busy writing in this person's life.

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

Chapter 8

For many years the Bible held some sort of cultural weight. If you said anything and you added the words, “Because the Bible says so”, for many people that was enough. But things have changed. Many who are not Christians would say things like:

- The Bible is just a bunch of old stories and myths
- The Bible not rooted in history
- The Bible contradicts itself all the time
- The Bible has changed radically over time; people have added to the Bible and written their own agendas into it
- This was written 2-3000 years ago. It is outdated, irrelevant now

Bart Ehrman who used to be a Christian and is still a New Testament scholar said, “Some of the writers of the Bible were religious geniuses ... But they were not inspired by God, in my opinion, any more than any other genius is. And they contradict each other all over the map”³³. Richard Dawkins argues, “To be fair, much of the Bible is not systematically evil but just plain weird”³⁴. The late Christopher Hitchens believes, “The Bible ... was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals.”³⁵ Finally, Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code* suggests, “The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.”

As Christians, normally we speak about the Bible by using the Bible. Philosophers call this circular reasoning. In this chapter we’re going to talk about the Bible without using the Bible. We’re asking the question, “Can we trust the Bible?” And we’re

³³ Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*

³⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

³⁵ Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*

going to look at the evidence for why we *can* trust the Bible. This, by the way, is one of the things I love about the Bible. We can, excuse the pun, play open book. We can say, “Check it out, apply your most rigorous testing!”

1) Bibliographical evidence

Some people say that maybe some guy, maybe a religious guy, a great teacher or a prophet, wrote a whole bunch of stuff in a cave 2-3 000 years ago. But, they would argue that there’s no way we can know what they wrote down, because the Bible is thousands of years old. They would point to something like the broken telephone game. You never end up with the sentence you started. So they would say that in much the same way, we cannot have any confidence that what we have is what was written down 2 or 3000 years ago.

But there are actually some methods that scholars use to determine how much an ancient document has changed over time:

- They look at how many ancient copies of the manuscripts we have. The more you have, you can study the variations and determine where the mistakes are and which are original
- Scholars look at the time between the time that the manuscript was written and the earliest copies we have of those manuscripts. The shorter the time period, the less time you have for mistakes to creep in.

Other than Bible, the most reliable ancient document is Homer’s Iliad.³⁶ The Iliad was written in about 800BC about the Trojan War. The earliest copies we have of the Iliad are from 400BC, a gap of 400 years. To date we have discovered just over 1500 copies of the Iliad. This allows scholars to lay out the 1500 copies, compare them, see where the mistakes lie and get a really good idea as to what was in the original text. Heroditus is often called the Father of History as he recorded a lot of history from ancient the world in about 450BC. We’ve got 49 papyrus fragments from Heroditus with the earliest surviving manuscript coming from the 10thC AD. This is a

³⁶ <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>

gap of 1450 years. Plato, considered to be the most pivotal figure in the development of philosophy, wrote his 7 Tetralogies around 400BC. At latest count we have about 210 ancient manuscripts with the oldest surviving manuscript from 895 AD. A gap of 1300a. I could continue to talk about Caesar's Gallic wars, Pliny the elder, Tacitus and more. These are not the most disputed ancient documents but considered to be the most reliable ancient documents.

Now if you've studied philosophy or European history, here's what you never hear: "Guys, this is a bit embarrassing, but we've only got 200 copies of Plato and this embarrassing gap of 1300 years. We just can't be sure if we have what he wrote down; we can't even be sure if he existed!" In the same way, you never will you hear on the History Channel, "So I know we've all watched Asterix and Obelix, but we've actually got no way of knowing if Caesar even existed, what he did and what he accomplished because we have only 250 manuscripts and this gap of 900 years". Rather what you find is people studying Roman history, Caesar's Gallic Wars, Heroditus and Tacitus as if they were real people and as if their documents are reliable. We've got people studying Plato's philosophy like we've got the copies of what Plato actually wrote down. If you had to ask where this confidence comes from, they would tell you that they have good *evidence* to trust the documents they have access to. And yet, many of the same scholars would turn around and tell us that we cannot trust the Bible historically.

How does the Bible fair?

Let me show you how the Bible fairs when we use the exact same set of requirements in order to determine whether or not we can trust that what we have is a reliable historical document.

- The earliest papyrus that we have compared to the time of writing is a gap of not 1000 years, or 400 years, but 40 years!
- The number of ancient Greek manuscripts we have is not 100, 200 or even 400, but over 5000 ancient Greek manuscripts. If you add manuscripts we have in other ancient languages, we have over 25 000 ancient copies of the New Testament. [For more details on this, see Appendix A]

2. Did the Bible evolve into myth?

Others have been concerned about the gap between the actual events and the time of writing. Karen Armstrong in her best-selling book *A History of God* says, “We know very little about Jesus. The first full-length account of his life was St. Mark’s Gospel, which was not written until about the year 70 AD, some forty years after his death. By that time, historical facts had been overlaid with mythical elements which expressed the meaning Jesus has acquired for his followers ... rather than a reliable straightforward portrayal.”³⁷ The basic claim is that Jesus didn’t die and rise from the dead and do miracles. He might have been a great teacher, but we’ve got no idea, because after he died, people started telling stories about him, and their stories got bigger and more embellished until people started believing these evolved stories about Jesus.

Here’s the problem with that. Some of Paul’s letters were written as early as 15-20 years after the life of Jesus. If you’re going to make up stories about miracles and stuff, you need to wait until the eye-witnesses are dead. If I start saying that the Holocaust never happened, eye-witnesses will come forward saying, “But I was there!” Paul when talking about the resurrection says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to over 500 eye-witnesses, most of who are still alive. In other words – go and ask them yourself! Gospel writers include real names of real people like Simon of Cyrene. All the events around Jesus were also very public. There’s just too many eye-witnesses and not enough time for myth to develop.

