

The Christian Faith Stands up to the Critics

The problem

Even though a person may desire to believe in God, you cannot honestly do this by your will alone. For instance, if thinking rationally you are convinced that Santa Claus is a fake, you will have many obstacles to overcome before you believe he is real. Suppose I showed you all the advantages in believing; “You will get many valuable Christmas presents if you believe!” Still, no sane adult is going to believe in Santa Claus. The reason we do not believe is not the lack of benefits, we do not believe because the evidence points to him being a myth.

However this paper is not about Santa Claus. There is a much more important question, perhaps the most important question of all; did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? “If you believe in Jesus you will get many benefits, including eternal life!” However wouldn't the evidence have to be conclusive before a righteous God would hold you accountable to believe it? The good news is that the evidence does exist, it's complete and compulsive.

Willful ignorance is no excuse

Galileo, a brilliant astronomer, thought that the earth orbited the sun. Before that time the popular belief was that the earth was the center of the universe. The Roman Catholic Church demanded that he repent of such foolish beliefs or he would be burned at the stake. These church leaders ignorance could not be helped. However, their willful determination to be stupid was so extreme, they would murder a man to keep themselves and others ignorant. For this, God can hold them accountable.

Our willful ignorance will look just as foolish someday. The solution is to listen, try to understand what is being taught (you don't have to agree) then do experiments to prove or disprove the theory.

In addition, a seeker of truth will look for his own prejudices. Recognizing them, he will make the extra effort to let the facts point to the truth. In seeking the truth he has nothing to be afraid of by studying the facts.

Understanding the supernatural

Nor is it necessary for us to understand supernatural events in order to believe in them and be held accountable. I do not comprehend how the sun has burned at just the right intensity for such a long time to support life on earth. However, it is reasonable to believe it. Scientists consider it reasonable believe in 'black holes' yet none of them have ever seen one. There is sufficient evidence to prove Jesus' resurrection from the dead, even though we personally cannot repeat the experiment. So, let us look at some of this evidence.

Does God really expect me to believe in miracles?

Yes, believing in miracles does not mean you are gullible. A few years ago NASA claimed that they found a rock that fell from Mars, not only that, the rock contained evidence of life on Mars. Now if you believed that story I would worry about being gullible.

- There are a lot of rocks on this planet what lead them to this one?
- How did they know it came from Mars? Did they have other rocks to compare it to?
- How big a natural phenomenon (explosion) would it take to get this rock out of Mar's gravitational pull?
- What were the chances of this rock (actually there must have been many of them for there to be a chance of a scientist to find one) hitting a target as far away as earth?
- Would the reentry into the earth's atmosphere (which usually burns these things up completely) not have damaged the alleged life forms beyond recognition? That is assuming that the explosion that ejected this rock into space or the millions of years of space travel didn't.

When this event happened most people who were talking about it, didn't question a thing. It seems history repeats itself as in Acts 19:35-36 the people of Ephesus worshiped a similar stone which fell from heaven.

This was not the case with Jesus. His miracles were substantiated, even by his enemies. The miracles were necessary as his message was essential. Jesus himself said: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."

What about errors in the Bible?

This is really a question of personal bias. Let me give you an example. Suppose a man has a wife who cannot be trusted. One day he comes home from work early and sees a man sneaking out his back door. What will he suspect? Now suppose a man has a wife whom he trusts with no reservations. One day he comes home from work early and sees a man sneaking out his back door. Though he cannot imagine what it is, he knows there is a reasonable explanation. Perhaps she had this man deliver a birthday present that she was trying to keep as a surprise.

If you believe the Bible has errors you will be like the first husband who cannot trust his wife. When you read a verse like: "Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble." Job 9:6 you will think, "It teaches the earth is on pillars, there is another error" and become more affirmed in your opinion.

If you trust the Bible with no reservation, you will be like the second husband. You may not have an immediate explanation but your faith will not waiver. After reading the Bible and enjoying it's transforming power in my life, I have become like the second husband. As a result, most of my 'apparent contradictions' have been answered, in another verse: "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." Job 26:7, is in the same book and Job knew the world wasn't on pillars after all. As I seek the truth I have no doubt, that in time, all my questions will be answered.

It is important for these reasons that you do not learn about the Bible from a skeptic. Why receive any instruction from a person who hated the subject he was teaching. They are more likely to be poorly educated themselves. They create straw-man arguments. Their goal will be to make you like them.

Couldn't myths have been added later?

One of the most common arguments against the reliability of the Gospel accounts is that they were written centuries after the life of Jesus. Thus the Christians, during this long time, forgot the facts and because of their superstitious nature, made up the fables.

Until fairly recently our oldest complete manuscript was dated to the fifteenth century. Now we have two complete manuscripts of the New Testament that are dated to the third century. Was this enough time for the myths to creep into the scriptures? The skeptics will argue that 300 years is plenty of time for error and myths to creep into scripture.

