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# EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT

LIFE-CHANGING TRUTH  
FOR A SKEPTICAL WORLD



**JOSH McDOWELL**  
& **SEAN McDOWELL, PhD**



**EVIDENCE**  
THAT DEMANDS  
A VERDICT

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**JOSH McDOWELL**  
AND  
**SEAN McDOWELL, PhD**



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Substantial portions of this material were previously published as *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Thomas Nelson in 1999, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Vols. I and II, by Thomas Nelson 1992, and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Thomas Nelson in 1984. Those editions included material originally published by Here's Life Publishers, Inc. © 1972, 1975, 1979, 1981 Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc.

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ISBN 978-1-401-67671-1 (eBook)

ISBN 978-1-401-67670-4 (HC)

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

ISBN 978-1-401-67670-4

*Printed in the United States of America*

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# FOREWORD

## **A mirror requires a response.**

Every morning, just about every one of us stumbles into the bathroom to take a look at how much work needs to be done before we present ourselves to the outside world. In spite of the fact we've never met, I know exactly how long you stand in front of the mirror each morning. You stand there until it gets better. A lot better! Most of us would rather be late than to show up on time not looking our best. After all, nobody gets credit for looking in the mirror. We're judged by how we respond to what we see.

In 1972 Josh McDowell published a mirror for believers and skeptics; a mirror that indeed required a response, or as he so brilliantly stated it, a verdict. For over forty years, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* has been the go-to resource for Christ followers desiring to equip themselves for the task of presenting and defending the claims of the Christian faith. Since that initial release, more than three million copies of this classic apologetics resource have been printed worldwide. More importantly, multiple millions of people all over the world have been impacted by the men and women who've read and internalized the insights and research contained in this timeless resource. And

now, Josh and his son, Dr. Sean McDowell, have partnered with over thirty graduate students and a dozen leading scholars to update and revise this fabulous resource for a new generation.

## **Why an update?**

While the truth of the Bible doesn't change, the questions and critics do. Following the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon, the New Atheists have mounted an effective campaign against the viability of all religion. Their criticisms of Christianity have been particularly effective, especially in academic settings. If we're honest, most of us graduated high school and left home with Sunday school arguments for the reliability of the Bible and the credibility of our faith. Unfortunately, years of sermons, camps, mission trips, and personal devotions can be undermined by a single lecture in a university setting. Sunday school answers are no match for the rigors of academia. They don't fare much better under the weight of adulthood either. While a previous generation of Christians had the option to stick their heads in the sand and tune out the voices of the skeptics, Christians today don't have that luxury. The Internet has changed the game.

The voices, lectures, and arguments of the New Atheists are just a click away, and they are undermining the faith of many. So now, more than ever, we need materials designed to equip a new generation for a new generation of questions and detractors.

I'm confident this expanded and updated edition of *Evidence* will do for the modern church what the original version did for me and my contemporaries. As a parent and pastor I'm extraordinarily grateful to Josh and Sean for continuing to stand in the gap

and defend our very defensible faith. After all, the foundation of our faith is not a book. It's way better than that. Our faith is in a Person. A Person who lived, died, and rose again—for which we have compelling evidence. Evidence that requires a response. A personal response. As Josh says, a verdict!

*Andy Stanley*

*Author, Communicator, and  
Founder of North Point Ministries*

# PREFACE

## Why a Massive Book about Evidence?

The story begins about forty-five years ago. After I (Josh) became a Christian, I began to speak in public forums about my spiritual journey and my extensive research into the reliability of the biblical text, as well as the evidences for the deity of Christ and his resurrection. One of my lecture series was “Christianity: Hoax or History?” People of all walks of life would come up to me and ask if they could get my research and speaking notes. You see, at that time it was very hard to find documentation of the historical evidences for the Christian faith. Students, professors, and laypeople in the church would ask, “How can we get access to what you and others are teaching on these subjects?” So it was that I began to compile my research and speaking notes to create the first edition of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

## Why This Revised Edition?

Since the first edition of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* was published in 1972 and revised in 1979 and 1999, significant new discoveries have further confirmed the historical evidence for the Christian faith. For example, new archaeological finds have

provided further confirmation of the credibility of both the Old and New Testaments.

Nevertheless, for the past forty years our culture has been heavily influenced by the philosophical outlook called postmodernism. People today question why evidence for the Christian faith is even necessary or important. There is a skepticism in our land and around the world that has given rise to the misguided thinking of the Jesus Seminar, or more recently, the New Atheists, to confuse and disorient people about the true identity of Jesus Christ.

To address the most current trends and examine the objections and questions that are so pervasive in our Internet world early in the twenty-first century, I am delighted that my son, Sean, agreed to direct the extensive and challenging project of revising and updating this classic book and to serve as my coauthor. Sean is a talented scholar, teacher, author, and speaker. He and his team of researchers, writers, and editors have done a terrific job in helping me to complete this massive undertaking.

It is our hope that, in providing the most up-to-date information, this fourth edition of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* will equip Christians of the twenty-first century with confidence as they seek to understand and defend their faith. In addition, we believe

that, as has happened with previous editions, many who have been confused or never exposed to the truth of Christianity will discover that Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be, that God loves them, and that he wants to welcome them into his eternal family.

### Watch Your Attitude

Our motivation in using this research is to glorify and magnify Jesus Christ, not to win an argument. *Evidence* is not for proving the Word of God, but rather for providing a reasoned basis for faith. One should have a gentle and reverent spirit when using apologetics or evidences: “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with *gentleness and reverence*” (1 Pet. 3:15 NASB, emphasis mine).

These notes, used with a caring attitude, can motivate a person to consider Jesus Christ honestly, and direct him or her back to the central and primary issue of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:1–4, as well as “How to Know God Personally” at the end of this book).

When I share Christ with someone who has honest doubts, I always seek first to listen. I want to hear that person’s story and only then offer information to answer his or her questions. Then I turn the conversation back to the person’s relationship with Christ. The presentation of evidence (apologetics) should never be used as a substitute for sharing the Word of God.

### Why Copyrighted?

These notes are copyrighted, not to limit their use, but to protect against their misuse and to safeguard the rights of the authors and publishers that we have quoted and documented.

### A Lifetime Investment:

We recommend the following books for your library. These are also good books to donate to your university library. (Or, a university will often purchase books for its library if you submit a request.)

#### Parts I and II:

- Blomberg, Craig. *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*. B&H Academic, 2016.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Evans, Craig. *Fabricating Jesus*. IVP, 2006.
- Licona, Michael. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. IVP, 2010.
- Bowman, Rob and Ed Komoszewski. *Putting Jesus in His Place*. Kregel, 2007.
- Eddy, Paul Rhodes and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend*. Baker, 2007.
- McDowell, Sean. *The Fate of the Apostles*. Routledge, 2016.
- Kruger, Michael J. *The Question of Canon*. IVP, 2013.
- Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vols. 1–3. Fortress Press, 2003.
- McGrew, Lydia. *Hidden in Plain View: Undesignated Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts*. DeWard, 2017.

#### Part III:

- Kaiser, Walter C. *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* IVP, 2001.
- Hoffmeier, James K. and Dennis R. Magary. *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?* 2012.
- Kitchen, K. A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Eerdmans, 2003.

#### Part IV:

- Groothuis, Douglas. *Truth Decay*. IVP, 2000.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Truth or Consequences*. IVP, 2001.
- Keener, Craig. *Miracles*. vols. 1–2. IVP, 2012.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**W**e would like to thank the following people for their research, editing, and writing contributions for the following chapters:

- A Theistic Universe . . . . . Danny McDonald  
The Uniqueness of the Bible . . . . . Troy Peiffer & Anthony Costello  
How We Got the Bible . . . . . Arthur Young  
Is the New Testament Historically Reliable? . . . James Johansen & Matthew Tingblad  
Has the Old Testament Been Accurately  
    Transmitted? . . . . . Troy Peiffer & Anthony Costello  
Gnostic Gospels and Other Nonbiblical Texts . . Timothy Fox  
The Historical Existence of Jesus . . . . . Cisco Cotto  
The Lofty Claims of Jesus . . . . . James Kaufman  
The Trilemma—Lord, Liar, or Lunatic? . . . . . Adam Kingston  
Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled in  
    Jesus Christ . . . . . Jonathan McLatchie  
    The Resurrection: Hoax or History? . . . . . Shawn White  
Is Christianity a Copycat Religion? . . . . . Shawn White  
The Deity of Jesus: An Investigation . . . . . Rob Bowman & Randall Wilson  
The Old Testament and Ancient Near  
    Eastern Influences . . . . . William Conner  
Biblically Faithful Approaches to Genesis . . . . . Barrie Winn  
Archaeology and the Old Testament . . . . . Dr. Joseph Holden, President of Veritas  
    Evangelical Seminary  
The Historical Adam . . . . . Barrie Winn  
The Historicity of the Patriarchs . . . . . Aaron Bond  
The Historicity of the Exodus . . . . . Cisco Cotto  
The Historicity of the Conquest . . . . . Robert Ryals  
The Historicity of the United Monarchy . . . . . Rick Miller

## The Historicity of Divided Monarchy and

Exilic Period . . . . .	Stephen Royce
The Composition of the Pentateuch . . . . .	Cliff Feggert
The Composition of the Book of Isaiah, The Historicity of Daniel. . . . .	Nathan Richards
Alleged Contradictions in the Old Testament. . .	Aaron Heinrich
The Nature of Truth . . . . .	Brian Collins & Gabriel Pagel
The Knowability of Truth. . . . .	Nathan Hollister
Answering Postmodernism . . . . .	John Barnwell
Answering Skepticism . . . . .	Emily Stevens
Are Miracles Possible? . . . . .	Jerilyn Valentine & Derrick Jahn
Is History Knowable? . . . . .	Scott Bootman
Responding to the Challenges of Bart Ehrman . .	Ben Whittington

We would also like to express our appreciation to the following scholars who helped provide critical feedback and editing for chapters that fell within their expertise. Our thanks to Ken Turner, Charlie Trimm, Scott Carroll, Paul Rhodes Eddy, Daniel Wallace, Michael Licona, Rob Bowman, Michael Brown, Jeff Zweerink, Casey Luskin, Timothy Pickavance, Ann Gauger, John Bloom, Fuz Rana, David Talley, Craig Blomberg, Jason Carlson, and Scott Smith.

Our thanks to Carlos Delgado for his careful and insightful edits of the entire manuscript. And we deeply appreciate Jonathan McLatchie for his extra research to find some of the most common objections raised against the last version of *Evidence* (1999) and for providing helpful responses to include in this updated version.

Many thanks to Charlie Trimm, David Talley, and Ken Turner in particular for so much work updating and expanding the chapters pertaining to the Old Testament. All three of you went far above and beyond the call of duty to help make these chapters both high quality and relevant for today.

We would like to draw special attention to the efforts and sacrifice of Don and Judy Kencke. The two of you truly put in tireless and countless hours reading, editing, and updating content throughout the entire manuscript. We truly believe God prepared you for such a time as this. And we will be forever grateful for how much energy and focus you put into making this manuscript the quality that it is. There is no way we could have done this without you.

And we would also like to offer our gratitude to Daniel Marrs, our editor from Thomas Nelson, for guiding this project from start to finish. You have truly cared about the little details and the big details, which make a project like this a success. Thanks for gently pushing back when necessary, and also for the extra effort you put into this entire project. You are truly a blessing and exactly the right person for the job.

# REVISING *EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSH MCDOWELL

**A**lthough I, Sean, have had the privilege of working with my father on a variety of projects, updating *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is perhaps the most special of all. While he has written or coauthored more than 150 books, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is one of his signature works.

People regularly share with me that this book helped lead them to Christ, or if they came across the book as a believer, helped them hold on to their faith during a season of doubt. And some of the most influential evangelical scholars today, such as William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, and leading pastors, such as Skip Heitzig, consider the book formative in their own faith journeys. While apologetics books have proliferated in recent years, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, *Evidence* was one of the few based on the historicity of the biblical accounts. For many it became their “go-to” reference book for evidence-based apologetics. *Evidence* has been truly groundbreaking and trendsetting.

And this does not yet even include its

international influence! Since 1972, *Evidence* has been translated into forty-four languages and published worldwide. Millions of people from South America, Asia, Australia, Africa, the Middle East, and beyond have come to rely upon *Evidence* as one of the most important apologetics books of this generation.

No wonder I ventured into this project with both enthusiasm and trepidation! It was thrilling to be able to manage the update of such a significant project, trusting that God would use it again for a new generation, yet I also felt the weight of *getting it right*. After all, so many people all over the world consider *Evidence* an authoritative source of evidence for the reliability of the Bible, the historicity of the resurrection, and the reality that Jesus was really God in human flesh.

As I considered ways to introduce this new edition, I realized there could be no better reintroduction than an interview with my father, Josh. The revisions and expansions to this present edition remain fully grounded in Josh’s own story—his reasons for writing *Evidence* in the first place and the impact the

book has had on his own life and the lives of those he's ministered to over the years.

**SEAN: Dad, why did you first write *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*?**

**JOSH:** I wrote it as a result of a struggle. I began my college years with a lot of hurt, anger, and bitterness. I was mad at my father—your grandfather—for being an alcoholic and for destroying my family. I was also angry at Wayne Bailey, the man who worked on our farm, for sexually abusing me from ages six to thirteen. I was desperately seeking happiness and meaning in life, and simply didn't know where to find it. I was successful in school, business, sports, and even campus leadership. And even though I put on a smile and acted like I had it all together, my life seemed so empty. I desperately wanted to know truth.