3. Archaeological evidence

Not only did the biblical authors use real names, but real places. For many years people have tried to argue that the Bible refers to places that haven’t been discovered archaeologically. So, they say, ‘The Bible is wrong, throw it away’. The book of John refers to a place called Bethesda in chapter five that has a pool ‘by the Sheep Gate’ and that there are ‘five-roofed colonnades’. People had been digging around Jerusalem and had found no pool and no five-roofed colonnades near the

³⁷ Mark Clark, *the Problem of God*

Sheep Gate. In other words, 'The Bible is wrong, it can't be trusted, throw it away'. Yet if you go to Jerusalem today, you can see what they discovered in the mid 19th century as they dug a little deeper ... a pool at Bethesda, near the Sheep Gate, with five-roofed colonnades, just as John describes.³⁸

This next one happened quite recently. The Scriptures make mention of a town called Magdala, the namesake of Mary of Magdalene. Again, scholars hadn't found it and said that the Bible can't be trusted. But in the early to mid 2000's, they discovered the town of Magdala on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, just as the Scriptures describe.³⁹

The New Testament spoke about Pontius Pilate but there was no external evidence anywhere that he existed. Until in 1960 when in Caesarea Philippi archaeologists uncovered a stone: *Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea*. Every time an archaeological site is found, one more obstacle is removed, there is one more piece of evidence, one more confirmation of the Scriptures. Nelson Glueck, considered to be one of the world's greatest archaeologists, and appeared on the cover of Time magazine was credited with personally uncovering over 1500 ancient sites in the Middle East. After all his work, he stated, "No archaeological discovery has ever overturned a Biblical reference". The Smithsonian Anthropological Department went on record saying, "Much of the Bible, in particular the historical books of the Old Testament, are as accurate historical documents as any that we have from antiquity and are in fact more accurate than many of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Greek histories".

Luke, being a doctor and familiar with facts and evidence, wrote the book of Acts. In it he mentions 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands and he mentions by name and by rank 65 Roman, Jewish and Gentile leaders. Sir William Ramsay was an atheist and the son of an atheist. He came from a wealthy family and had graduated from the prestigious university of Oxford. He had been taught that the New Testament was not a historical document and really wanted to make a name for himself, disproving

³⁸ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God*

³⁹ <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1219/the-archaeological-excavations-at-magdala/>

the Bible through archaeology and determination. He decided to start with the writings of Luke and set out for the Holy Land. During the next 25 years he released book after book. He was incredibly impressed with the accuracy that Luke wrote with. Finally, he declared, “Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense...in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians. Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness.” Sir William Ramsay shocked the world after 30 years of trying to disprove the Bible by announcing to his followers that he too was a Christian now, simply because of the archaeological evidence.⁴⁰

4. Internal contradictions

But doesn’t everyone know that the Bible contradicts itself all the time? Reddit.com is one of most popular websites for young skeptics today, all posting alleged contradictions. Now I don’t have time to get into all of them, but let’s look at two:

- Matthew 27:5 says that Judas hung himself, but Acts 1:18 says that he bought a field, fell headlong in it and he literally burst open with all his guts coming out. There we go – obvious contradiction! But like with so many Scriptures, this not a contradictory account, but a complimentary account. If one said he choked to death and another said he died of a stab wound, then yes, that would be a contradiction. This one’s pretty simple: he hung himself, probably hung there for a while, after which either the rope broke or someone cut him down, he hit the ground and burst open. Not a very pleasant picture, but there it is.
- Elsewhere people point out that Matthew 28:5 refers to an angel talking to the women, whereas in John 20:12 it says that there were two angels. Contradiction? Let’s not get too excited here. Matthew is simply talking about the angel that did the talking, John is explaining how many angels there were.

In fact, in a court of law, if four eye-witness accounts were exactly the same, they would believe that there was clear collusion. But if all report the account in slightly different ways, remembering different complimentary details, they would conclude

⁴⁰ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*

that the eye-witnesses are all telling the truth. And that is what we have with the four Gospels of the New Testament.

So here we have this set of ancient documents, more than forty authors, most of whom never knew each other personally, political leaders, prophets, fisherman, tax collectors, doctors, herdsman and priests, written over the course of 1500 years, on three continents, Asia, Africa, Europe, in three different languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and yet we have such coherency. If you took ten authors, from one generation, from one class in the same university and got them to write on something controversial like land expropriation, you would get ten radically different and conflicting opinions.

Gleason Archer trained in Latin, Greek, French and German, majored in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic; and in post-graduate years became involved in Syriac and Akkadian, taught classes in Middle Kingdom Egyptian studies, did specialized study in Eighteenth Dynasty historical records and also studied Coptic and Sumerian, and completed a full law degree and was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar. He has probably written the definitive book on Biblical contradictions where he deals with every single objection people have raised. In it he makes this remark, "As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself-or else by objective archaeological information."⁴¹

⁴¹ Gleason Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*

5. The prophetic reliability of the Scriptures

Imagine you had to write down 2000 predictions about 1500 years from now and place them in an envelope. Cities haven't been developed yet, you would have to mention leaders in power, 465 of them would need to be about one man. You would need to mention his name, where he would be born, how he would die and so forth. Now imagine they all came true?! But that's what we get with the Scriptures. I heard a debate between the late Christopher Hitchens (atheist) and Douglas Wilson (Christian) and when they got to discussing the prophetic reliability of the Bible, Christopher Hitchens remarked, "Ok, the Bible says that the Messiah must enter Jerusalem on a donkey. Quick get me donkey!"⁴² To which Douglas Wilson said, "Ok fine, I'll give you the donkey." And then he went on to point out all the Messianic fulfillments that he could have had no control over. If Jesus was just a man, how could he control where he was born, what tribe he was in, the census at the time of his birth, Herod's killing of two-year old baby boys, Jesus' family, fleeing into Egypt and Roman soldiers casting lots for Jesus' clothes, just to mention a few? Apparently the statistical chance of Jesus only fulfilling eight of these prophecies amount to this: cover the state of Texas in dollar coins two-feet, draw an X on one of them, blindfold someone and let them walk around Texas until they decide to pick up a coin. The chances that they pick up the coin with an X on it are the kinds of odds we're talking about. And that's just eight prophecies. Jesus fulfilled many more than that. ⁴³

I want to wrap this up, but I haven't even spoken about how the Jewish Scribes went to such great pains to ensure that there were no mistakes. They trained for years to become a scribe. They would know which was the central word and the central letter of any scroll, and if any of the copies were out, they would tear the whole thing up. I haven't spoken about the fact that there's so much counter-productive content in the Scriptures. Half the time the disciples look like total fools. We've got Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane wrestling with obeying the Father's will. If you're making a religion up, you don't put that stuff in unless it actually happened that way. I haven't spoken about the Dead Sea scrolls which were discovered in 1949. These

⁴² *Collision* Documentary

⁴³ http://sciencespeaks.dstoner.net/Christ_of_Prophecy.html

scrolls were from a community known as the Essenes that lived around the time of Christ in Qumran near the Dead Sea. Previous to their discovery, the oldest Old Testament scrolls were from the Masoretes in 900AD. They could now compare Old Testament scrolls from the time of Christ with copies that were 1000 years younger, and yet they found that they were practically identical.⁴⁴