This all begs the question. When was the New Testament written? For those who are open to the facts they will prove that the Gospels were written shortly after Jesus' death. Within thirty six years, if this was so, there was no time for myths to creep in.

If during this time someone started to make up stories, like Jesus feeding four thousand people, the very people who were alive at the time would have refuted those writings as a lie. Archeological and historical research has provided no such writings. The early church would have had a vested interest in refuting the Gospel accounts if they were mythology. Even the critics of Jesus at the time did not deny the events, rather they tried, as they do to this day, to find natural explanations, or they attributed his miracles to the devil. The latest date you can honestly attribute to any of the four Gospels is 68 AD. Is there any proof the gospels were written so soon after Jesus death?

I admit there are no complete manuscripts from the first century, however there are over a thousand partial manuscripts and fragments dated to the first century not to mention letters that quote from the New Testament. Could these authors quote scripture when it was not yet written yet?

This brings up a question. How do you date ancient documents anyway? One way documents are dated is by looking at how they describe major events. For example, suppose you found an old piece of paper in your cellar. If you read the words "World War One" you would know that this document was written sometime after World War Two (W.W.II) was off to a good start. If your document had said: "The Great War" It would have been written after W.W.I and it may have been written before the end of W.W.II.

How could we use this method to date the Gospels? In the year 70 AD the Romans crushed Israel. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple did not have one stone left upon another. The last holdout for the Jews was in a Roman Fortress called Masada. When the Romans finally broke through the walls they found that all the Jews, nearly one thousand of them, had committed suicide. Thus the destruction of the nation of Israel was complete.

Nor was life better for the Christians in Rome. Nero, who for his atrocities toward the Christians during his reign is now famous, died in 68 AD.

There is not even the least hint of life after these events in the Gospels or any of the epistles. They were left out with no hint, not even a Freudian slip. Instead an accurate and detailed account of how life was before the destruction of Israel. Their precise accounts of life in Israel during Jesus time would have been just as impossible for third century monks to fabricate as it would be for you and me to.

Other ways to date your paper would be for an expert to compare paper, ink, fonts and writing styles used.

There is no reason to believe the authors were not eyewitnesses to the accounts they describe in the New Testament.

The location of the scriptures

Finding documents in the right place does not prove they are authentic but it helps provide circumstantial evidence. If you found a will that was purported to be mine in my safe deposit box, the location would help confirm its authenticity. When billionaire Howard Hughes died it was rumored that about three thousand wills showed up. I think that determining the location where the supposed wills were found could easily eliminate most of them.

Deciding where scripture and letters from the church fathers should be found may be a little harder to do. Yet the principle is the same, and the documents live up to the scrutiny. One example to illustrate this would be the location of some ancient Qumran manuscripts, popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. If we were going to use the location where they were found to test their authenticity. Where would we expect to find them? Exactly where they were found, in the mountains of Israel about eight miles south of Jericho, in an old Qumran community. Maybe for contrast you could compare this to where the ancient manuscripts supporting The Book of Mormon are found.

The archeological discoveries and the ancient documents found in monasteries all provide convincing evidence that would hold up in court. The underlying documents are what they claim themselves to be.

There are many witnesses

There are four gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are four separate accounts. Many skeptics believe that Matthew and Luke plagiarized from Mark. This is more wishful than rational thinking.

When two people record the same event they will usually give very different accounts. When two witnesses in a courtroom give the same account, detail for detail, of an event it means they were coached. From different locations we hear different sounds, see different things. Different things catch our attention or seem important, sometimes distractions cause us to miss significant facts. All these things put together will cause us to often see the same events very differently.

A careful study of the same narratives in the different Gospels will show these differences. The marks of corroboration or plagiarism are completely missing. Was there two lepers or ten? How many blind men were there? How many demoniacs were there who were possessed by Legion? What was the name of that countryside? What was written on Jesus' accusation? This is just a tiny sample, all the events truly appear to be written by different witnesses.

Again for some contrast, let us look at The Book of Mormon, written less than two hundred years ago. Read the account in The Book of that parallels the Sermon on the Mount. I rest my case.

Corroborating evidence

Testimony gains credibility when you can produce corroborating evidence. The Jewish cannon of scripture (Old Testament) has many prophecies of their Messiah all pointing to Jesus. He was to be born in Bethlehem of the Tribe of Judah, the son of David. The timing of his appearance was predicted in Daniel Chapter 9. His betrayal

for 30 pieces of silver, the manor of his death, hands and feet pierced and yet not a bone of his was broken. Finally He would be placed in the tomb of a rich man. All these and many other things were predicted by the Jewish prophets.

Proof that (most of) these prophecies were made before Jesus time is verified by Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient documents. A book could be written how the Jews copied and preserved their scripture. They were so meticulous, the copy was considered more accurate than the original since it would have no folds or scuff marks.