And yet in the university I saw this small group of people, two professors and about eight students, whose lives were different. I wanted what they had, and so I asked them what made their lives different. One girl said, "Jesus Christ," and I laughed. Her answer struck me as the stupidest thing I had ever heard. But this group challenged me to examine the claims of Christ intellectually.

I am certainly not the smartest person in the world, but I am responsible to use my intellect to discover truth to the utmost. So I took up their challenge, and to my amazement came to the conclusion that God did manifest himself through the Scriptures and the person of Christ.

Once I came to this intellectual conviction, I began to strategize about how I could share the things I discovered with others. During the first thirteen years after becoming a Christian, I both shared my faith and continued to research the evidential basis for the Christian faith. After I would speak, people from the audience kept asking me for

copies of my notes and research. That gave me the idea that I could and should publish my research to inform those who were truly seeking truth as well as to encourage followers of Christ. Eventually, I brought together a team of students from a variety of universities to work with me. They would research all day, and then I would collate their findings at night. Out of those years of work came *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

And yet no one wanted to publish it! I broke almost every principle of publishing, such as including lengthy quotes with full documentation. People told me that it wouldn't sell and that no one would read it. It took me nearly a year to type out the manuscript on an electric typewriter. I checked and double-checked footnotes and yet still made some mistakes. I finally published it on a Friday morning, and by that evening, it was already selling out. And it continued to sell at a feverish rate for years.

Now there are some incredible apologetics books by people such as Ravi Zacharias, Lee Strobel, Frank Turek, J. Warner Wallace, and others. But there was almost nothing like it when I first wrote *Evidence*.

**SEAN: What is one of your favorite stories about the impact of *Evidence*?**

**JOSH:** Probably my favorite stories come from overseas—from places like the Middle East and South Korea. One year *Evidence* was chosen by secular newspapers as the book of the year in South Korea. Honors like this are so exciting because they mean that the book is influencing lives by motivating people to dig deeper into the Scriptures.

A man walked into a Christian bookstore in an Arabic-speaking country. "I want your best book on the defense of Christianity." The bookstore manager handed him *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* in Arabic.

As the man left he exclaimed, “I’m doing my dissertation on destroying Christianity.” Six months later the storeowner baptized the student who had become a believer.

**SEAN:** How has culture changed since you first wrote *Evidence* in the early 1970s?

**JOSH:** When I first wrote *Evidence*, there was very limited access to information. Today there is an overload of truth claims. In the 1970s people were exposed to ideas by their parents, friends, teachers in school, and then eventually professors in the university. But there wasn’t the Internet, where people now have endless access to unfiltered information.

Also, when I first wrote *Evidence*, people wanted proof for their beliefs. People wanted evidence. And then it began to switch about ten to fifteen years ago. It used to be that when I made a truth claim at a university, students would say, “How do you know that’s true? Give us some proof.” But then students started saying, “What right do you have to make that claim? You are an intolerant bigot.” Culture has gravitated away from the essence of truth to the emotion of the individual. Essentially, culture has moved from valuing substance to valuing form.

**SEAN:** How do you intend *Evidence* to be used?

**JOSH:** I wrote *Evidence* as a resource book for individuals and families. According to his wife, legendary Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry would read *Evidence* for fifteen minutes every night before bed, including the night before the Super Bowl. But he’s an exception. *Evidence* is a thick book that is heavy with content. I wrote it to be a resource for individuals and families to walk through together, so they could be confident that there is a lot of evidence for Christianity and know where to find answers to common objections.

**SEAN:** What is your goal for this new version?

**JOSH:** The goal for this new version is the same as the first one: *to give people a reference book that spurs them toward truth and greater confidence in Scripture and the desire to know truth.* My hope is that *Evidence* continues to be a foundational book for pastors, teachers, parents, students, youth workers, and other Christians who want to have confidence about their own faith and be ready to give an answer for their faith.

**SEAN:** What role did the evidence play in your personal journey to Christ?

**JOSH:** My biggest objection to Christianity was that it was not true. But once I checked out the evidence firsthand, I realized that Christianity is true. Encountering the evidence was one of the biggest factors that led me to consider the claims of Christ. Through wrestling with the evidence, I learned that faith is meant to go along with evidence, not run contrary to it.

But, despite what many people think, it wasn’t the evidence that brought me to Christ. What brought me to Christ was an understanding of the love of God. Jeremiah 31:3 says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (ESV). What brought me to Christ was the realization that if I were the only one in the world, Christ still would have died for me.

My ultimate problem wasn’t intellectual—it was emotional. I had bitterness and hatred for my father because he was an alcoholic and destroyed my family. In addition, the sexual abuse I experienced for seven years by Wayne Bailey just compounded the hurt. Given my father’s failures, it brought me no joy to hear that a heavenly Father supposedly loved me. Every time someone mentioned a “heavenly Father,” it didn’t bring

joy—it brought pain. I could not decipher the difference between a heavenly Father and an earthly father because in my world and in my experience, fathers hurt people. So I wanted nothing to do with God. I never even considered the message of Christianity until I was convinced that it was true. Evidence brought me to the point of considering how the Christian message might apply to my own life. It was the evidence that first caught my attention, but it was an understanding of the love of God, as I mentioned above, that ultimately drew me to trust and follow Christ.



It truly was a joy and privilege to partner with my father, and dozens of students and scholars, on this project. God has used this book in remarkable ways over the past half century. My prayer is that God will continue to use it to ground believers with confidence in their faith and to help seekers discover how much God truly cares for them and desires for them to know him personally. I hope you find this edition faithful to the original spirit of *Evidence* but also updated for a new generation.

# HE CHANGED MY LIFE

**T**homas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century philosopher, wrote, “There is within every soul a thirst for happiness and meaning.” I (Josh) first began to feel that thirst when I was a teenager. I wanted to be happy. I wanted my life to have meaning. I became hounded by those three basic questions that haunt every human life: *Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?* I wanted answers to these questions, so as a young student, I started searching for them.

Where I was brought up, everyone seemed to be into religion. Because I thought maybe I would find my answers in being religious, I started attending church—a lot. I went every time the doors opened—morning, afternoon, or evening. But I must have picked the wrong church, because I felt worse inside the church than I did outside. About the only thing I got out of my religious experience was seventy-five cents a week: I would put a quarter into the offering plate and take a dollar out so I could buy a milkshake!

I was brought up on a farm in Michigan, and most farmers are very practical. My dad, who was a farmer, taught me, “If something doesn’t work, chuck it.” So I chucked religion.

Then I thought that education might have the answers to my quest for meaning. So I decided to go to college. You can learn many

things in college, but I didn’t find the answers I was seeking. I’m sure I was by far the most unpopular student with the faculty of the first college I attended. I would buttonhole professors in their offices and badger them for answers to my questions. When they saw me coming they would turn out the lights, pull down the shades, and lock the door so they wouldn’t have to talk to me. Soon I discovered that my teachers and fellow students had just as many problems, frustrations, and unanswered questions about life as I had. A few years ago I saw a student walking around with a T-shirt that read: “Don’t follow me, I’m lost.” That’s how everyone on campus seemed to me. Education, I concluded, was not the answer!

Prestige must be the way to go, I decided. It just seemed right to find a noble cause, give yourself to it, and become well known. The people on campus with the most prestige were the student leaders. So I ran for various student offices and got elected. It was great to know everyone on campus, make important decisions, and spend the college’s money doing what I wanted to do. But the thrill soon wore off, as was the case with everything else I had tried.

On Monday morning I would wake up, usually with a headache because of the way

I had spent the previous night, dreading to face another five miserable days. I endured Monday through Friday, living only for the partying nights of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Then on Monday the whole boring cycle would start over again. I felt frustrated, even desperate. My goal was to find my identity and purpose in life. But everything I tried left me empty and without answers.

I didn't let on that my life was meaningless: I was too proud for that. Everyone thought I was the happiest man on campus. If things were going great for me, I felt great. When things were going lousy, I felt lousy. I just didn't let it show.

I was like a boat out in the ocean, tossed back and forth by the waves. I had no rudder—no direction or control. But I couldn't find anyone who could tell me how to live any differently. I was frustrated. No, it was worse than that. There's a strong term that describes the life I was living: hell.

Around that time I noticed a small group of people—eight students and two faculty members. There was something different about them. They seemed to know who they were and where they were going in life. And they had a quality I deeply admire in people: *conviction*. There is a certain dynamic in the lives of people with deep convictions, and I enjoy being around people with that dynamic, even if their beliefs differ from mine.

It was clear to me that these people had something I didn't have. They were disgustingly happy. And their happiness didn't ride up and down with the circumstances of life; it was constant. They appeared to possess an inner source of joy, and I wondered where it came from.

But there was something else about this group that caught my attention—their attitudes and actions toward each other. They genuinely loved each other—and not only

each other, but the people outside their group as well. They didn't just talk about love; they got involved in peoples' lives, helping them with their needs and problems. It was all totally foreign to me, yet I was strongly attracted to it. So I decided to make friends with them.

About two weeks later, I was sitting around a table in the student union talking with some members of this group. Soon the conversation turned to the topic of God. I was pretty skeptical and insecure about this subject, so I put on a big front. I leaned back in my chair, acting as if I couldn't care less. "Christianity, ha!" I blustered. "That's for weaklings, not intellectuals." Down deep, I really wanted what they had. But with my pride and my position on campus, I didn't want *them* to know that I wanted what they had. Then I turned to one of the girls in the group and said, "Tell me, what changed your lives? Why are you so different from all the other students and faculty?"

She looked me straight in the eye and said two words I had never expected to hear in an intelligent discussion on a university campus: "Jesus Christ."

"Jesus Christ?" I snapped. "Don't give me that kind of garbage. I'm fed up with religion and the Bible. And I'm fed up with the church."

Immediately she shot back, "Mister, I didn't say 'religion'; I said 'Jesus Christ.'" She pointed out something I had never known: Christianity is not a religion. Religion is humans trying to work their way to God through good works. Christianity is God coming to men and women through Jesus Christ.

I wasn't buying it. Not for a minute. Taken aback by the girl's courage and conviction, I apologized for my attitude. "But I'm sick and tired of religion and religious people," I added. "I don't want anything to do with it."

Then my new friends issued me a challenge I couldn't believe. They challenged me, a pre-law student, to make a rigorous, intellectual examination of the claims of Jesus Christ: that he is God's Son; that he inhabited a human body and lived among real men and women; that he died on the cross for the sins of humanity; that he was buried and was resurrected three days later; and that he is still alive and can change a person's life even today.

I thought this challenge was a joke. These Christians were so dumb. How could something as flimsy as Christianity stand up to an intellectual examination? I scoffed at their challenge.

But they didn't let up. They continued to challenge me day after day, and finally they backed me into the corner. I became so irritated at their insistence that I finally accepted their challenge—just to prove them wrong. I decided to write a book that would show them that Christianity was a joke—intellectually and historically. I left college for a period of months so that I could travel throughout the United States and Europe to gather evidence in libraries and museums to prove that Christianity is a sham.

At the end of my journey in Europe, I found myself sitting in a museum library in London, England. After several hours of research studying some out-of-print books, I leaned back in my chair, rubbed my eyes, and without remembering I was in a quiet library, I spoke out loud, "It's true. It's true! It's really true!" It was about 6:30 p.m. when I left the library. As I walked along those London streets, I realized that there was no escaping the facts: the Bible is true, the resurrection of Christ really did happen, and Jesus is who he claimed to be. I did not fall on my knees and become a Christian right there, right then. But it seemed that there was a voice within

me saying, "Josh, you don't have a leg to stand on." I immediately suppressed it. But every day after that it just got louder and louder. The more I researched, the more I became aware of that same challenge. I returned to the United States and continued my research at the Harvard University and University of Michigan libraries. But I couldn't sleep at night. I would go to bed at ten o'clock and lie awake until four in the morning, trying to refute the overwhelming evidence I was accumulating that Jesus Christ is in fact God's Son.

I began to realize that I was being intellectually dishonest. My mind told me that the claims of Christ were indeed true, but my will was being pulled another direction. I had placed so much emphasis on finding the truth, but I wasn't willing to follow it once I found it. It seemed that God was challenging me with these words from the Bible in Revelation 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (NIV). But becoming a Christian seemed so ego-shattering to me. I couldn't think of a faster way to ruin all my good times, let alone my life.

I knew I had to resolve this inner conflict because it was driving me crazy. I had always considered myself an open-minded person, so I decided to put Christ's claims to the supreme test. One night at the end of my second year of college, I became a Christian. Someone may say, "How do you know you became a Christian?" That's a fair question. Here is the simple answer: "*I was there!*"

I met alone with a Christian friend and prayed four things that established my relationship with God. First, I said, "*Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for me.*" I realized that if I were the only person on earth, Christ still would have died for me. You

may think it was the irrefutable intellectual and historical evidence that brought me to Christ. No, the evidence was only God's way of getting his foot in the door of my life. What brought me to Christ was the realization that he loved me enough to die for me.

Second, I said, "*I confess that I am a sinner.*" No one had to tell me that. I knew there were things in my life that were incompatible with a holy, just, righteous God. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NIV). So I said, "*Lord, forgive me.*"

Third, I said, "Right now, in the best way I know how, I open the door to my life and place my trust in you as Savior and Lord. Take over the control of my life. Change me from the inside out. Make me the type of person you created me to be."

The last thing I prayed was, "Thank you for coming into my life."

After I prayed, nothing happened. There was no bolt of lightning. If anything, I actually felt worse after I prayed—almost physically sick. I was afraid I had made an emotional decision that I would later regret intellectually. But more than that, I was afraid of what my friends would say when they found out. I really felt that they would think I had "gone off the deep end."