How many people have walked away from faith because of false information, or because of something that hasn't archaeologically been discovered yet, or because of an apparent contradiction in the Scriptures? Mistrust in this book is the oldest challenge out there. Right in the beginning, the first doubt placed in our minds was, "Did God really say?" Seriously, can you trust God's words? Isn't that often your challenge? The Bible says something you don't like, or it confronts a deeply held cultural belief, and something in you says, "Did God really say?" As Tim Keller points out, maybe that isn't an argument against the Bible, maybe that's an argument *for* the Bible?⁴⁵ If the Bible does originate with God, don't you think that he will challenge every culture at every part of history in one way or another? He's not always going to agree with you? I mean seriously, when you put all this together, what do you get? People say we believe in the Bible without evidence, but all I've been talking about is evidence. The evidence for the Scriptures makes the Bible stand apart from every other ancient document. Why is that? Let's just apply some logic here: If there's a God, is it totally irrational to think that the God who could cause this universe and this creation to come into being couldn't protect his book? Maybe, just maybe it's God's Word preserved by God.

⁴⁴ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*

⁴⁵ Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*

WHO IS JESUS?

Chapter 9

Christians make a big deal out of Jesus. But if you had to ask different people who Jesus is, you would get different answers depending on their worldview:

- Buddhism teaches that Jesus was not God but an enlightened man like Buddha
- Hinduism teaches that Jesus was *an* incarnation of god(s), like Krishna
- Islam teaches that Jesus was a man and a prophet but was inferior to Mohammed
- Jehovah's witnesses say that Jesus was merely the archangel Michael, a created being that became a man
- Mormonism teaches that Jesus was only a man who became one of many gods, that he was a polygamist and the half-brother of Lucifer
- New Age guru Deepak Chopra says Jesus is a state of consciousness we can all aspire to
- Scientology (think Tom Cruise and John Travolta) teaches that Jesus was an implant forced on a Thetan about a million years ago⁴⁶

Even for many who go to church, Jesus is just a life-coach who exists to make them feel good about themselves; or Jesus is their butler, and with the right words and right phrases they can get Jesus to magically do whatever they want him to do. But this question, 'Who is Jesus' still stands as the most important question everybody needs to be able to answer.

⁴⁶ Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*

1. The problem of exclusivity

At a superficial level, people seem to like Jesus; they don't always like his followers or his church, but they like kind Jesus, compassionate Jesus, healing Jesus, welcoming-sinners Jesus, they definitely like Jesus who turns water into Cabernet Sauvignon, they like the soft-haired and twinkly-eyed Jesus of the movies who somehow managed to keep his clothes perfectly white. But dig in a little deeper and there's a couple of things about him that make people very uncomfortable. The dominant cultural value today is one of tolerance, which in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. However, not only is cultural tolerance embraced, but idea tolerance is also embraced to the point of flat-out relativism. The way this comes out is, 'You've got your truth, I've got my truth, who are we to say anyone is wrong about anything'. But Jesus makes culture so uncomfortable when he says: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). These exclusive claims are difficult for many Christians to embrace as well. We live in a troubled but beautifully diverse country where we want to celebrate different cultures, different backgrounds, different foods and other cultural expressions. In this climate, it seems horribly intolerant and exclusive to maintain that some ideas are better than others.

In much of this resource, we have attempted to show that naturalistic and atheistic worldviews fall short as a reason for everything. However, where atheism says, 'all religions are wrong', a culture of tolerance and inclusivity says, 'all religions are right'. Now of course we don't want to offend unnecessarily or be unnecessarily intolerant, so we've got this right-hearted impulse where we don't want to offend anyone, so we say, 'All religions are true'. But here's what we don't understand: If, in the name of being intolerant and inoffensive we want to say, 'All religions are right', we have just offended 95% of the world's population. And if all religions are right, does that include the Ammonites that used to take babies and tear their limbs apart and throw them in a fire with drums playing so the parents couldn't hear their

screams? What about Jim Jones who convinced over 900 of his followers to kill themselves? ⁴⁷

Not only is this inclusivist way of thinking actually highly exclusive, it also commits the very crime it is accusing all other religions of doing, and that is intellectual arrogance, because it says, “I have a particular way of thinking about *all* religions that is exclusive/true/right.” A well-known parable of Eastern origins about six blind men and an elephant is often used to make this point. The blind men are led into a room where, unbeknown to them, is an elephant. Each is asked to feel and describe what is in front of him. One feels a tusk and believes he has a spear; the one with the trunk believes he has a snake; one is convinced he is touching a wall and not the elephant’s side and so it goes. The parable goes on to say that this is how it is with the world’s religions which have come to different conclusions about the same thing. We are told that no one religion has the whole truth, that truth is subjective and relative to the individual. We are told therefore that since we are all equally blind, no one religion can judge another about truth. Leslie Newbiggin, the missiologist, points out that the story backfires on itself because it is being told from the vantage point of *someone who can actually see*, someone who is not blind, someone who *does* have a comprehensive understanding of reality. The teller of the parable claims to know the *full* reality which the world religions can’t. ⁴⁸

In addition, inclusivist claims are illogical. Mahatma Gandhi said, “My position is that all great religions are fundamentally equal”. In speaking to people about different religions, the general response can be summarized by the idea that all religions are fundamentally similar and superficially different. In other words, they may sing different songs, wear different clothes and say different prayers, but in essence, they are all the same. But the truth is that they are superficially similar and fundamentally different. Most religions have similar moralities and some sort of Golden Rule element. But just beneath the surface they differ on sin, salvation, ultimate reality, justice, heaven, hell and Jesus. The point is that no two opposing ideas can be right

⁴⁷ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God*

⁴⁸ Leslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*

in the same way at the same time. Have you ever looked for your seat on a plane or in a movie and found someone sitting in that exact seat? Here's what you don't do: sit on their lap because you're both right. No, both of you rightly assume that only one of you is right, and that one of you misread the seat number or is on the wrong plane or in the wrong movie. I understand that we may *want* both to be true.

Sometimes the way I deal with things is denial, like when my pool goes green. In my head, if I ignore it, it's not true because I don't want it to be true. But the problem is that the more I leave it, the worse it gets until eventually I have to face up to reality, what is true. Either Jesus is the Son of God or he's not. He just can't be both, that's illogical.