Any person who is not completely ignorant of Jewish history understands that the Jewish Nation has rejected Jesus as their Messiah. No serious argument (It would be far easier to believe in Santa Clause) can be produced to prove that the Old Testament was tampered with. If it had been they would have removed the prophecies of Jesus not added them.

The Old Testament prophecies of Jesus prove that the supernatural exists, removing all excuses for not believing. However, more importantly, they make it clear that Jesus is to be listened to.

Can we prove the apostles didn't lie?

Did the apostles lie? Our first test for a lie will be checking its vagueness. For example, if a liar were to tell me about an event that he experienced in a modern machine shop. If he were never in a machine shop the description of it would be by necessity very vague.

The more details he put in his lie, the more errors in its description. This is one of the easiest tests for telling a liar. Lets suppose an example with a mother and wayward child.

Mother: "Did you go to school today?"

Wayward Child: "Yes Mommy."

Mother: "What did your teacher assign for homework?"

Wayward Child: "Ah... Some math and some grammer."

Mother: "Was Bobby Smith in school today?"

Wayward Child: "Ah... I don't remember"

Mother: "Did you like (some special event that happened that day.)"

Wayward Child: "Yes I liked it a lot."

Mother: "What was it like?"

Wayward Child: "Ah.. Ah.. (trying to change subject) I don't feel well"

A few years ago there was a famous politician on trial. What made this event the topic of talk radio was this elected official's memory. Repeatedly he gave the same answers as he was asked different questions: "I don't remember..." "I can't recall..."

Compare this to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, recorded by four different people (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). They were not written in vagueness but were very specific with times, dates the names of people places and their descriptions. The Gospels record local belief systems and superstitions. To no surprise, archeological discoveries have only verified the details right down to the names and dates for kings, governors, priests, and the proclamations made by them.

While not every name or date has been proved by archeology, I do not know of a single contradiction. Some liberals use arguments like: "The Bible has been proven false because archeology never found evidence of the Hittites, an ancient people mentioned in the Bible." This is not the Bible's fault; it is just a deficiency of archeology. Many skeptics have used this type of reasoning to reject the Bible. However, not to my surprise, recently some archeologists did find the Hittites.

The bottom line is plain. The writers of the Gospels who called us to honest and holy living were telling the truth. They were not being elusive or hard to pin down. Contrariwise they were informed and very specific in their statements.

Early Christians were killed for their beliefs.

Many people will die for a cause they believe in. On the other hand nobody will die for something they believe is a lie. The religious leaders burned William Tindale at the stake, for translating the Bible into the common language. He would not have died if he did not believe from his heart the Gospel was true. What is this Gospel that people will commit the act of murder, just to keep you from reading it?

Many Christians suffered dreadful tortures and were killed mercilessly at the hands of Nero (who died in 68 ad). Many of these were disciples who sat at Jesus' feet. Many were personal witnesses of His resurrection. This is a terrible witness to the accuracy and importance of the Gospel that we would do well not to ignore.

The witness's credibility must be looked at.

The Credibility of a witness is important in deciding weather you are listening to fact of fiction. The Gospel writers call believers to repent from sin. To stop hating (even your enemies), stealing, coveting, and of course to stop lying. Jesus condemned the religious leaders, because that they did not believe the words of John the Baptist. Even when they saw evil people turn from their sins, they still did not believe. Jesus called his disciples to holiness. Today, people are still turning from their sins by believing the Gospel.

There are five ancient manuscripts from Aristotle and no one questions his existence or the validity of his writings. We have over 5000 ancient manuscripts from the New Testament. So why is there any skepticism? The call of the New Testament writers is to turn from our sins, this in my experience, is the leading reason people reject the Gospel.

Some people may point to today's religious leaders who do not believe the scripture, those who have not repented of their sin. Sadly, this has been a true statement through all time. Yet the Gospel writers were not the

religious leaders. We are not talking about people who used peoples superstitious beliefs to make themselves rich. We are talking about people who were following the teachings of Jesus and who gave all they had and were willing to die for them.

Jesus' teachings are only moral to those who believe.

The moral integrity of a witness is important. A witness, having a history of being completely honest, and whose moral integrity is beyond question, has given you a critical message. Whose fault will it be if you do not believe?

However, were Jesus' teachings moral? He taught that nobody comes to the Father except through him. He taught his death would pay for the sins of the world. He taught that you must believe in him in order to be saved. If you do not believe these things are true, how could you call Jesus a moral teacher?

Everything is at stake here. Read the Gospel of Jesus Christ for yourself, seek the truth, there is no excuse not to believe and be saved.

If I can be any help email me, jeff@the-gospel.org

Jeff Barnes

If this study was helpful,
we recommend reading:

[Faith on Trial](#), by Pamela Ewen