But over the next eighteen months my entire life was changed. One of the biggest changes occurred in how I viewed people. While studying in college, I had mapped out the next twenty-five years of my life. My goal had been to become governor of Michigan and then a United States senator. I planned to accomplish my goal by using people in order to climb the ladder of political success—I figured people were meant to be used. But after I placed my trust in Christ, my thinking changed. Instead of using others to serve me,

I now discovered that I wanted to be used to serve others. Becoming other-centered instead of self-centered was a really dramatic change in my life.

Another area that started to change was my bad temper. I used to blow my stack if somebody just looked at me wrong. I still have the scars from almost killing a man during my first year in college. My bad temper was so ingrained that I didn't consciously seek to change it. But one day, when faced with a crisis that would ordinarily have set me off, I discovered that my bad temper was gone. I'm not perfect in this area, but this change in my life has been significant and dramatic.

Perhaps the most significant change has been in the area of hatred and bitterness. I grew up filled with hatred, primarily aimed at one man whom I hated more than anyone else on the face of the earth. I despised everything this man stood for. I can remember as a young boy lying in bed at night plotting how I would kill this man without being caught by the police. This man was my father.

While I was growing up, my father was the town drunk. I hardly ever saw him sober. My friends at school would joke about my dad lying in the gutter downtown, making a fool of himself. Their jokes hurt me deeply, but I never let anyone know. I laughed along with them. I kept my pain a secret.

I would sometimes find my mother in the barn, lying in the manure behind the cows where my dad had beaten her with a hose until she couldn't get up. My hatred seethed as I vowed to myself, "When I am strong enough, I'm going to kill him." Sometimes when visitors were coming over and my dad was drunk, I would grab him around the neck, pull him out to the barn, and tie him up. After tying his hands and feet, I would loop part of the rope around his neck, hoping he would try to get away and choke himself.

Then I would park his truck behind the silo and tell everyone he had gone to a meeting, so we wouldn't be embarrassed as a family.

Two months before I graduated from high school, I walked into the house after a date to hear my mother sobbing. I ran into her room, and she sat up in bed. "Son, your father has broken my heart," she said. She put her arms around me and pulled me close. "I have lost the will to live. All I want to do is live until you graduate, then I want to die."

Two months later I graduated, and a few months later my mother died. I believe she died of a broken heart. I hated my father for that. Had I not left home a few months after the funeral to attend college, I might have killed him.

But after I made a decision to place my trust in Jesus as my Savior and Lord, the love of God inundated my life. He took my hatred for my father and turned it upside down. Five months after becoming a Christian, I found myself looking my dad right in the eye and saying, "Dad, I love you." I did not want to love that man, but I did. God's love had changed my heart.

After I transferred to Wheaton College, I was in a serious car accident, the victim of a drunk driver. I was moved home from the hospital to recover, and my father came to see me. Remarkably, he was sober that day. He seemed uneasy, pacing back and forth in my room. Then he blurted out, "How can you love a father like me?"

I said, "Dad, six months ago I hated you, I despised you. But I have put my trust in Jesus Christ, received God's forgiveness, and he has changed my life. I can't explain it all, Dad. But God has taken away my hatred for you and replaced it with love."

We talked for nearly an hour. Then he said, "Son, if God can do in my life what I've seen him do in yours, then I want to give him

the opportunity." He prayed, "God, if you're really God and Jesus died on the cross to forgive me for what I've done to my family, I need you. If Jesus can do in my life what I've seen him do in the life of my son, then I want to trust him as my Savior and Lord." Hearing my dad pray this prayer from his heart was one of the greatest joys of my life.

After I trusted Christ, my life was basically changed in six to eighteen months. But my father's life changed right before my eyes. It was like someone reached down and switched on a light inside him. He touched alcohol only once after that. He got the drink only as far as his lips, and that was it—after forty years of drinking! He didn't need it anymore. Fourteen months later, he died from complications of his alcoholism. But in that fourteen-month period over a hundred people in the area around my tiny hometown committed their lives to Jesus Christ because of the change they saw in the town drunk, my dad.

But I need to tell you that as I grew up, my father was not the only person I grew to despise and deeply hate. Our hired cook and housekeeper, Wayne Bailey, was a tall thin man with a long pointed nose. He had a room upstairs in our farmhouse. To say that I grew to hate Wayne would be to put it mildly. You see, Wayne sexually abused me repeatedly, beginning when I was just six years old—until as a young teenager I became strong enough to resist. One day, when my parents were both out, Wayne from behind put his hand on my right shoulder. My body stiffened because I knew what was next. My fear and nervousness had never stopped him before. But this time I was finally ready. I spun around and slammed Wayne against the wall, grabbing his neck with my left hand and raising my right clenched fist. *"If you ever touch me again—even once—I will kill you!"* That was the day the sexual abuse stopped.

Several years later he quit his job on our farm and left for good.

But the emotional pain and deep psychological scars remained with me. Yes, I truly hated Wayne for what he had done. Forgive him? Seriously? That question is one I had to wrestle with. And I did. It wasn't until I realized afresh the enormity of what it meant that Jesus had died for me and had forgiven me that I knew that I needed to find Wayne and, as an act of obedience, forgive that man for what he had done. My pastor had told me that forgiveness doesn't mean justifying or condoning what he did, but it would begin the process of freeing me from the past, and it would offer a lost person the opportunity for redemption.

Well, I located Wayne—living in a drab house in Jackson, Michigan. Having carefully rehearsed what I would say, I told him, “Wayne, what you did to me was evil. Very evil! But I have come to know Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. And I have come here . . . to . . . tell you . . .” I prayed for strength and continued, “Wayne, all of us have sinned, and no one measures up to God's standard of perfection. We all need redemption, and, well, I've come here to tell you that I forgive you.”

He looked at me without blinking. For a moment I wished it wasn't true, but it was true and I had to say it. “Christ died for you, Wayne, as much as he died for me.” I paused

and then as I turned to leave, I turned to face him one final time. “One other thing, Wayne. Don't let me ever hear of you touching a young man again. You'll regret it.”

Out of obedience to God's command, I had chosen to forgive a man who had deeply hurt me. Forgiveness is an action, not an emotion. As I pulled away in my car, there was no high or low point of emotion that one might expect. Instead, I recognized a peace in my heart unlike anything I had experienced before.

You can laugh at Christianity. You can mock and ridicule it. But it works. If you trust Christ, start watching your attitudes and actions—Jesus Christ is in the business of changing lives.

Christianity is not something to be shoved down your throat or forced on you. You have your life to live and I have mine. All I can do is tell you what I have learned and experienced. After that, what you do with Christ is your decision.

Perhaps the prayer I prayed will help you: “Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Forgive me and cleanse me. Right this moment I trust you as my Savior and Lord. Make me the type of person you created me to be. In Christ's name, Amen.”

*Josh McDowell*

# INTRODUCTION

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## I. What Is Apologetics?

As a professor of Christian apologetics at Biola University, I (Sean) help prepare students to answer tough questions raised against the Christian faith. One day someone from outside the Biola academic community called our university to ask why we offer classes on apologizing for the faith. She thought apologetics meant teaching students to say they were sorry for their beliefs! While her question was well intentioned, she didn't grasp the nature of apologetics and its biblical role in the Christian life. Christians certainly should apologize for their faith, but not in the sense she had in mind.

### Apologize . . . for What?

The word *apologetics* does not mean to say you're sorry. Instead, it refers to the defense of what you believe to be true. This book of evidence for the validity of the Christian faith is therefore a book of *apologetics*.

Theologian and apologist Clark Pinnock explains the nature of apologetics in this way:

The term apologetics derives from a Greek term, *apologia*, and was used for a defence that a person like Socrates might make of his views and actions. The apostle Peter tells every Christian to be ready to give a reason (*apologia*) for the hope that is in him (1 Pet. 3:15). Apologetics, then, is an activity of the Christian mind which attempts to show that the gospel message is true in what it affirms. An apologist is one who is prepared to defend the message against criticism and distortion, and to give evidences of its credibility. (Pinnock, A, 36)

### Biblical Passages with the Word *Apologia*

The New Testament uses the Greek word *apologia*, often translated in English as

“defense,” eight times in the New Testament. (All passages in this list are quoted from the esv with italics added):

1. Acts 22:1: “Brothers and fathers, hear the *defense* that I now make before you.”
2. Acts 25:16: “I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his *defense* concerning the charge laid against him.”
3. 1 Corinthians 9:3: “This is my *defense* to those who would examine me.”
4. 2 Corinthians 7:11: “For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves [*apologia*], what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.”
5. Philippians 1:7: “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the *defense* and confirmation of the gospel.”
6. Philippians 1:16: “The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the *defense* of the gospel.”
7. 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a *defense* to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”
8. 2 Timothy 4:16: “At my first *defense* no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!”

First Peter 3:15 uses the word *defense* in a way that denotes the kind of defense one would make to a legal inquiry, asking, “Why are you a Christian?” A believer ought to

give an adequate answer to this question. The command to be ready with an answer is directed toward *every* follower of Jesus—not just pastors, teachers, and leaders.

There are instances in many other passages when, even though the word *apologia* may not appear, the Bible either models or explicitly emphasizes the importance of apologetics. Consider a few: 2 Corinthians 10:5; Jude 3; Acts 2:22–24; 18:4; Titus 1:9; Job 38:1–41; Luke 24:44.

### Jesus the Apologist

Except for 1 Peter 3:15, the New Testament appearances of *apologia* all come from the writing or ministry of Paul. But was Jesus an apologist? Though the New Testament does not mention Jesus using the word *apologia*, we nevertheless hold that he was, indeed, an apologist. Philosopher Douglas Groothuis has carefully studied the question of whether Jesus was a philosopher or an apologist. After giving many examples of how Jesus rationally defended the crucial claims of Christianity, Groothuis concludes:

Contrary to the views of critics, Jesus Christ was a brilliant thinker, who used logical arguments to refute His critics and establish the truth of His views. When Jesus praised the faith of children, He was encouraging humility as a virtue, not irrational religious trust or a blind leap of faith in the dark. Jesus deftly employed a variety of reasoning strategies in His debates on various topics. These include escaping the horns of a dilemma, *a fortiori* arguments, appeals to evidence, and *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. Jesus' use of persuasive arguments demonstrates that He was both a philosopher and an apologist who rationally defended His worldview in discussions with some of the best thinkers of His day. This intellectual approach does not detract from

His divine authority but enhances it. Jesus' high estimation of rationality and His own application of arguments indicates [*sic*] that Christianity is not an anti-intellectual faith. Followers of Jesus today, therefore, should emulate His intellectual zeal, using the same kinds or arguments He Himself used. Jesus' argumentative strategies have applications to four contemporary debates: the relationship between God and morality, the reliability of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus, and ethical relativism. (Groothuis, JPA)

### Apologetics in the Old Testament

Some falsely assume that apologetics began in the New Testament era. After explaining how Jesus and Paul engaged in logical debate both to destroy faulty beliefs and to propagate the Christian faith, philosopher J. P. Moreland observes:

Jesus and Paul were continuing a style of persuasion peppered throughout the Old Testament prophets. Regularly, the prophets appealed to evidence to justify belief in the biblical God or in the divine authority of their inspired message: fulfilled prophecy, the historical fact of miracles, the inadequacy of finite pagan deities to be a cause of such a large, well-ordered universe compared to the God of the Bible, and so forth. They did not say, "God said it, that settles it, you should believe it!" They provided a rational defense for their claims. (Moreland, LYG, 132)

## II. Five Reasons Apologetics Is Important Today

### Reason #1: We Are All Apologists Anyway

Apologetics is not listed as a spiritual gift for teachers, preachers, or evangelists, as though only some ought to become apologists. Rather, *all* Christians are called to be

ready with an answer (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3). We all make a case for Christianity in some fashion or another—but are we doing it well? Beyond the specific Christian calling to have a ready defense for the faith, there is a sense in which everyone is already an apologist for something. The question is not *whether* we are apologists, but *what kind* of apologists we are. Christian author and social critic Os Guinness addresses this idea:

From the shortest texts and tweets to the humblest website, to the angriest blog, to the most visited social networks, the daily communications of the wired world attest that *everyone is now in the business of relentless self-promotion—presenting themselves, explaining themselves, defending themselves, selling themselves or sharing their inner thoughts and emotions as never before in human history.* That is why it can be said that we are in the grand secular age of apologetics. The whole world has taken up apologetics without ever knowing the idea as Christians understand it. We are all apologists now, if only on behalf of “the Daily Me” or “the Tweeted Update” that we post for our virtual friends and our cyber community. The great goals of life, we are told, are to gain the widest possible public attention and to reach as many people in the world with our products—and always, our leading product is Us. (Guinness, FT, 15–16)

## **Reason #2: Apologetics Strengthens Believers**

Many Christians claim to believe in Jesus, but only a minority can articulate good reasons for why their beliefs are true. Yet when Christians learn good evidences for the truth of the Bible, for the existence of God, or how to respond to tough challenges to the faith, they gain confidence in their beliefs. For instance, I (Sean) lead high school students

on an apologetics mission trip each year to Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, or Berkeley. To prepare for this trip, students attend weekly meetings and lengthy training sessions, and read apologetics books. Then we go meet, have conversations with, and listen to lectures from some of the best thinkers from other faiths. The vast majority of these students come back with a renewed confidence that their beliefs are not only true, but also defensible. As a result, many grow more eager and willing to share their faith.

Philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig explains how college students can gain confidence by learning apologetics:

Typically I’ll be invited onto a campus to debate some professor who has a reputation of being especially abusive to Christian students in his classes. We’ll have a public debate on, say, the existence of God, or Christianity versus humanism, or some such topic. Again and again I find that while most of these men are pretty good at beating up intellectually on an eighteen-year-old in one of their classes, they can’t even hold their own when it comes to going toe-to-toe with one of their peers. John Stackhouse once remarked to me that these debates are really a Westernized version of what missiologists call a “power encounter.” I think that’s a perceptive analysis. Christian students come away from these encounters with a renewed confidence in their faith, their heads held high, proud to be Christians, and bolder in speaking out for Christ on their campus. (Craig, RF, 21)

## **Reason #3: Apologetics Helps Students Hang On to Their Faith**

A number of different studies track how many students leave the church during their college years, and, overall, the stats indicate that, after high school, between one-third

and two-thirds of young people do leave. (Wallace, AYP) While they leave for many different kinds of reasons (moral, volitional, emotional, relational, etc.), intellectual questions are *one* important factor. Young people have genuine intellectual questions. And when these questions are not answered, many leave the church.

Both of us regularly speak at churches around the world, and frequently meet afterwards with parents who say something like, “I wish my child could have heard you a few years ago. We raised her in the faith, but now she has strayed from it. She had questions that no one could answer, and simply doesn’t believe anymore.” These stories are so common today, and they break our hearts. Intellectual challenges, just a click away, confront young people today more than in any other previous generation. We do, however, also frequently hear stories of how our books, articles, and videos (and those of other apologists) have helped people hold on to their faith in the face of challenges. Bottom line: *if you want to train up young people to remain strong in the Christian faith, one vital component is training in apologetics.*

#### **Reason #4: Apologetics Helps with Evangelism**

In an article about big issues facing the church, pastor Timothy Keller says the contemporary church needs a renewal of apologetics:

Christians in the West will finally be facing what missionaries around the world have faced for years: how to communicate the gospel to Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and adherents of various folk religions. All young church leaders should take courses in and read the texts of the other major world religions. They should also study the gospel presentations written by

missionaries engaging those religions. Loving community will be extremely important, as it always is, to reach out to neighbors of other faiths, but if they are going to come into the church, they will have many questions that church leaders today need to be able to answer. (Keller, HSC)

People naturally have questions. They always have and always will. One of the key functions of apologetics, then, is to respond to questions and clear away objections people have that hinder their trust in Christ. Apologist, author, and speaker Ravi Zacharias emphasizes the important impact of an alert response to someone’s question, even in a small way: “*Do not underestimate the role you may play in clearing the obstacles in someone’s spiritual journey.* A seed sown here, a light shone there may be all that is needed to move someone one step further.” (Zacharias, AA, xvii)

In this book, we are going to take you deep. Yet our goal is that you gain knowledge not for its own sake, but for your preparation to confidently answer questions people may ask you about Christianity. If you want to share your faith effectively, you need to be ready with answers.

Professor James Beilby explains the relationship between evangelism and apologetics:

Evangelism and apologetics are closely related. Both have a common general goal: encouraging commitment to Jesus Christ. In fact, in certain theological circles, apologetics has been labeled pre-evangelism. On this understanding, apologetics clears the ground for evangelism; it makes evangelism more effective by preemptively addressing impediments to hearing the gospel. This is certainly true, but I submit that apologetics is also useful in the midst of the presentation of the gospel

and after the presentation of the gospel. In other words, there is no moment in which a Christian takes off her evangelist hat and puts on her apologist hat. The relationship is more seamless than that. The difference between the two is one of focus. Evangelism is focused on presenting the gospel; apologetics is focused on defending and commending it. There is, moreover, an important difference in the audience of evangelism and apologetics. Evangelism is done only with non-Christians, but apologetics should be done with Christians and non-Christians alike. (Beilby, TACA, 32)

### **Reason #5: Apologetics Helps Shape Culture**

Apologetics and evangelism never happen in a vacuum. In our experience, apologetics questions come from both Christians and non-Christians—*because they both live in the same cultures, and the same world influences their thinking*. Why are considerations of culture so important? Craig explains:

They're important simply because the gospel is never heard in isolation. It is always heard against the background of the cultural milieu in which one lives. A person raised in a cultural milieu in which Christianity is still seen as an intellectually viable option will display an openness to the gospel which a person who is secularized will not. For the secular person you may as well tell him to believe in fairies or leprechauns as in Jesus Christ! Or, to give a more realistic illustration, it is like our being approached on the street by a devotee of the Hare Krishna movement who invites us to believe in Krishna. Such an invitation strikes us as bizarre, freakish, even amusing. But to a person on the streets of Delhi, such an invitation would, I assume, appear quite reasonable and be serious cause for reflection. I fear that evangelicals appear almost as weird to persons

on the streets of Bonn, Stockholm, or Paris as do the devotees of Krishna. (Craig, RF, 16)

Influential theologian J. Gresham Machen perhaps said it best:

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. (Machen, CC, 7)

Philosopher and apologist Francis J. Beckwith further explains:

It is fashionable today to speak of the theological posture of Western civilization, and American intellectual culture in particular, as post-Christian. Our most important, influential and culture-shaping institutions and professions—law, medicine, education, science, media and the arts—no longer accept the presuppositions of the biblical worldview as part of their philosophical frameworks. Thus, for example, it is not unusual—in fact, it is quite common—to hear academic luminaries from different disciplines in assorted venues defend points of view that presuppose theological claims, and Christian ones in particular, are not claims of knowledge but rather religious opinions no different in nature than matters of taste. The ease by which these points of view are presented, and the absence of a call to justify them by the same standards of philosophical rigor that are required of their opposition, is testimony to how potently certain claims antithetical to the Christian worldview have shaped the ideas, opinions and policies of those who occupy the seats of culture influence in our society. (Beckwith, TEA, 16–17)

### III. Christianity Is a Factual Faith

#### Christianity Is a Historical Faith

Christianity appeals to history. It appeals to facts of history that can be examined through the normal means of historicity. Pinnock defines these types of facts: “The facts backing the Christian claim are not a special kind of religious fact. They are the cognitive, informational facts upon which all historical, legal, and ordinary decisions are based.” (Pinnock, SFYC, 6–7)

Luke, the first-century historian, demonstrates the historical nature of Christianity in his introduction to his gospel:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.*

— Luke 1:1–4 ESV

Among these historical, knowable events was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event that Luke says was validated by Jesus himself through “many proofs” over a forty-day period before numerous witnesses (Acts 1:3 ESV).

Like the Gospels, Acts records history. Concerning the genre of Acts, New Testament scholar Craig Keener observes, “Acts is history, probably apologetic history in the form of a historical monograph with a narrow focus on the expansion of the gospel message from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke’s approach focuses on primary characters and their deeds and speeches, as was

common in the history of his day.” (Keener, AEC, 115)

We hope, then, to present the historical facts surrounding the Christian faith, and to determine whether the Christian interpretation is the most reasonable. Make no mistake—the historical facts matter for Christianity. The Christian faith is an objective faith; therefore, it must have an object that is worthy of faith. Salvation comes not from the strength of our beliefs, but from the object of our beliefs. Yes, salvation comes through faith (Eph. 2:8, 9; John 6:29), but the merit of faith depends upon the object believed (not the faith *itself*).

Let me (Josh) illustrate. Once I debated the head of the philosophy department of a Midwestern university. In answering a question, I happened to mention the importance of the resurrection. At this point, my opponent interrupted and rather sarcastically said, “Come on, McDowell, the key issue is not whether the resurrection took place or not; the key issue is this: ‘Do you believe it took place?’” He was hinting at, even boldly asserting, that my *believing* was the most important thing. I retorted immediately, “Sir, it does matter whether the resurrection took place, because the value of Christian faith is not in the one believing, but in the One who is believed in, its object.” I continued, “If anyone can demonstrate to me that Christ was not raised from the dead, I would not have a justifiable right to my Christian faith” (1 Cor. 15:14, 17).

The Christian must avoid the attitude, “Don’t confuse me with the facts—my mind is made up!” For the Christian, the historical events reported in the Scriptures are essential. That’s why Paul said, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14 ESV).

## Christianity Is a Testable Faith

As Paul makes clear in his letter to the Corinthians, Christianity is a historical religion tied to the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These claims are testable, in that anyone can actually examine their validity and determine historically whether they are reliable. As noted, Paul ties the truth of the Christian faith to the historical resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). Professor of apologetics Craig Hazen considers this one of the strangest passages in all of religious literature. He says:

I have not been able to find a passage in the Scriptures and teachings of the other great religious traditions that so tightly links the truth of an entire system of belief to a single, testable historical event. . . . This idea that the truth of Christianity is linked to the resurrection of Jesus in a testable way does set Christianity apart from the other great world religious traditions in a dramatic fashion. When you boil it down, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the like are about inner, personal experience and not about objective public knowledge. Other traditions *seem* to be about objective knowledge until you probe a little more deeply. Mormonism, for instance, seems to be about hidden gold plates, Jesus' ancient visit to the Western hemisphere, and latter-day prophets—things that could certainly, in principle, be evaluated in an objective way. However, when facing evidence contrary to these claims, the Mormon missionary, scholar, or apostle steps back and begins to talk about the special inner knowledge, a “burning in the bosom,” that is the only confirmation that really counts about these unusual stories. At the end of the day, the Mormon is no different from the Buddhist in that they both rely on inner experience as their ultimate source and warrant for religious knowledge. (Hazen, CWR, 144)

## IV. Clearing the Fog: Ten Misconceptions About the Christian Faith

When Sean was growing up, we lived in a small town called Julian, in the mountains outside San Diego. Sometimes the fog would get so thick that while driving we couldn't see the car directly in front of us. Though the fog made the car ahead invisible, the fog didn't change the fact that the car was still there. Fog affects visibility, but the things it hides are no less real than they are on a clear day. In a similar way, many people have “foggy” views of the Christian faith, misunderstandings we hope to clear up before we get to the evidence.

### Misconception #1: “Christianity doesn't need evidence because faith is blind.”

Many atheist critiques of Christianity claim that faith is blind, irrational, stupid. In his book *The God Delusion*, leading atheist Richard Dawkins asserts that faith opposes reason, and calls faith a “delusion,” which he describes as “persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence.” (Dawkins, GD, 28)

A common example used to show that the Bible denigrates evidence is the story of doubting Thomas. Dawkins writes, “Thomas demanded evidence. . . . The other apostles, whose faith was so strong that they did not need evidence, are held up to us as worthy of imitation.” (Dawkins, SG, 198) Was Jesus repudiating an evidence-based faith?

In *Is God Just a Human Invention?* Jonathan Morrow and I (Sean) list three problems with this claim:

First, Jesus predicted his resurrection on multiple occasions in the presence of the disciples. Thomas should not have been

surprised at the return of Jesus. Second, Thomas heard eyewitness testimony (evidence) from the rest of the disciples and yet still refused to believe. (The vast majority of scientific knowledge we possess depends upon trusting the conclusions of other scientists, which is true for virtually all disciplines.) Third, Jesus did many miracles during his ministry as proof of his identity. In fact, right after the story of Jesus scolding Thomas, John said the miracles of Jesus were recorded “so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name.” (McDowell and Morrow, IGJHI, 21)

Despite what Dawkins claims, Christianity values the role of the mind, which includes the proper use of reason and argumentation. Jesus said to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and *mind* (Mark 12:30). The Lord said to the nation of Israel, “Come now, let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18 ESV). Scripture and church history emphasize the importance of the role of the mind in discipleship and evangelism.

In the Old Testament, God showered Egypt with miracles before inviting Israel to follow him into the wilderness. Rather than asking Israel for blind allegiance, God’s miracles through Moses gave them good reasons to trust him. Exodus 14:31 makes this clear: “Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.” Miracles preceded the call to belief, laying the foundation for a rational step of faith.

Even so, many Christians use the term “faith” to mean “blind faith” rather than biblical faith. But Christianity itself does not demand blind faith. In fact, quite the opposite: when Jesus Christ and the apostles called upon a person to exercise faith, it was

not a “blind faith” but rather an *intelligent* faith. The apostle Paul said, “I *know* whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12, emphasis added). Jesus specifically performed miracles to show who he was, and, as a result, many confidently placed their faith in him. During a trip to Capernaum, Jesus healed a paralytic. After forgiving the man’s sins, Jesus said to the crowd, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed and go to your house’” (Mark 2:10, 11). Jesus healed the man so people would *know* he spoke with authority from above.

Professor of philosophy David Horner explains:

Faith and reason are friends and partners. They go together. They need each other and cannot flourish or even survive apart. Our faith should be a reasonable faith, and our reason should be a faithful reason—one that recognizes the inevitable and rationally necessary presence of trust and commitment. Trusting and committing yourself to what you have good reason to think is true and trustworthy, in those cases when doing so is appropriate or unavoidable, is the most reasonable thing you can do. (Horner, MYF, 170)

Christians are often accused of taking a “blind leap into the dark.” For me (Josh), however, I found the evidence for Christianity powerful and convincing. So when I became a Christian, I hadn’t leapt blindly into the dark, but stepped into the light. I placed the evidence I gathered onto the scales, and they tipped in favor of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, resurrected from the dead. Had I been exercising “blind faith,” I would have rejected Jesus Christ and turned my back on all the evidence.

Of course, no one can *absolutely prove* that Jesus is the Son of God. My investigation of the evidence weighed the pros and cons. The results convinced me that Christ must be who he claimed to be, and I had to make a decision, which I did. You may be thinking, *You found what you wanted*. But this is not the case. Rather, *I confirmed through investigation what I wanted to refute*. I set out to disprove Christianity. I had biases and prejudices not for Christ but against him.