2. The problem of the Christ Myth

A few years ago, a movie called 'Zeitgeist' went viral around university campuses claiming that long before Jesus there were many other myths from different cultures about dying and rising gods who heal people, walk on water, born of a virgin, feeding thousands of people, having 12 disciples, dying for 3 days and rising again. In other words, Jesus is just a plagiarized form of older mythological characters like Horus, Mithras and Dionysius.

The first problem with that is, unlike these other mythological gods, not only do we have the eye-witness accounts in the New Testament that Jesus actually existed, but we have non-biblical sources, hostile to Christianity, many of them hostile to Judaism who have recorded Jesus' actual existence and claims. These sources include Thallus, Tacitus, Phlegon, Pliny the younger, Josephus, Lucian, Celsus and more. If you compiled what all these non-biblical sources said about Jesus, this is what emerges:

"Jesus was born and lived in Palestine. He was born, supposedly, to a virgin and had an earthly father who was a carpenter. He was a teacher who taught that through repentance and belief, all followers would become brothers and sisters. He led the Jews away from their beliefs. He was a wise man who claimed to be God and the Messiah. He had unusual magical powers and performed miraculous deeds. He

healed the lame. He accurately predicted the future. He was persecuted by the Jews for what He said, betrayed by Judah Iskarioto. He was beaten with rods, forced to drink vinegar and wear a crown of thorns. He was crucified on the eve of the Passover and this crucifixion occurred under the direction of Pontius Pilate, during the time of Tiberius. On the day of His crucifixion, the sky grew dark and there was an earthquake. Afterward, He was buried in a tomb and the tomb was later found to be empty. He appeared to His disciples resurrected from the grave and showed them His wounds. These disciples then told others Jesus was resurrected and ascended into heaven. Jesus' disciples and followers upheld a high moral code. One of them was named Matthai. The disciples were also persecuted for their faith but were martyred without changing their claims. They met regularly to worship Jesus, even after His death."⁴⁹

Remember, these were hostile sources that agree with the historical claims of the New Testament! So already, Jesus stands out amongst these mythological figures as an actual person of history.

Earlier I mentioned that 'all these other myths' also have a god-man like figure who could heal people, walk on water, born of a virgin, feeding thousands of people, having 12 disciples, dying for 3 days and rising again. But as we look at the facts, we discover that these claims are a bit of a stretch. Here are two examples:⁵⁰

- **Horus:** It is claimed by some that Horus had 12 disciples, but there is no Egyptologist who accepts this claim. There is no mention of Horus' 12 disciples in *The Book of the Dead*, nor is this idea contained the hieroglyphs of Egypt. In fact, the closest we get in Egyptian Hieroglyphs of Horus having disciples are four accepted followers: a turtle, a bear, a lion and a tiger. They also claim that Horus was born of a virgin. But if we look at the story of Horus' conception, we learn that his mother's name was Isis and his father was Osiris. Osiris was in a fight with another god during which he was killed and chopped into pieces. The story goes that Isis gathered up the pieces and hovered over his severed phallus. Now to

⁴⁹ <http://coldcasechristianity.com/2017/is-there-any-evidence-for-jesus-outside-the-bible/>

⁵⁰ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God*

call this a parallel with Jesus' virgin birth is a stretch. Finally, the claim is that Horus rose from the dead. Except in most Horus stories he doesn't die at all. There is one story where he does die, and in that story he is cut into pieces by an enemy and then thrown into water and then fished out the water by crocodiles.

- **Mithras:** It is often claimed that Mithras is another mythological figure plagiarized by Jesus. He too was supposedly born of a virgin, just like Jesus. However, Mithras was born fully formed out of a rock with a dagger in one hand and a torch in the other. Exactly the same as the virgin birth? I mean how do you tell if a rock is a virgin?! Another problem with Mithras is that while there was a Babylonian form of Mithraism predating Christ, most of what we know about Mithras is from the Roman form of Mithraism, in the third and fourth centuries AD, *after* Christ's death and resurrection. The earliest Christian leaders like Tertullian and Justin Martyr were already claiming that Mithras borrowed from Christianity not the other way around.⁵¹

Lee Strobel in his book, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, quotes T.N.D. Mettinger, a senior Swedish scholar, professor at Lund University who wrote one of the most recent academic treatments of dying and rising gods in antiquity. Mettinger admits that the consensus among modern scholars is that there are no dying and rising gods that preceded Christianity. He ends off his study by admitting, "There is, as far as I am aware, no *prima facie* evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites of the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world".⁵²

3. Did Jesus claim to be God?

I remember waiting in the parking lot for my then girlfriend, soon to be wife, when the thought struck me that for my entire life, I had simply believed that Jesus was God. I realized that I could not point to a single Scripture (without Google) that pointed towards Jesus' divinity. I can still remember me discovering for myself the biblical claims for Jesus' divinity. However, what I didn't find anywhere in the Scriptures, as

⁵¹ For a more comical take on this, see <https://youtu.be/IZR-bMzi5Gk>

⁵² Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*

many skeptics are quick to point out, were the words coming out of Jesus' mouth, "I am God". Many attempt to conclude that Jesus therefore didn't claim to be God and that any sense of divinity we ascribe to Jesus is culturally formed.

What we're going to see, is that not only did Jesus claim to be God, but he claimed to be a very specific God, the One and Only true God, the God who made all things, the God of Abraham and Moses, the God who is sovereign and who alone forgives sin and deserves our worship. Now, just because someone claims to be God doesn't make them God. Caesar claimed to be a god, David Koresh and Jim Jones claimed to be God, yet that doesn't necessarily make them God. So while Jesus never said the words, "I am God", let's see how he makes his claims:

- *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (John 17:3). Here, not only does he affirm that there is only one true God, but that knowing him is the same as knowing this one true God.
- *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). According to Jewish law, such claims to divinity were considered blasphemy and punishable by capital punishment. Let's see how this plays out.
- *"I tell you the truth", Jesus answered, "Before Abraham was born, I AM!"* (John 8:58). Here Jesus is claiming pre-existence as well as making a claim to the personal name of the God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3. In case you think we're stretching the language a bit far here, notice how the Jews respond in the following verse: *"At this, they picked up stones to stone him"* (John 8:59). They knew exactly what Jesus was claiming!
- *"Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these', replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God'"* (John 10:30-33).

These are just a few examples where Jesus was certainly claiming to be God even though he never used the words, "I am God". While this doesn't prove he was God

(the evidence for the resurrection in the following chapter will aim to do that), one cannot say that Jesus never claimed to be God.

4. Lord, Liar, Lunatic

In the name of religious tolerance, many are happy to believe that Jesus was a great man, a great prophet or teacher, but they do not believe that he was God. C.S. Lewis famously points out that when it comes to these claims, we're only left with three options:

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”⁵³

As a Christian, I believe that Jesus existed, that He claimed to be God, that the Scriptures bear accurate historical witness to his life, death and resurrection, and that the worldview forming out of the Scriptures and the reality of Jesus Christ is the most profound, true and meaningful worldview out there. I grew up in a pastor's home and my parents did their level best to raise me as a Christian. A regular challenge to many Christians is that they are simply Christians because of the family or time and place they live in. If they were raised in India, they would most likely be a Hindu. Now that may be true, but that is no argument for truth because that door swings both ways. One could argue that you're only an atheist because of the family, time and place you grew up in. Maybe if you were born into Buddhist China you too would be a devout Buddhist. I suspect that the atheist would likewise respond that while this is an interesting anthropological observation, it does not bear on what is ultimately true or not.

⁵³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 45

DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD?

Chapter 10

In the previous chapter we asked the question, “Who is Jesus?” and we saw how the evidence points towards a real, historical figure, who lived this incredible life and made these incredible claims about being God. But again, just because you claim to be God doesn’t make you God.

When talking about the Christian faith, think about a dart board. At the centre of our faith is the Gospel, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. But at the centre of the centre, the red part of the bullseye, the point at which everything comes together or falls apart is the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus never rose from the dead, then he’s a dead Messiah, which means he’s a failed Messiah and God is up there in heaven grateful that there is one less crazy out there thinking he’s God. But, if Jesus did rise from the dead – I’m not talking about resuscitation, I’m not talking about ‘seeing the lights and hearing angel’s music’ and being ripped back into the real world; I’m not talking about kick-starting the heart with a defibrillator (I had to look that one up, those cool moments in the movies when they send an electric current into the body to get the heart going again), I’m not even talking about Lazarus, who was dead, smelly dead (the King James Version said, ‘He stinketh’), where Jesus raised him from the dead where he went on to live and get old and then die of old age or some other ancient disease. I’m talking about crucified by professional Roman executioners, killed, dead in a tomb, three days later rising from the dead with a new body that can disappear and walk through walls, never-to-die-again kind of resurrection. If *that* happened, that affects everything! Let me ask you, if there’s a God who started this all, then who is the one and only being capable of doing this kind of resurrection? I think we can agree that if that kind of God exists, he is the only being capable of doing that. So, if someone claims to be God and is not, when he dies, everyone forgets about him and heaven breathes a sigh of relief. But if someone claims to be God, predicts his own death, fulfills 465 prophecies from hundreds and thousands of years before him, predicts he is going to be resurrected

from the dead precisely because he is the Son of God ... when that happens, that means that the only being capable of doing that is affirming everything Jesus did, everything Jesus said, and everything Jesus claimed to be. In other words, if Jesus rose from the dead, he is who he said he is; if he didn't, he wasn't.

To answer this question, we can't do a science experiment or check Google Earth footage from 9 April 30AD, so we are going to look at and evaluate the evidence.

One of the things we could do is look at the Bible and the claims of the Bible. One of the earliest manuscripts describing the resurrection says this,

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born”.⁵⁴

There are a whole lot of claims here, and if you trust the Bible, maybe that's enough for you. But if you're skeptical of the resurrection you are probably also skeptical of the Scriptures, and therefore we're going to look at the evidence that supports these claims. So we're going to look at three lines of evidence that every historian (Christian and not) needs to try and explain: 1) The empty tomb, 2) The presence of eye-witnesses, and 3) The impact of the resurrection.

1) The empty tomb

The New Testament contains seventeen ancient documents attesting to the resurrection. These documents and letters are spread over several decades written by people who did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead. In addition (as we saw in the previous chapter), we also have non-biblical hostile sources that also recorded this phenomenon. But here's what we don't have – we don't have any documents

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

from the ancient world saying something like: “They found his body”, or “These early Christ followers are deceived because Jesus didn’t actually die”. This means that all scholars (Christian and not) are united on this one, that the tomb was empty. If this wasn’t the case, all the Jews or the Romans needed to do was say, “Ok, move the stone, and show everyone the body and let’s put an end to this nonsense”.

But no one was able to produce a body. So the next question is, what happened?

There are a number of theories

1. The women went to the wrong tomb. The idea is that they were so filled with grief, they weren’t concentrating and went to wrong tomb. But that means that no one thought to check out whether they went to the right tomb or not, including the Jews and the Romans who wanted this movement to die. An even further stretch is that *everyone* went to the wrong tomb, including the Jews and the Romans who wanted this movement to die. This sounds pretty implausible as the owner of the tomb was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. I’m pretty sure they could have sorted this one out if it was simply an error of mistaken tomb identity.
2. The disciples stole Jesus’ body and lied about it, pretending that the resurrection happened when they knew all along it hadn’t. A major problem with this theory is that they all (except the apostle John) were martyred for this belief. If you’re being tortured for a lie or a grand scheme, at some point you give in and blame someone else for the scam.
3. Jesus didn’t really die. In order for this to be true, imagine that after having his back ripped apart, his feet nailed to a piece of wood, his heart punctured with a spear, wrapped in 30kgs of linen he revived himself in a cold tomb without food or water for three days, he somehow managed to revive and free himself, roll away a stone as heavy as a Volksie, overpower a bunch of Romans and travel the country convincing everyone he rose from the dead. While that makes for an interesting story, I don’t know if anyone would have been convinced by that. In addition, Romans were trained executioners. If there was one thing they knew how to do, that was to kill people. There were times where they would crucify up to 6 000 people in one day. There is no historical record of anyone ever surviving a Roman crucifixion. In fact, the word *excruciating* literally means ‘out of the

cross' (ex-cruc). Other than Luke, none of the Gospel writers were coroners or medical doctors, yet they describe that the moment a Roman sword pierced Jesus' side, blood and water came out. The medical field tells us that when people are injured to the point of death, the body enters a state of circulatory shock due to the fact that organs are not receiving adequate blood flow. This results in increased fluid surrounding the lungs or heart. When eye-witnesses described this phenomenon, they were describing absolute proof that Jesus was dead.