The next three objections are some of the most common ones we hear, but they also have considerable overlap. They each deal with the failure of Christians to live up to biblical ideals. For each of these, we hope you will recognize that Christians have, in fact, often fallen short of living as Christ teaches but also that Christianity itself stands or falls on its own evidential merits, regardless of how Christians may or may not live (and such is true for any other belief system too).

**Misconception #2: “Christianity cannot be true because the church has committed injustices.”**

The world well knows the sins of the church, among them the Inquisition, witch-hunts, the Crusades, and modern-day sexual abuse. Clearly, the church has fallen short of the ideals Jesus proclaimed. Many discount the Christian message *not* because they have examined the evidence and found it wanting, but because they are personally disappointed with Christians and churches. As Keller has observed, we need to address “the behavior of Christians—individual and corporate—that has undermined the plausibility of Christianity for so many people.” (Keller, RG, 52)

The fact that Christian behavior so deeply undermines the plausibility of the gospel in the minds of many people should be a wakeup call for Christians. We need to ask

ourselves some tough questions: *Have I failed to live as Jesus taught me to? How responsible am I for the negative perceptions many have of the church?* We would each do well to look at our own lives and seek God’s grace and forgiveness.

If you are a non-Christian, it is important to ask yourself a few tough questions as well: Does the moral failure of Christians undermine the claim that Jesus is truly God? Have I had a negative experience with some Christians that clouds my view of the entire church? Am I really evaluating Christianity and the church fairly?

For at least two reasons, the character flaws of the church should not surprise us. First, the Bible speaks of human nature as gloriously made in God’s image, but profoundly fallen in sin. Human nature is deeply flawed (Rom. 3:9–18; Mark 7:14–23). Even true Christians are capable of wretched acts. The Bible does say we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), but this is only fully realized in the next life.

Second, many who claim to be Christians have not placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and therefore do not truly know him. Jesus taught that both believers and non-believers would be part of the institutional church, but that their true identity would not be revealed until the end (Matt. 13:24–30). He also taught that there would be people who *thought* they were acting in his name—even doing “many wonders,” but they will not enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 7:21–23). Just because someone claims to be a Christian, then, does not mean he or she really is. Could it be that the church is often indicted for the actions of people who are not even Christians? This is why the standard of Scripture is so important. Ultimately, we need to compare the actions of both individuals and the corporate church with the genuine teachings of the Bible.

We ought to put the sins of the church in perspective. Philosopher John Mark Reynolds notes,

We are the people of the great cathedrals, but also of the tortures of the Inquisition. The religious fervor that would produce the American genius Jonathan Edwards would also produce the Salem Witch Trials. Sadly, most of the students in universities I meet have heard of the bad things we have done, but not the good. Secular schools have shamed us into silence. After all, if Christendom was mostly bad for the world, then decency requires withdrawing from the public square. Humility about our history is in order, but extremists in the secular community insist we feel nothing but shame. This is unnecessary, since the good of Christendom far outweighs the bad, just as good and honorable ministers outnumber the hypocrites. (Reynolds, CC, 71–72)

In his book *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?*, pastor and evangelist D. James Kennedy provides an overview of the positive contributions Christianity has made through the centuries. (Kennedy, WIJH) Here are ten highlights:

- Hospitals, which essentially began during the Middle Ages
- Universities, which also began during the Middle Ages
- Literacy and education for the masses
- The separation of political powers
- Civil liberties
- The abolition of slavery
- Modern science
- The elevation of women
- Benevolence and charity; the Good Samaritan ethic
- High regard for human life

One of the great injustices of our day is racism. After observing that the Civil Rights movement was essentially a “religious revival,” Timothy Keller notes,

When Martin Luther King, Jr., confronted racism in the white church in the South, he did not call on Southern churches to become more secular. Read his sermons and “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and see how he argued. He invoked God’s moral law and the Scripture. He called white Christians to be *more true* to their own beliefs and to realize what the Bible really teaches. He did not say, “Truth is relative and everyone is free to determine what is right or wrong for them.” If everything is relative, there would have been no incentive for white people in the South to give up their power. Rather, Dr. King invoked the prophet Amos, who said, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24). The greatest champion of justice in our era knew the antidote to racism was not less Christianity, but a deeper and truer Christianity. (Keller, RG, 64–65)

### **Misconception #3: “The hypocrisy of Christians undermines the reasonability of the Christian faith.”**

Christian hypocrisy has done massive damage to the Christian faith. According to Guinness, the challenge of hypocrisy is second only to the problem of suffering and evil, and is one of the main reasons people duck the challenge of the gospel. (Guinness, FT, 190) Hypocrisy is such a massive challenge, says Guinness, because Christians are called to be God’s witnesses to the world (Isa. 43:10; John 3:28): “In other words, before we are asked to preach, proclaim or try to persuade people of the claims of Jesus and his Father, we are asked simply to be witnesses for him—to provide an honest and factual account of what

we have seen and heard objectively, and what we ourselves have experienced (“Once I was blind, but now I can see”)—and to live lives that support what we say.” (FT, 188)

It is tempting for Christians to respond by pointing out the hypocrisy in other people and worldviews. For instance, the voices of tolerance and inclusiveness are often remarkably intolerant and noninclusive of people with traditional values. Such hypocrisy should be rightly pointed out. But this doesn’t get Christians off the hook. After all, James said, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Christians are called to a higher standard. Whether we like it or not, people will judge the truthfulness of Christianity by the lives of its adherents.

As with the charge that the church has caused injustice in the world, Christians should first look inside and see if there is any merit to this claim. *Have we been hypocritical in any way? Have our lives betrayed our principles? Have we contributed to this narrative?* Rather than blame others, we need to take an honest look inside, identify our own hypocrisy, repent of it, and then admit our shortcomings.

As for the claim itself, it is an example of a “genetic fallacy,” which is a claim that is dismissed because of some perceived fault in its origin (its genesis). Guinness explains,

There is an important difference between the *source* of a truth claim and the *standard* by which it should be assessed. It is therefore wrong to reject a claim just because of the character and condition of its source. . . . The issue is always truth, and truth is not a matter of where someone is “coming from” or how oddly or shabbily they have behaved in the past before making the claim. . . . *If the Christian faith is true, it would still be true even if no one believed it, or if all who did were hypocrites; and if it is false, would still be*

*false even if everyone believed it and there was no apparent hypocrisy in their behavior.* (FT, 196)

If you are upset about hypocrisy in the church, then you are in good company—Jesus felt the same way. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy, calling them blind guides, snakes, and even killers of the prophets (Matt. 23). He condemned them for not practicing what they preached. If hypocrisy troubles you, then you’re on the side of Jesus.

What does hypocrisy tell us about Christianity? Scholars and teachers Clinton Arnold and Jeff Arnold explain:

When we go to church or spend time with Christians, many of us go in with the expectation that we won’t find anything we don’t like, including hypocrites. These people have been fixed by Jesus already, right? It doesn’t take long to become disappointed if that’s what we expect. But maybe this expectation is off. If you walked into a hospital, would you be surprised if you found sick people everywhere? What if some of them were *really* sick? This is much closer to how we should approach the church and Christians in general. We are not perfect; in fact, we’re all still very sick. But we are getting better. It’s easy to forget that we all came to the church at different points in life; many people come from broken lives that are now in the process of healing, and most of us are more sick than we realize. We should not be surprised to find people in different states of mending. It would make more sense to compare a person to how they were before they became a Christian than to compare them to perfection. The church is not a place for perfect people, it’s a place for broken people slowly being made whole by Jesus. If we find ourselves surprised when we see sin in the church, we should rethink our expectations. (Arnold and Arnold, SABQ, 101–102)

#### **Misconception #4: “The intolerance of Christians is a good reason to reject the Christian faith.”**

Guilty as charged. Christianity has its fair share of judgmental and intolerant people. We have no interest in covering up the misbehavior of Christians. But keep something in mind: *when Christians act in an arrogant, judgmental manner towards others, they are not following Scriptural teachings.* Pride is one of the seven deadly sins (Prov. 6:16, 17), an evil that comes from the heart (Mark 7:21–23). We apologize for judgmental Christians; remember, though, when Christians act “holier than thou,” they act inconsistently with what Christianity *itself* requires. True Christians aim to be at peace with others (Heb. 12:14), build relationships with people regardless of creed, race, nationality, or sex (John 4:1–42; Luke 9:1–10), and are called to be humble and gentle (Eph. 4:2).

We must distinguish between Christians’ behavior and genuine Christianity. To condemn Christianity because of the misbehavior of some Christians is another way to commit the “genetic fallacy,” which is dismissing a claim because of some perceived fault in its origin.

Yes, Christians often express judgment and intolerance, failing to follow the example and teachings of Jesus. But even if Christians were kind and gracious in their attitudes, the critic might claim, wouldn’t they still be intolerant for condemning the beliefs of others? Author and speaker Mark Mittelberg offers an incisive response:

What’s fascinating is that the people who condemn Christians for acting as if they’re right and others are wrong are, in that very action, acting as if they themselves are right and Christians are wrong. So they are at that moment doing the very thing they say is

wrong. When you think about it, it’s pretty silly to condemn people for thinking they are right—because aren’t you simultaneously thinking *you* are right in saying they are wrong? Or, broadening the point a bit, who in their right mind *doesn’t* consistently think that they are right? . . . I mean, really, do you ever think you’re wrong while you’re in the midst of thinking that very thought? I don’t think so; I think as soon as you start to realize your thinking is wrong you change your belief and start thinking differently! Therefore, for two reasons no one should condemn Christians just for thinking they’re right and others are wrong: (1) everybody else does the same thing, and (2) Christians might really be right, after all. (Mittelberg, QCH, 241)

Those who accuse Christians of being intolerant have a distorted view of what tolerance really entails. Rather than accepting all views as equally valid, true tolerance involves recognizing and respecting others when we *don’t* approve of their values, beliefs, and practices. After all, we don’t use the word “tolerate” for what we enjoy or approve of—such as steak or good movies. Thus, there is an intimate connection between tolerance and truth. That is, we only tolerate what we find to be false or mistaken in some capacity. If we all agreed, we would not need tolerance. Only when people genuinely disagree does tolerance become necessary. Claiming that someone is wrong for holding a different viewpoint, then, isn’t itself intolerant; the attitude that accompanies the claim may, however, be intolerant. But charitably and kindly disagreeing can be an act of genuine tolerance.

This is what Jesus did. And it is how the American founders viewed tolerance as well. Groothuis explains that tolerance as understood by the founders “is a kind of patience that refuses to hate or disrespect those with

whom we disagree, even when disagreement concerns the things that matter most. The ideal of tolerance, in the Western classical liberal sense, is compatible with strong convictions on religious matters and with raging controversies. In fact, John Locke, one of the leading proponents of early modern tolerance, was himself a professing Christian who engaged in apologetics.” (Groothuis, CA, 150)

Finally, charging Christians with intolerance assumes the existence of an objective moral standard. But if there is no God, how can there be such a standard? Ironically, as theologian and analytic philosopher Paul Copan observes, tolerance is only intelligible if God exists:

The reality of God actually makes tolerance intelligible, because God is the source of truth and because God has made human beings in his likeness. Naturalistic secularism has no such foundation for tolerance. If tolerance is a value, it isn't obvious from nature; so if there is no God and we are just hulks of protoplasmic gunk, how could tolerance be an objective value at all? Instead, if objective truth exists, as religion maintains, then we must seek and seriously discuss it despite our differing worldviews. But if objective truth doesn't exist, as secularism generally maintains, then relativism obliterates genuine differences of perspective. (Copan, TFY, 36)

### **Misconception #5: “There can't be just one right religion.”**

One of the most common questions we both receive is, “How can you say Jesus is the only way to God?” The complaint is clear: it is intolerant, exclusivist, and naïve to assume that only one religion could be correct.

Recently I (Sean) was in a conversation with a friend, and he asked how I could say that Jesus is the only way. I simply said,

“I'm not saying it. Jesus said it. Take it up with him.” He certainly didn't expect that response. And I didn't mean to be rude or abrupt. My point was that Jesus was the one who first made the claim, and he has the credentials to back it up. If our claims about Jesus in this book are true, then Jesus has more credentials to speak on eternal life than anyone. He is the only virgin-born, miracle-working, sinless, resurrected Son of God! You may not *like* the idea of Jesus being the only way, but if he truly is the Son of God and said he was the only way to salvation—can you afford to ignore his claim?

It would be nice if everybody could be right, but as simple reason and basic common sense tell us, all religions cannot be true in their core beliefs. By its very nature, truth is exclusive. If  $1 + 1 = 2$ , then it doesn't equal 3, 4, 5, and every other number. While all religions could possibly be wrong, it is not logically possible for all of them to be right when their claims differ so radically. Either they are all wrong or only one is right.

The chart “Basic Beliefs of Major Religions” shows that all religions, even by their own claims, differ from one another, having their own specific ideas of who God is (or is not) and how salvation may be attained.

Many criticize Christianity for its exclusivity, but Christians are not the only group claiming to have the truth. Notice in the chart “Basic Beliefs of Major Religions” the attitudes of each religion toward the others. Four of the five religions *claim* exclusivity. They believe that all other religions are false. Hindus often do not claim exclusivity. In fact, many are happy to say that Christianity is true. But the key is what they *mean* by it. Hindus believe all religions are true when they are subsumed within the Hindu system. In other words, Christianity is one medium by which people can experience reincarnation.