2) Eye witnesses

In any trial, the testimony of eye-witnesses will always play a very important role in determining the facts of the event in question. The Bible records a range of eye-witnesses:

- The first people to the tomb were some of the women who followed Jesus. In both Jewish and Roman culture at that time, a woman's testimony was not believable. Jewish historian Josephus says, "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex". The Rabbis said, "Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women!" And the daily prayer of every Jewish man was, "Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has not created me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." The point of all of this is that if you're making up a story, you don't include that detail. You place credible and believable witnesses as your primary eye-witnesses. The only reason you include a detail like this is if that is what really happened.
- Then we've got the problem of these 500 witnesses that Paul spoke about. Sceptics have tried to explain this away by proposing some sort of mass hallucination theory. It is not unheard of for people who are suffering grief to believe that they saw the deceased person. But generally they know it and don't call up the whole family saying that Grandpa Fred rose from the dead. In addition there is not a single medical record of more than one person ever having the same hallucination. What gives this group of eye-witnesses even more credibility is that Paul wrote this down within 15-20 years of the crucifixion. This was a public document, read aloud to the churches. In other words, he wrote this while

most these eye-witnesses were still alive. If you want to make something up, you go somewhere else, or you wait until the eye-witnesses are dead. For this movement to fail, all you needed was enough people to go around asking these so-called eye-witnesses only for them to respond, “No sorry, didn’t happen!”

- James, Jesus’ brother, is named as one of the eye-witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. We know that James was not one of Jesus’ early followers.⁵⁵ American pastor Andy Stanley often says, ‘Think about your brother; now what does your brother have to do to convince you that he is God?’ I’m sure James had some pretty weird theories about his brother, but whatever they were, they didn’t involve his brother being God. But then we know, that after the resurrection, James becomes the leader of the largest and most influential early church (in Jerusalem). What is the one thing that could have changed his mind? It could only be the resurrection.
- Paul also mentions himself as an eye-witness. While this sounds rather circular, it is worth remembering that Paul was zealously and violently opposing the Jesus movement. Yet he went from persecuting Christians to dying for being a Christian; he went from burning churches to planting churches. And he cites meeting the resurrected Jesus as the reason for the life-threatening turn-around.

The last thing I want to say about these eye-witnesses, it’s not like these guys willed this into being because they really, really were hoping that Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, none of them, to a person, expected it. Every single one of them didn’t believe it at first: Mary thought she was seeing a gardener; Peter thought the body was stolen; Thomas refused to believe until he saw the evidence. You see, there were not crowds of people lining up outside the tomb on Sunday morning waiting for the resurrection. They assumed, like you and me, that dead equals dead. And yet, here they are, every single one of them standing as eye-witnesses of the resurrection. That needs some explanation.

⁵⁵ John 7:5

3) The Impact of the resurrection

One of the things no anthropologist has been able to explain is why the Jesus movement exploded so rapidly. Remember, Jesus' first followers were poor, marginalized and uneducated; yet they developed this confidence and fearlessness that led to the massive spread of the Gospel, even at the cost of their own lives. My old pastor used to say, "You don't lie to get into trouble, you lie to get out of trouble". According to extra-biblical church tradition, here are how some of the apostles died:

- Paul was beheaded under Emperor Nero
- Peter was crucified upside down, also in Rome under Emperor Nero
- Andrew was crucified in Greece
- Thomas was pierced through by spears while spreading the Gospel in India
- Philip converted the wife of a Roman proconsul in Asia Minor who's husband cruelly put him to death
- James was stoned and then clubbed to death in Syria

If Jesus actually died, the movement would have died. There were other messianic movements in the first century whose would-be Messiahs all were executed. In each case, that was the end of the movement. And yet, even though for three centuries Christians were persecuted, arrested and killed for their faith, the movement exploded. By some estimates, by the time Constantine came into power in the early 4th century, almost one-third of the Roman Empire were Christians. This movement has gone on to the point where over 2.2 billion people claim to be Christians today.

What does this mean?

This has implications. When you come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was a real historical person, was crucified for your sins and was vindicated as the Son of God by being raised from the dead, that means something. We live in a culture where it is easy to give mental assent to something without it changing anything about your life, but if you look around the globe at places where Christians are being persecuted, or if you study the first three centuries of Christianity, what you see is that the reality of the resurrection gave them supernatural fearlessness in the face of the some of the

most terrifying situations known to man. Think about the stuff that strikes fear into your heart? Now imagine you could lose your fear of the biggest thing you could ever be afraid of – death.

Marcus Aurelius was the Roman Emperor in the mid to late second Century and oversaw what is known as the fourth major persecution of Christians. During this time, Claudius Galenus, who was a famous Roman doctor, wrote a whole lot of things that had been preserved in antiquity. He mentions Christians six times in his writings.⁵⁶ Examining dead bodies was outlawed in 150AD so doctors used to hang around the arenas so they could perform their examinations on dying bodies and not dead bodies. Many of these were bodies of Christians who had just endured unimaginable and torturous pain. After witnessing dying Christians every single day, this is what he wrote down: “For fearlessness of death and the hereafter is something we witness in them every day”.⁵⁷ The thing that stood out to him was their lack of fear concerning death and the afterlife. Imagine people in your life describing your lack of fear because of your faith in the resurrection!

This is why C.S. Lewis said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important”.⁵⁸ Paul says the same thing in the following ways: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”⁵⁹; and, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’”.⁶⁰

If you are still wondering, or journeying with someone who is still not convinced, I want to encourage you with two stories. The first story is of Thomas, one of the original twelve disciples. The other disciples came to him claiming that they had personally seen the resurrected Jesus. Thomas didn’t want to hear about it. He said that he would only believe when he saw the actual evidence himself. A week later

⁵⁶ http://www.tertullian.org/rpearce/galen_on_jews_and_christians.htm

⁵⁷ <http://northpoint.org/messages/the-n-commandments/fear-not/>

⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*

⁵⁹ 1 Cor 15:17

⁶⁰ 1 Cor 15:32

Jesus appears in a locked room and showed Thomas the evidence after which Thomas believed. In this story we see that Jesus blesses those who believe without necessarily seeing all the evidence, yet instead of rebuking his lack of faith, he accommodates Thomas and meets him at his point of need and unbelief. The second story is about a man who wanted Jesus to cleanse his child of unclean Spirits. Jesus said to him that everything is possible to him that believes; to which the man responded, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief".⁶¹ In both of these stories, Jesus meets us at our point of unbelief, he accommodates our questions, he gives us what we need in order to believe. Sometimes our lack of faith *is* linked to our fear, our fear of full submission, our fear of what others will think if we became a Christian, or our fear of the consequences of becoming a Christian. Why don't you pray, "Help me overcome my unbelief".