### BASIC BELIEFS OF MAJOR RELIGIONS

Religion	Beliefs About God	Beliefs About Salvation	Beliefs About Other Religions
Buddhism	No God	Enlightenment	False
Hinduism	Many Gods	Reincarnation	All True*
Islam	Unitarian (Allah)	The Five Pillars	False
Judaism	Unitarian (Yahweh)	The Law	False
Christianity	Trinitarian (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)	Grace	False

\* Hindus will often claim that all religions are true, but this can only be the case when other religions are subsumed within Hinduism. When taken on their own merits, all other religions are false, according to Hinduism.

But what Hindus *don't* mean is that Christianity is true on its own terms. So, like adherents of all other religions, Hindus actually believe Christianity is false, thereby joining every other religious group (including atheists and agnostics) in the belief that only their own worldview is true.

And yet, in another sense, Christianity is not exclusive at all, but is the most inclusive religion. Christ invites all unto himself. Unlike Mithraism, which apparently excluded women, or Mormonism, which formerly excluded black people from the priesthood, the message of Jesus has always been for *everyone*.

Colossians 3:11 says, "In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us" (NLT). Christ makes no human distinctions—he died and rose again so that all people could have a personal relationship with the living God.

Christianity excludes no one who will believe, yet Christ himself offers the only way to be reconciled with God. As philosopher Stephen Davis explains, "The resurrection of Jesus, then, is God's decisive proof that Jesus is not just a great religious teacher among

all the great religious teachers in history. It is God's sign that Jesus is not a religious charlatan among all the religious charlatans in the world. The resurrection is God's way of pointing to Jesus and saying that *he* is the one in whom you are to believe. *He* is your savior. *He* alone is Lord." (Davis, RI, 197)

The resurrection demonstrated the truth of what God the Father had said about Jesus at his baptism: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). If you are an honest enquirer into the truth of Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus is a great place to begin.

#### Misconception #6: "Christianity and science are at war."

Many believe science and religion are at war with each other. In fact, the belief that Christianity is opposed to modern science is one of the top reasons young people cite for leaving the church. (Kinnaman, YLM, 135–136)

But where did this idea come from? Is it accurate? In 1896 Cornell University president Andrew Dickson White released a book entitled *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. White is largely credited with inventing and

propagating the idea that science and Christianity are adversaries in the search for truth. White cast Christians as fanatics who clung to scriptural claims that the earth was flat. But is this account true? Sociologist Rodney Stark responds,

White's book remains influential despite the fact that modern historians of science dismiss it as nothing but a polemic—White himself admitted that he wrote the book to get even with Christian critics of his plans for Cornell . . . many of White's other accounts are as bogus as his report of the flat earth and Columbus. (Stark, FGG, 123)

Why has this warfare myth been so influential? Stark continues, "The truth concerning these matters is that the claim of an inevitable and bitter warfare between religion and science has, for more than three centuries, been the primary polemical device used in the atheist attack on faith." He concludes with the claim that "there is no inherent conflict between religion and science, but that *Christian theology was essential for the rise of science.*" (Stark, FGG, 123)

How is theology essential for science? In their book *The Soul of Science*, Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton summarize the Christian assumptions that provided the backdrop for the emergence of the scientific revolution in Europe:

Christian teachings have served as *presuppositions* for the scientific enterprise (e.g., the conviction that nature is lawful was inferred from its creation by a rational God). Second, Christian teachings have *sanctioned* science (e.g., science was justified as a means of alleviating toil and suffering). Third, Christian teachings supplied *motives* for pursuing science (e.g., to show the glory and wisdom of

the Creator). And fourth, Christianity played a role in *regulating* scientific methodology (e.g., voluntarist theology was invoked to justify an empirical approach in science). Among professional historians the image of warfare between faith and science has shattered. Replacing it is a widespread recognition of Christianity's positive contributions to modern science. (Pearcey and Thaxton, SS, 36–37)

Most scientific pioneers were theists, including prominent figures such as Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), Robert Boyle (1627–1691), Isaac Newton (1642–1727), Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), Louis Pasteur (1822–1895), Francis Bacon (1561–1626), and Max Planck (1858–1947). Many of these pioneers intently pursued science because of their belief in the Christian God. Bacon believed God meant for us to explore the many mysteries that filled the natural world. Kepler wrote, "The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God, and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics." (quoted in Lennox, GU, 20) Newton believed his scientific discoveries offered convincing evidence for the existence and creativity of God. His favorite argument for design related to the solar system: "This most beautiful system of sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being." (quoted in Pearcey and Thaxton, SS, 91)

While the theistic worldview fosters the development of science, naturalism undermines it. Since according to naturalism we humans are the product of a blind, purposeless, and unguided process, how can we trust our rational faculties? Outspoken philosopher of neuroscience Patricia Churchland agrees:

The principle chore of brains is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive. Improvements in sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: a fancier style of representing [the world] is advantageous so long as it . . . enhances the organism's chances for survival. Truth, whatever that is, takes the hindmost. (Churchland, EAN, 548)

Notre Dame philosopher Alvin Plantinga further clarifies:

Churchland's point, clearly, is that (from a naturalist perspective) what evolution guarantees is (at most) that *we behave* in certain ways—in such ways as to promote survival, or more exactly reproductive success. The principal function or purpose, then, (the “chore” says Churchland) of our cognitive faculties is not that of producing true or verisimilitudinous (nearly true) beliefs, but instead that of contributing to survival by getting the body parts in the right place. What evolution underwrites is only (at most) that our *behavior* is reasonably adaptive to the circumstances in which our ancestors found themselves; hence it does not guarantee mostly true or verisimilitudinous beliefs. Our beliefs *might* be mostly true or verisimilitudinous; but there is no particular reason to think they *would* be: natural selection is interested, not in truth, but in appropriate behavior. (Plantinga, WCRL, 314–315)

Certainly, some Christians resist science. And, as Plantinga observes, there are some beliefs individual Christians hold that are in tension with modern science. But this is only *shallow* conflict. No real conflict between theism and science exists. As we have seen, theology provided the backdrop for the scientific revolution. The real conflict—the *deep* conflict—is between science and naturalism.

### Misconception #7: “God has not provided enough evidence for rational belief.”

As a college student, I (Sean) explored significant doubts I had about my faith. It bothered me that God didn't make his existence more obvious. In fact, one skeptic made me wonder, *Why doesn't God write “Jesus Saves” on the moon or “Made by God” on each cell?*

After carefully examining the evidence, however, I became convinced that God *has* made himself known (Rom. 1:18–21; 2:14, 15). Consider a few prominent arguments for the existence of God:

- *The Cosmological Argument*: Both scientific and philosophical reasons help us conclude that the universe, at some point, had a beginning. Given that something can't begin to exist without a cause, the cause must be *outside* the universe. Since matter, time, and energy simultaneously came into existence at a finite point in the past, the cause is plausibly timeless, immaterial, intelligent, powerful, and personal. Simply put, *the beginning of the universe points to a Beginner*.
- *The Fine-Tuning of the Laws of Physics*: The laws of physics that govern the universe are exquisitely fine-tuned for the emergence and sustenance of human life. The slightest changes in any number of physical constants would make our universe inhospitable. The most compelling and reliable explanation for why the universe is so precisely fine-tuned is that an Intelligent Mind made it that way. Simply put, *the fine-tuning of the universe points to a Fine-Tuner*.
- *The Design Argument from DNA*: Massive amounts of genetic information orchestrate cellular organization and

the development of living creatures, but natural forces cannot explain the origin of information (such as DNA). Yet every day we attribute the origins of information to minds. Simply put, then, *the vast amount of information contained in living organisms points to an Information Giver.*

- *The Moral Argument:* This argument reasons that since objective moral values exist, so must God. If God does not exist, then moral values are ultimately subjective and nonbinding. Yet we know objective moral values are real. Therefore, since moral values do exist, God must as well. Simply put, *the existence of moral values points to a universal Moral Lawgiver.*

Much more could be said—entire chapters and books, in fact! Ongoing debates about these arguments continue both inside and outside of academia. But after considering the scientific evidence for God, and in particular from DNA, skeptic-turned-believer Lee Strobel concluded, “The conclusion was compelling, an intelligent entity has quite literally spelled out the evidence of his existence through the four chemical letters in the genetic code. It’s almost as if the Creator autographed every cell.” (Strobel, CC, 244) We could not agree more. While God has not provided exhaustive knowledge of his existence, he has given *sufficient* knowledge for those with an open heart and mind.

But God is interested in much more than simply convincing us of his existence. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland explain:

Unsatisfied with the evidence we have, some atheists have argued that God, if he existed, would have prevented the world’s unbelief by making his existence starkly apparent (say, by

inscribing the label “made by God” on every atom or planting a neon cross in the heavens with the message “Jesus saves”). But why should God want to do such a thing? As Paul Moser has emphasized, on the Christian view it is actually a matter of relative indifference to God whether people believe that he exists or not. For what God is interested in is building a love relationship with us, not just getting us to believe that he exists. Even the demons believe that God exists—and tremble, for they have no saving relationship with him (James 2:19). Of course, in order to believe *in* God, we must believe *that* God exists. But there is no reason at all to think that if God were to make his existence more manifest, more people would come into a saving relationship with him. Mere showmanship will not bring a change of heart (Lk 16:30–31). It is interesting that, as the Bible describes the history of God’s dealing with mankind, there has been a progressive interiorization of this interaction with an increasing emphasis on the Spirit’s witness to our inner selves (Rom 8:16–17). In the Old Testament God is described as revealing himself to his people in manifest wonders: the plagues upon Egypt, the pillar of fire and smoke, and parting of the Red Sea. But did such wonders produce lasting heart-change in the people? No, Israel fell into apostasy with tiresome repetitiveness. If God were to inscribe his name on every atom or place a neon cross in the sky, people might believe that he exists; but what confidence could we have that after time they would not begin to chafe under the brazen advertisements of their Creator and even come to resent such effrontery? In fact, we have no way of knowing that in a world of free creatures in which God’s existence is as obvious as the nose on your face that more people would come to love him and know his salvation than in the actual world. But then the claim that if God existed he would make

his existence more evident has little or no warrant, thereby undermining the claim that the absence of such evidence is itself positive evidence that God does not exist. (Craig and Moreland, PFCW, 157–158)

If you find the evidence still wanting, perhaps consider whether you hold to non-evidential reasons for your nonbelief. Belief and unbelief often have more to do with psychology than rational argumentation. If you have a broken relationship with your father, for instance, you may find it difficult to believe in a loving, personal heavenly Father. This was certainly true for me (Josh). In fact, the idea of God as a “father” repulsed me, since my own father was an abusive alcoholic. Given the failure of my earthly father, I certainly didn’t need a cosmic father telling me how to use my time, spend my money, or live my life. I didn’t *want* to believe in God because it would mean radically reorienting my entire life.

Psychologist Paul Vitz has studied some of the great atheists of the past, such as Bertrand Russell, Jean Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, Camus, and Nietzsche. Remarkably, he found the vast majority had either a dead, distant, or disappointing father. He concludes, “If our own father is absent or weak or abandons us, even by dying, or is so untrustworthy as to desert us, or is so terrible as to abuse and to deceive us in various ways, it’s not hard to put the same attributes on our heavenly Father and reject God.” (Vitz, PA, 150)

### **Misconception #8: “Being a good person is enough to get to heaven.”**

Some time ago, I (Sean) had an in-depth discussion with a college student about the morality of hell. Even though I provided every philosophical and theological justification I could muster, he simply couldn’t accept that

a loving and just God would send anyone to hell. After about an hour of conversation, it finally dawned on me. His primary problem was that he believed in the essential goodness of mankind. From his perspective, hell seemed like total overkill for basically good people who commit a few small indiscretions.

In one sense, he’s right. If hell were the consequence for small missteps, it would seem remarkably unjust. C. S. Lewis has rightly observed, “When we *say* that we are bad, the ‘wrath’ of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we *perceive* our badness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God’s goodness.” (Lewis, PP, 52)

The Bible has a very stark view of human nature. While human beings are the most valuable creation of a loving God, we have utterly rebelled against our Creator. We are deeply affected by sin. Theologian Wayne Grudem explains: “It is not just that some parts of us are sinful and others are pure. Rather, every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts (the center of our desires and decision-making processes), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies.” (Grudem, ST, 497) Thus, God doesn’t send good people to hell; there is no such thing as a good person. And that includes you and me!

King David wrote, “They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:3). The apostle Paul wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Rom. 7:18) and, “To those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled” (Titus 1:15). Jesus said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality,

envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:20–23 ESV).

This depiction of human nature can be confirmed by looking at the history of humanity. Apologist Clay Jones has spent decades studying the problem of evil. He closely examined the evil perpetrated in the twentieth century by Nazis in Germany, communists in Russia, China, and Cambodia, the Japanese in World War II, and other nations including Turkey, Pakistan, Uganda, Sudan, and the United States. After immersing himself in these human tragedies, Jones concluded:

I first began to study human evil so that no one could disqualify me for having glossed over the immense sufferings that people perpetrate on each other. I didn’t want anyone to say that I had gotten God out of the problem of evil the easy way: by making evil seem less serious than it really is. But as I read about one sickening rape or torture or murder after another, something strange happened: I was struck that evil *is* human. I realized that heinous evils weren’t the doings of a few deranged individuals or even of hundreds or of thousands, but were done by humankind *en masse*. I studied continent after continent, country after country, torture after torture, murder after murder and was staggered to discover that I hadn’t taken Scripture seriously enough: humankind *is* desperately wicked. (Jones, CDTH, 1)

Human fallenness makes the gospel powerful: we can only appreciate the extent of the work of Christ when we understand the evil and corruption we and the world truly contain. This does not mean unbelievers cannot do some good in society—of course they can! However, sin has separated us so deeply from God that we have no power to save ourselves apart from God’s grace (Eph. 2:1, 2). Paul

makes it clear that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). And this “falling short” is not merely a matter of our actions, but primarily a matter of the heart (1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:21–30).