⁶¹ Mark 9:24

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Chapter 11

I have often said that if the Christian faith is like a dartboard, the Gospel is at the centre of our faith. While Christians and non-Christians alike would associate the word ‘Gospel’ with Christianity, if I had to ask, “Well, what is the Gospel?”, I doubt most would be able to get too far out of the starting blocks. Up to now, we’ve spoken a lot about the Bible and the Christian worldview without really using the Bible. In this chapter I’m going to turn this around and let the Bible answer this question as clearly as possible.

What is the Gospel?

During the time of the Roman Empire, if a future emperor was born, became king, had a birthday or if there was a military defeat, heralds would go out throughout the empire proclaiming the *evangelion*, the Greek word from which get the word Gospel, which literally means good news.⁶² This word was borrowed by the Bible writers to describe the Good News that the King has won and defeated his greatest enemies. This is what we now know as The Gospel. One of the earliest writings describing the Gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15. While this document was probably written ten to fifteen years after Jesus’ death, most scholars believe that this particular passage was like a hymn or a creed that was already being recited and shared by Christians as the core of their faith⁶³ going right back to the time immediately after Jesus’ death.

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”⁶⁴

Notice that this is of first importance. The Gospel – the victory of The King – is considered to be the most important thing, the central thing. And yet, for the

⁶² Zondervan

⁶³ Commentary on 1 Cor 15?

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Christian, this victory happened in the most unlikely of places ... a cross, a place of Roman torture and execution. Think about it: you may wear a beautiful cross on your necklace, or someone in your family may keep a collection of different decorative crosses, maybe some of you even have a cross tattooed on you for reasons that are meaningful to you. I also think of standard Christian art that often has a silhouette of a cross (or crosses) set against a beautiful sunset background or some light shining through the clouds, all designed to evoke warm religious feelings. While there's nothing wrong with that, the reality of the cross is far more gruesome than that. Imagine hanging a noose from your rearview mirror or sending a postcard with a picture of a recently used electric chair. The cross was a place for criminals who were tortured. Romans knew how to inflict the greatest degree of pain onto humans. If they were scourged before their crucifixion, their bodies would have been ripped apart before the painful experience of the actual crucifixion. We're talking blood and guts here. The Bible tell us that Jesus would have been so disfigured during this process that he would have been unrecognizable. We would have been so disgusted we would have turned our faces from him.⁶⁵ The gruesome nature of the cross has led many people to ask questions like: "Why the cross?"; "Why would Jesus have to die?"; "Why couldn't God just forgive us?"; "Why can't God just accept us and our wrong doings?"; "Can't we just leave the cross out? Can't we just say that Jesus loves us – the end?" I mean, thousands of people die every day; thousands of people were crucified by the Romans. Why are we saying that this death means something?

In Chapter 5 we identified that the real problems at the core of all our experience of evil, pain and suffering are sin and death. And, if those are the problems, what's the solution? There are only really two options here: the solution is either going to come from God, or from flawed human beings. If you do not believe in God, that means that you either need to abandon any ideas of a solution or you need to trust human beings to be or to bring the solution. I would argue that we've tried that, but as far as I know, no-one has been able to do anything about death or that part of us that causes us to continue to be flawed. Having said that, it makes sense that if there

⁶⁵ Is 53:1-6

was a God, a being untouched by sin and death, that the solution would come from him. The Gospel is the story of how God entered our world of sin and death, of how God is the solution to sin and death and what he did to personally love us and deal with sin and death.

What does the Gospel mean?

The Gospel is not just that Jesus died and rose again, but what it means. The passage that probably best explains the meaning of the Gospel is found in Paul's letter to the Romans:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.⁶⁶

The Human Condition

This passage opens up unglamorously describing us as powerless and ungodly. While this may seem offensive at first, we've already pointed out that we are in fact powerless as a race to do anything about death and sin. When the Scriptures describe us as ungodly, among the many things it means by that is the idea that we are un-god-like. I think sometimes we think that if there is a god, he would be a slightly better and smarter version of us. If this was so, it makes sense that if I tried really hard, I can somehow be more like him. But the way the Scriptures describe the God of the Bible is that he is a being so other and so different to us that we cannot fully comprehend the gap between us and him. This is what the Bible means when it

⁶⁶ Romans 5:6-11

says that God is holy. His holiness is so far removed from ours that our best righteous works are like filthy rags compared to his.⁶⁷ This is not necessarily saying that our righteous works are bad (although our motives may not always be as pure as we like to believe), but if we could understand how Holy and different and righteous God is, comparing our righteousness to his is like lighting a match and comparing it to the sun. While a match can still burn with some heat, we know that the sun is billions of times more powerful than the hottest fire man could ever make.

Yet we struggle to admit this about ourselves, so we euphemize our sin, referring to them as lapses, or indiscretions, and we tell ourselves that we deserve good things. We think that we have something in us that makes us good and acceptable to God, and all we have to do is just try a little harder. Now I get it. I get that it's so hard for us to admit that we're unworthy when everything else in life is a battle to prove we are worthy. We have to prove ourselves at work, prove ourselves in marriage and prove ourselves in relationships. We also struggle to see how far our sin makes us fall short of God's holiness. I heard a great illustration that helps us understand this: Imagine being given a tall, cool, glass of iced tea on a hot day. As I gave it to you I told you that I felt obliged to inform you that there was a drop of urine in there. You would correctly reject the entire cup of iced tea. Or imagine you were in need of blood after an accident and as I was about to give the blood to you I told you that I felt obliged to tell you that there was a tiny strand of HIV in the bag of blood. Again, you would conclude that even one tiny strand of HIV makes the entire bag of blood repulsive. In the same way, sin has contaminated every part of us. But God didn't leave us there. That's where the cross comes in.

Christ's Death *For Us*

This still leaves us with the question: why the cross? Even if our human condition leaves us powerless against sin and death, why did Jesus have to die to do anything about it? Imagine walking past a turbulent section of a river, and as you look closer, you see a man who can clearly swim appear to be struggling. So you ask him what he is doing and he says he is doing this for you. You would rightly be confused by

⁶⁷ Isaiah 64:6

this. This story only makes sense if you were the person drowning in the water and he risked his life to save you. Verse 8 says, “While we were sinners, Christ died for us”. We were the ones drowning, we were the ones dying, we were the ones powerless against sin and death. Jesus didn’t randomly suffer on a cross and declare this as his love for us. His love is demonstrated by the fact that he entered our perilous situation at the cost of his own life in order to save us.