This is why Jesus came. Although Jesus was (and is) fully God, he humbled himself to take on human flesh (Phil. 2:5–7) and experience the death that humans deserve. As a result, we can experience forgiveness for our sins and come to know God personally (John 17:1–5). Jesus explains:

*For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*  
— John 3:16–18

So, is it enough to be a “good” person? It’s true that many people may live outwardly good lives, but for Jesus evil is a matter of the heart. According to Jesus *no one* is good (Mark 10:18). Anyone who honestly reflects upon his life, and sincerely probes his heart, knows that this is true. Our only hope is found in Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

### **Misconception #9: “A good God would prevent evil and suffering.”**

Evil and suffering become perhaps the most powerful reasons people struggle with the idea of God. Who has not at some point looked at the world and cried out, like the prophet Habakkuk, “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ and You will not save?” (Hab. 1:2).

Evil and suffering are not merely intellectual matters to be solved, but belong to our personal experience. Evil is a matter of *both* the heart and the mind. Thus, even though this is a book of evidences, we encourage you to err on the side of being gracious and kind with others—especially those who are hurting. Sometimes arguments are unhelpful. When someone is hurting, the biblical response is to hurt with him or her (Rom. 12:15). As Christians, our ultimate response must be one of love. And yet *sometimes* love requires that we be prepared to speak the truth.

My (Josh’s) father often said, “A problem well-defined is half-solved.” It helps, then, first to define what we mean by *evil*. Despite what Eastern religions claim, evil is not an illusion, but neither is it a “thing.” Rather, evil is a departure from the way things ought to be, a corruption of good. Just as rust cannot exist without iron, and a lie cannot exist without truth, so evil steals and corrupts from good. This means that there can be good without evil, but not evil without good. “That’s why we often describe evil as negations of good things,” observes apologist and speaker Frank Turek. “We say someone is *immoral, unjust, unfair, dishonest, etc.*” (Turek, SG, 117) Ironically, then, when someone raises the problem of evil, that person is assuming there is such a thing as objective good. And if there is objective good, then there must be a God.

C. S. Lewis was once an atheist who believed that evil disproved God. But upon deeper reflection, he changed his mind:

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 the universe with when I called it unjust? (Lewis, MC, 45)

The existence of evil ends up being an argument *for* God. But if God is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, wouldn’t he want to end evil? Is there a contradiction in the conception of God and the reality of evil?

While critics often claim a contradiction between God and the presence of evil, thanks to Alvin Plantinga’s *God, Freedom, and Evil* and the work of many other philosophers before Plantinga, professional philosophers widely regard the existence of God as not being incompatible with evil. Plantinga offers a morally sufficient reason why God may allow evil:

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can’t cause or determine them to do only what is right.

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*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 the universe with when I called it unjust?*

C. S. Lewis

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For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; and they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good. (Plantinga, GFE, 30)

According to Plantinga, God is not the creator of evil, nor is he morally culpable when humans misuse their freedom, any more than a car manufacturer is accountable when a drunk driver harms someone. Simply put, no logical incompatibility exists between God and the presence of evil in the world.

But doesn't evil make God *improbable*? Craig has noted that we need to consider *all* the background evidence for God, including the cosmological argument, various design arguments, the argument from mind, the moral argument, as well as all the historical evidence for the life, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus before we conclude that God's existence is improbable. "When we take into account the full scope of the evidence," says Craig, "the existence of God becomes quite probable. . . . Indeed, if [a person] includes the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit as part of his total warrant, then he can rightly assert that he knows that God exists, even if he has no solution to the problem of evil." (Craig, HQR, 90–91)

The atheist is ultimately silent in the face of evil. According to Richard Dawkins, here is what you can expect from the naturalistic account of reality:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no other good. Nothing but blind pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music. (Dawkins, ROE, 133)

But according to Christianity, God is not silent. God did not merely send an angel, prophet, or a book. In the incarnation of Jesus, *God gave himself*. God is not indifferent to our suffering. He took it on himself so we could experience salvation. Paul writes, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32 ESV). At the cross, evil and sin were conquered; they await final destruction at Christ's return. Evil will not have the final word.

### **Misconception #10: "Biblical teaching on sex is repressive and hateful."**

Let's face it; we live in a world saturated with sex. Our movies, music, novels, politics, and even advertisements are dominated by sex. Essentially, the celebrated view of sex in our culture is: *if it feels good, do it*. Anything that prevents someone from experiencing consensual sex in whatever fashion he or she desires is viewed as harmful and repressive. In *Letter to a Christian Nation*, influential atheist Sam Harris levels a common criticism against Christian sexual morality:

You [Christians] believe that your religious concerns about sex, in all their tiresome immensity, have something to do with morality. And yet, your efforts to constrain the sexual behavior of consenting adults—and even to discourage your own sons and daughters from having premarital sex—are almost never geared toward the relief of human suffering. In fact, relieving suffering seems to rank rather low on your list of priorities. Your principal concern appears to be that the creator of the universe will take offense at something people do while naked. (Harris, LCN, 25–26)

Many young Christians also see the church's sexual ethic as repressive, joyless, and controlling. (Kinnaman, YLM, 149–150) So, does God hate sex?

While Christians have certainly failed at times to teach and model the biblical view of sex, it is false to assume that God hates sex. In fact, the exact opposite is true—*God created sex and said that it was good!* Proverbs 5:18–19 says to “rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (ESV). And the Song of Solomon speaks of the power and beauty of sexual intimacy. Sex, as God designed it, is a wonderful thing. He designed it for four reasons: procreation, unity, recreation, and to glorify himself.

1. *Procreation.* Even though children don't always result, sex is a baby-making act by its very nature. In Genesis 1:28, God says, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (ESV). It's worth noting that this is actually a *command* from God (it is also a blessing). Few complain about this command!
2. *Unity.* One of the most powerful aspects of sex is its ability to bond people together.

Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (ESV). In the act of sex, two people become fully united. Sex is not merely a physical act; it involves an emotional, relational, spiritual, and even transcendent connection.

3. *Recreation.* So many people think God is a cosmic killjoy when it comes to sex. But they fail to realize that God created sex to be pleasurable in the first place. God could easily have made sex boring and tedious—a mere duty, like taking out the trash or changing the oil in our car. Or he could have made humans reproduce asexually. But he made sex one of the most exhilarating of all human experiences.
4. *Glorify God.* We are to glorify God in everything we do. The apostle Paul says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31 ESV). When done with true love for another, in accord with God-ordained principles and boundaries, sex brings God glory.

Does God's view of sex really bring harm to people? Let us ask some simple questions: What would the world be like if everyone followed the biblical plan for sex, engaging in sexual activity in a committed, lifelong relationship with someone of the opposite sex? Would there be more suffering as Harris suggests? Or would there be less? Would we have more intact marriages, or more broken homes? Would there be more fatherless homes, or more involved fathers? Would STDs, teen pregnancies, and abortions increase or decrease?

Despite the cultural narrative that biblical guidelines bring repression and harm, medical doctors Joe McIlhaney and Freda

McKissic Bush conclude, “It appears that the most up-to-date research suggests that most humans are ‘designed’ to be sexually monogamous with one mate for life. This information also shows that the further individuals deviate from this behavior, the more problems they encounter, be they STDs, non-marital pregnancy, or emotional problems, including damaged ability to develop healthy connectedness with others, including future spouses.” (McIlhaney and Bush, H, 129)

God doesn’t hate sex. He gave it as a blessing and designed it for human flourishing. And he lovingly gave us boundaries to protect and provide for us.

## V. Why Apologetics Has a Bad Name

According to Guinness, we live in a “grand age of apologetics.” He says that “our age is quite simply the greatest opportunity for Christian witness since the time of Jesus and the apostles, and our response should be to seize the opportunity with bold and imaginative enterprise.” (Guinness, FT, 16) Nevertheless, apologetics has often become about arguing with people rather than about truly, creatively, gently, lovingly persuading people. Thus, according to Guinness, our urgent need today “is to reunite evangelism and apologetics, to make sure that our best arguments are directed toward winning people and not just winning arguments, and to seek to do all this in a manner that is true to the gospel itself.” (FT, 18)

We entirely agree. The church desperately needs an apologetics revolution that is tied to evangelism. And yet even though this need is urgent, many continue to disparage apologetics. Some criticisms come from a lack of understanding the nature, role, and importance of apologetics. Others lie at the hands of apologists themselves.

There are at least five reasons apologetics often has a bad name (adapted from S. McDowell, WAHBN):

1. *Apologists Often Overstate Their Case:* There is a huge temptation to overstate the evidence for the Bible, Intelligent Design, the resurrection of Jesus, or any other apologetics issue. We have each succumbed to this at different times. Our eagerness to convince nonbelievers, or our desire to strengthen fellow Christians, contributes to our falling prey to the temptation to state things more certainly than they are. This does not mean the evidence for Christianity is not compelling. It is. But there are smart, thoughtful people who disagree. We must acknowledge this, or we’ll set up people—especially young people—for disappointment and failure.
2. *Apologists Often Do Not Speak with Gentleness, Respect, and Love:* A few years ago I (Sean) had a public debate on the question of God and morality. As part of my preparation, I watched many debates on the subject. Although I won’t mention any names, a handful of Christian debaters honestly made me cringe at how they treated their opponents. One debater demeaned and personally attacked his opponent, a former Christian. We probably all have an example of some overly eager apologist who was unnecessarily argumentative rather than loving. I (Josh) have had more than 250 debates on college campuses. While I aim to win arguments, my bigger goal is to win the audience. I must show genuine love, then, toward my opponent, even while I critique his case. Of course, we must not shy away from speaking truth—but we must do it in love.
3. *Apologists Often Are Not Emotionally Healthy:* Youth expert Mark Matlock

wrote a compelling essay about apologetics and emotional development. (Matlock, AED) In it, he argues that apologetics often attracts emotionally hurt people who in turn use apologetics to hurt others. He's absolutely right. As the saying famously goes, "Hurt people hurt people." There is power in knowledge. And by gaining information, many seek the power to control and even humiliate other people. So we ask you to consider: Why (honestly) are you reading this book? Are you looking for "ammo"? Is your heart genuinely broken for non-Christians? Are you really seeking truth? Do you pray for humility and guidance in your research and conversations with both Christians and non-Christians?

4. *Apologetics Often Is Done in a Cold, Mechanical, and Rationalistic Manner:* Many think of Christian apologetics as something like the Vulcans of Star Trek, who live solely by reason—void of emotion, without passion or relationship, or even good, old-fashioned storytelling. Apologetics is often seen as a narrow discipline for lawyers and doctors. But apologetics should not be done this way. It ought to engage the mind *through the heart, imagination, and emotions*. C. S. Lewis beautifully modeled this approach with his use of fiction. I (Josh) have spoken at more than 1,200 universities worldwide. Whenever I speak on an apologetics subject, I always tell my personal story of how God transformed me from a background of hurt, anger, and abuse. People need to see the truth of Christianity, but just as importantly, they need to see how that truth can personally change their lives.
5. *Apologetics Often Are Intellectually Elitist:* If you are reading this book to acquire some big words such as *evidential*,

*ontological*, or *bibliographical* to impress your friends, then you probably need to get a different book. Precision and clarity, while important, especially for apologists and philosophers, are not meant to make you sound smart—but for you genuinely to help people. When I (Josh) began speaking on college campuses in the 1960s, Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, told me to remember K-I-S-S, which stands for "Keep It Simple, Stupid." Sometimes the "big" words apologists use detract from our effectiveness. In fact, even the word "apologetics" is unfamiliar and off-putting to many people. So while we ought to use precise words—to communicate truth clearly—let's try to focus on communicating *effectively*.

There are probably some more reasons why apologetics has a bad name in certain circles. But before we go any further, please allow us to ask you some tough questions: *Do you overstate your case? Do you speak with gentleness and love? Are you emotionally healthy? Are you coldly rational in your apologetics? Do you use sophisticated words when simple ones will do?*

For the sake of the church and wider culture, we ought to do apologetics and evangelism in the way that Jesus did—with both grace and truth.

## VI. Being a Relational Apologist

The world has changed since *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* was first published in 1972. There were few popular apologetics books at that time. The kind of information you'll find in this book simply was not available to the masses, so Christians and non-Christians were often unaware of the evidence for Christianity. Today, however,

we have the opposite problem. If anything, we have an overload of information. People have to determine which information is important and which information they can trust. The vast amount of information means that someone looking for something to question the truth of Christianity can always find it.