True Forgiveness Costs

Another way to help us understand why Jesus had to suffer in order to forgive us is something that we may have experienced before, but not given much thought. Have you ever wondered why it is so difficult to forgive someone? You may even describe the forgiveness process as painful? This is because true forgiveness costs. Timothy Keller in his book *The Reason for God* explains this. Imagine I lend you my car but you crash it. I have two options: I make you pay or I refuse to make you pay. Either way, somebody has to pay; the debt doesn’t magically disappear simply because you choose to forgive them. In the same way, if someone sins against you, hurts you, lies about you, steals from you, or worse, you face the same two options: you can either make them pay, or you can choose to forgive them and not make them pay. But if you choose to do that, you not only suffer the loss due to their infliction against you, but you also become the cost-bearer for their infliction. And this hurts! It’s a form of agony. This is how Timothy Keller puts it:

“Forgiveness means bearing the cost instead of making the wrongdoer do it, so you can reach out in love and to seek your enemy’s renewal and change. Forgiveness means absorbing the debt of sin yourself. Everyone who forgives great evil goes through a death into resurrection, and experiences nails, blood, sweat and tears.”

But herein lies the beauty of forgiveness. As the anger subsides and the hurt subsides in the process of forgiveness, this is a hurt that leads to freedom, reconciliation, love and life instead of bitterness and cynicism. If this is true of our experience of forgiving others, we should not be surprised then that when God went

to forgive the sins of the world, he had to suffer the cost, because somebody had to still bear the cost, and he chose to bear it himself by getting upon a cross.

Reconciled

In verse 9-11 of this passage, the word reconciled comes up three times. This is because God's forgiveness of us has created the opportunity for forgiveness, love and reconciliation. We become so united with Christ that what was true of him becomes true of us and vice versa. We receive the benefits of his death and his life. Someone said it's like you wrote a failing exam and someone else came and wrote a perfect exam and handed theirs in as if it were yours and handed yours in as if it were theirs.

There's another word here that needs some unpacking, and that's the word justified in verse 9. This is a courtroom word. Imagine standing before a judge and you're guilty – you know it and he knows it, and you both know what you deserve. But then the Bible says that Jesus as our advocate jumps in and declares that the full penalty of our sin has already been paid by him. We are justified when the judge declares us, the guilty, free. As a result, we are not held accountable for our sin.

Can God be Just and Loving?

This begins to help us understand two characteristics of God that may seem to be in opposition to one another – the fact that God is both just and he is also loving. Justice demands that the perfect judge fully upholds the law and punishes wickedness. We would not expect anything less than that of a human judge; how much more from a perfect judge? But how does perfect love fit into this picture? Maybe a story about a king and his treasury will help. News gets to the king that gold is disappearing from the royal treasury. So the king declares that the culprit will be punished. Some time later his officials report to him that gold is still disappearing. The King orders that everyone in the land be informed that once caught, the culprit will be punished most severely. Once again, the king is informed that this hasn't deterred the thief. Finally, the King warns that the whole land be informed that the guilty thief will be lashed thirty-nine times. A short while later the treasurer comes to

the king and informs him that they have caught the thief, but the bad news is that the thief is none other but the king's mother. The king now finds himself in a position where he is experiencing the pull of two seemingly opposing values: on one hand he loves his mother deeply; on the other he is a just king and has to do right by the law. So he declares that his mother be brought bound into the public square where punishment will be delivered. Everyone is aware that this may result in the death of the king's mother. As his mother is about to receive her lashes, the king stops the proceedings, removes his shirt and places his body around his mother's small body and commands the soldier to proceed with the lashes. In this moment, the king is being perfectly just, i.e. he is fully upholding the requirements of the law; and he is being perfectly loving, i.e. he is taking the punishment upon himself in the place of his mother. This is the story of the cross where God was both perfectly just and loving.

A Story I Can Be a Part Of

The Gospel is the story of how God came to save us from sin and death. But if it is a story of the victory of the king, the next question has to do with how we become part of this story? How do we begin to experience the benefit of the victory of the King? Romans 4:5 answer this question in the following way:

“To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited to him as righteousness”

Firstly, this verse says, “To the one who does not work”. While at first this may sound strange, it simply refers to the realization that there is nothing we did to defeat sin and death and Jesus did all the working. But at some stage this needs to move from knowing what Jesus did to trusting what Jesus did. It's like getting on a plane – we can debate the laws of aerodynamics all day, but at some stage you need to demonstrate your trust of the plane and the pilot by getting on the plane. It doesn't matter how you do it. Some remember a time they prayed The Sinner's Prayer; some put their hand up in church; some were alone as they surrendered their life to Christ in faith; some remember walking in church one way, something happening

and walking out another way. The point is, at some point, you place your personal trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This verse says it is when you do that that something incredible happens. The way this verse puts it is, "His faith is credited to him as righteousness". As we trust Jesus, there is a cosmic accounting entry that happens whereby all the sin credited to our account is credited to Jesus account, and all the righteousness credited to Jesus' account is credited to ours. This is no longer about being influenced by Jesus but surrendering fully to him as our new King. It is at the point of faith and surrender that the work of Jesus becomes personally transacted to us in real time. It is at this point that the death of Jesus covers the cost of our sin and his life is given to us that we may live a new life in freedom and love.

Appendix A

A COMPARISON OF ANCIENT WORKS WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

Numbers in parentheses are the previously reported dates

Author	Work	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Gap	Old #	New
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	643	1,757
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480–425 BC	10th C	1,350	8	109
Sophocles ³⁰	Plays	496–406 BC	3rd C BC	100-200	100	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	895	1,300	7	210
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	9th C	950	10	251
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC–AD 17	Early 5th C	400	1 Partial, 19 copies	150
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	AD 100	1st half:850, 2nd: 1050 (AD 1100)	750–950	20	2 + 31 15 th C
Pliny, the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	AD 49–79	5th C fragment: 1; Rem. 14–15th C	400 (750)	7	200
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460–400 BC	3rd C BC (AD 900)	200 (1,350)	8	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some fragments from 1 C. BC. (AD 1100)	1,100+ (1,400)	200	340
NT		AD 50–100	AD 130 (or less) ³¹	40	5,366	5,795