People often ask us for the “silver bullet” argument that proves Christianity. But *there’s not any argument that can force anyone to believe*. Philosopher Michael J. Murray says it well:

There are no arguments for the truth of Christianity which force the atheist or non-Christian to their intellectual knees. . . . We can’t sledgehammer unbelievers into belief. At best, we can show them how the beliefs that they hold, or that they ought to hold, lead to or support the Christian view. They can continue to backtrack and readjust to avoid these conclusions. And so the best we can hope for is to show them that their worldview . . . becomes so ungainly and cumbersome in accounting for things, that it is more reasonable to give a different intellectual accounting of the world. (Murray, RH, 13–14)

So, how should Christians engage their neighbors? We commend to you four points (adapted from S. McDowell, NKA):

1. *An Apologist Must Be Gentle and Humble.* Jesus was the first Christian apologist. In John 5–8, Jesus reasoned with the religious leaders of his day, providing multiple lines of evidence that he is the Son of God. And yet, even though he is divine, Jesus willingly humbled himself for the sake of loving others (Phil. 2:5–7). We can do no less. Philosopher Dallas Willard observed,
 

Like Jesus, we are reaching out in love in a humble spirit with no coercion. The only way to accomplish that is to present our defense gently, as help offered in love in the manner of Jesus. But that is not all. The means of our communication needs to be gentle, because gentleness also characterizes the subject of our communication. What we are seeking to defend or explain is Jesus himself, who is a gentle, loving shepherd. If we are not gentle in how we present the good news, how will people encounter the gentle and loving Messiah we want to point to? (Willard, AG, 4)
2. *An Apologist Must Be Relational.* While labels can sometimes be helpful, depersonalizing people, by putting them into various boxes, can cause harm. If our labels cause us to ignore the unique personhood of *every* individual, we need to reexamine how we use them. We work hard to have genuine relationships with people who are atheists, Mormons, agnostics, and others who hold a variety of worldviews. Our goal is not simply to convert them, but to value them as human beings. Apologetics is not an abstract discipline, then, but an explanation offered to help people we deeply care about. If you are going to be an effective apologist today, you must build relationships with people of varying faiths, so you can speak from a heart of genuine care.
3. *An Apologist Must Be Studious.* Apologists must do their homework. We must know what we are talking about and do thorough research to back up our claims. We must critically examine our arguments and understand both sides of every issue. We encourage you to read for yourself the scholarly sources we cite. And read critical reviews of this book. Study both

sides and talk about your findings with fellow Christians and non-Christians. Apologists must do the hard work of learning a discipline and presenting the truth fairly and accurately.

4. *An Apologist Must Be a Practitioner.* Authenticity is highly prized among young people today. They want to know not only if we can make a good argument, but also whether our lives reflect the truth we proclaim. If our lives don't reflect our truth claims, what we say will fall on deaf ears. If you claim to believe in the deity of Jesus, is he really Lord in your life? If you believe in the resurrection, does it shape how you face death? How does your belief in the truth of the Bible really shape how you treat people? We must actively live the truth we proclaim.

## VII. A Clear Presentation of the Gospel Is the Best Offense

### My Personal Experience

For my (Josh's) philosophical apologetics course in graduate school, everyone had to write a paper on "The Best Defense of Christianity." I found myself constantly putting it off and avoided writing it, not because I didn't have the material but because I felt I was at odds with what the professor was expecting (an expectation based on the ream of my lecture notes from his class).

Finally I decided to voice my convictions. I began my paper with the sentence, "Some people say the best offense is a good defense, but I say to you that the best defense is a good offense." I proceeded by explaining that I felt the best defense of Christianity is a "clear, simple presentation of the claims of Christ and who he is, in the power of the Holy Spirit." I then wrote out "The Four Spiritual Laws" and recorded my testimony of how, on

December 19, 1959, at 8:30 p.m., during my second year at university, I placed my trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. I concluded the paper with a presentation of the evidence for the resurrection.

The professor must have agreed with my approach that the best defense of Christianity is a clear and compelling presentation of the gospel, for he gave me an A. William Tyndale was right in saying that "a ploughboy with the Bible would know more of God than the most learned ecclesiastic who ignored it." In other words, an Arkansas farm boy sharing the gospel can be more effective in the long run than a Harvard scholar with his intellectual arguments.

One precaution when using apologetics: God saves—apologetics does not. On the other hand, God often uses apologetics, or evidences, to help clear away obstacles to faith that many people erect, and also to show that faith in Christ is reasonable. The great Princeton theologian and apologist Benjamin Warfield declared:

It certainly is not in the power of all the demonstrations in the world to make a Christian. Paul may plant and Apollos water; it is God alone who gives the increase. . . . [I]t does not in the least follow that the faith that God gives is an irrational faith, that is, a faith without grounds in right reason. . . . We believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in him, not though it be irrational. . . . We are not absurdly arguing that apologetics has in itself the power to make a man a Christian or to conquer the world to Christ. Only the Spirit of Life can communicate life to a dead soul, or can convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. But we are arguing that faith is, in all its exercises alike, a form of conviction, and is, therefore, necessarily grounded in evidence. (Warfield, IN, 24–25)

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**Benjamin Warfield**

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### **A Former French Atheist Becomes a Christian**

Guillaume Bignon is a former French atheist who now considers himself a Christian philosopher and apologist. His story shows the importance of apologetics, but also of relationships, patience, and clearly presenting the gospel. In an interview for my blog, I (Sean) asked Guillaume what advice he has for Christians to share their faith with non-Christians. His answer is revealing:

*Never assume that your hearer knows the Gospel. Between my French family and friends, and my work on Wall Street, I meet tons of people, grown ups, who have a surface level understanding of religions, but are absolutely clueless about what the Bible teaches in answer to the question “what must a sinner do to be saved?”*

Somehow, I myself lived through age 25 without ever having heard that the Bible teaches sinners are saved by faith and not by works. I was stunned, and it took me a while to even process it: Heaven is for free? Given as a gift to those who would just repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus? Amazing. So here is my tip: early on in your conversations, make sure you say something like this: “Let’s set aside the arguments and reasons to think it’s true. I’m not yet trying to convince you that it’s a correct teaching. But let me explain to you briefly what Christianity *teaches*, what

the Christian view *is*.” Go on to tell them the Gospel (of course you need to be able to do just that, so prepare yourself to explain it clearly and Biblically).

I have done this over and over again, and have surprised more than a few listeners. And how do I know they get it? Because, without fail, the first thing out of their mouth is Paul’s very anticipated objection straight out of Romans: “If salvation is by faith, why not go on sinning?” Answer that too, but rest assured that *now* they get it; they get just how shocking the Gospel is, and you’re prepared to discuss its merits. (Interview in McDowell, FFABC)

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Although much more could be said, it is time to get to the evidence. We have studied the nature of apologetics, considered reasons why people often dismiss apologetics, examined why apologetics matters today, and cleared away some of the mental “fog.” Now, then, we ask, “Is there compelling evidence to show that Christianity is actually true?” We believe there is. There is significant evidence to help the reasonable person conclude that God exists and has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. We believe God wants us to know that we can know him personally. Read on to discover EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT!

# PROLOGUE: A THEISTIC UNIVERSE

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## OVERVIEW

### I. Introduction

#### II. The Role of Presuppositions

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The Nature of Presuppositions

#### III. Naturalism

Defining Naturalism

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Science vs. Metaphysical Naturalism

#### IV. Evidence for Theism

The Origin of the Universe

A Fine-Tuned Universe

The Origin of Life

The Origin of Consciousness

The Existence of Free Will

The Existence of Morality

#### V. Conclusion

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## I. Introduction

In the coming chapters, we will consider evidence for matters such as the reliability of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and the historical resurrection of Jesus, revealing strong historical evidence that confirms the Christian worldview. If we have the authentic words of Jesus claiming to be God, evidence that he genuinely performed miracles, and confirmation that Jesus resurrected from the grave, then Christianity is undeniably true.

But there is another way to approach our task. Rather than beginning with the historical data, we can evaluate the scientific and philosophical evidence of whether we live in a theistic or atheistic universe, and then

consider what this means for the probability of the Christian worldview. If we live in an atheistic universe, then Christianity is certainly false. But if we live in a theistic universe, or if we at least have good reason to believe we do, then Christian claims become more probable. The late deist philosopher Antony Flew (who was formerly an atheist) said, “Certainly given some beliefs about God, the occurrence of the resurrection does become enormously more likely.” (Habermas and Flew, DJRD, 39)

In our experience of study and dialogue with so many people who seek answers to the great questions about life’s meaning—and in particular, whether they can believe in God or Christianity—we have found that resistance to the miracle claims of Jesus does not

arise primarily from problems with the evidence, but from the worldview lurking *behind* consideration of the evidence—naturalism. Professor and apologist David Baggett notes:

The presumed adequacy of naturalism is a huge driving force in the minds of those rigidly skeptical of all miracle claims. It's not necessarily an irrational position to hold; there are very intelligent atheists out there whose secular presuppositions radically differ from my own, but who strike me as fair-minded and intellectually honest. If they hold what they sincerely consider to be very principled reasons for supreme confidence in naturalism to provide all the explanations we need, it's, well, natural for them to put up great resistance against miraculous claims, or even claims likely to point in that direction.

To my thinking, naturalism encounters some severe difficulties. It's challenged in explaining seemingly answered prayers and documented cases of evidentially significant near-death experiences. It fares poorly in accounting for qualia [interior awareness], consciousness, the emergence of life and the start of the universe. It lacks resources in accounting for human reason itself—if we're complicated organic machines whose every choice is caused by antecedent conditions and the physical laws of the world. I think naturalism is especially vulnerable when it comes to accounting for such realities as moral regret, moral obligations, moral rights and moral freedom, all of which makes considerably more sense from a theistic viewpoint. Naturalism certainly doesn't deserve the sort of unbridled allegiance and undying devotion that some would give it, and it certainly doesn't qualify to be what sets the terms for surrender in this debate. (Baggett, DRH, 137–138)

Needless to say, one's prior commitment to naturalism (or some other non-Christian

worldview) will powerfully influence how one evaluates the evidence for the historical Jesus. Yet if we have reason to doubt naturalism, then the case for Christianity becomes more probable. New Testament scholar and philosopher of religion Gary Habermas explains,

If it can be successfully argued that naturalism is insufficient as an explanation of the universe and that an explanation like theism, which incorporates an external intelligent source, is plausible, then it may also be rational to believe that the resurrection of Jesus was an act performed in accordance with God's attributes and will. If this is a theistic universe, then we might require even less direct evidence to affirm God's intervention in this or other historical occurrences, since miracles might follow, due to what we would know concerning the nature of the universe. (Habermas, RJFH, 53)

In this prologue, we have three goals: (1) explain the role and nature of presuppositions, (2) define naturalism, and (3) highlight six lines of evidence that undermine naturalism and point positively towards theism. Our goal in this chapter is not to *prove* the existence of God, but to show that theism is a reasonable position. In fact, we believe that, when properly understood, the universe reveals evidence of an Intelligent Mind. Naturalism simply fails to account for certain features of the universe, which by comparison, are at home in a theistic worldview. And as a result, as Flew observed, "the occurrence of the resurrection does become enormously more likely."

## II. The Role of Presuppositions

This section discusses the definition of *presupposition*, followed by a short list of synonymous terms, and concludes with the nature of presuppositions.

### A. A Definition of *Presupposition*

A *presupposition* is something assumed or supposed in advance. Generally, a presupposition is a basic belief—a belief that one holds as self-evident and not requiring proof for its validity. A presupposition is something that is assumed to be true and is taken for granted. Synonyms include: prejudgment, assumption of something as true, prejudice, forejudgment, preconceived opinion, fixed conclusion, preconceived notion, and premature conclusion.

### B. The Nature of Presuppositions

Presuppositions serve as the glue that holds arguments together. Philosopher John Frame identifies presuppositions with *a priori* knowledge:

*A priori* knowledge is knowledge possessed independent of experience—that knowledge which we bring to our experience in order to analyze and evaluate it. Some philosophers have tried to make the case that all our knowledge is *a posteriori*—that the mind begins as a “blank slate” (Locke) to be written out by experience. But we know some things that do not seem to be derived from experience. For example, the proposition that two times two is four—necessarily and everywhere in the universe—does not seem to be derivable from any experience. The term *presupposition* . . . captures much of the meaning that philosophers have sought to include under the label *a priori*. (Frame, CVT, 132–33)

Philosophers and apologists Steven Cowan and James Spiegel assert that,

All truth claims which are assumed without argument are called *presuppositions*. While we could argue for each of our presuppositions . . . , every argument we used would

itself make several presuppositions. In turn, we could provide arguments for those presuppositions, and so on. However, this process cannot go on forever. This shows that one cannot avoid having presuppositions. (Cowan and Spiegel, LW, 6)

No discipline operates without presuppositions guiding its study and investigation—even science, which some perceive as objective and bias-free; that is, everyone has a worldview—and worldviews inform both how we understand the world and how we answer life’s ultimate questions. The beliefs comprising our worldview are intricately connected; some are basic, requiring no proof, and these are our presuppositions. Other beliefs are directly informed by presuppositions, supporting other beliefs. Every belief, then, connects to and ultimately finds its root in one or more of our presuppositions.

So we must identify our presuppositions and understand why we affirm these presuppositions as opposed to others, and we must ask whether our presuppositions are reasonable and true. After all, not everyone’s presuppositions are valid; one may hold as basic a false belief. We might question beliefs due to faulty presuppositions, or note that even good presuppositions do not necessarily give rise to beliefs that are true.

Before analyzing the presuppositions of naturalism, the term *naturalism* must first be clearly defined.

## III. Naturalism

The worldview of naturalism has a long and storied past. Ancient Greek philosophy—the seedbed of modern Western philosophy—witnessed influential thinkers who operated from a naturalistic perspective. Thinkers such as Democritus and Epicurus still wield

significant influence for those who attempt to construct a view of the world devoid of the supernatural. Relative to its long history, however, naturalism's role as a formidable challenge to Christianity is fairly recent. As the Enlightenment emphasized human reason over divine revelation, philosophers, theologians, and scientists increasingly appealed to naturalism as a more satisfactory and sufficient explanation of the universe.

These historical and philosophical movements resulted in naturalism's omnipresence throughout Western culture. We see it whenever clergy or professors of religion explain the miracles of Jesus as "crowd psychology." We hear it whenever a PBS nature program credits nature for some remarkable wonder like the march of the penguins, rather than God. We see it when psychologists, ignoring that we are fallen beings created in the image of God, claim that we lie or cheat on our spouses because our supposed cave ancestors transmitted lying or cheating "genes" to us.

### A. Defining Naturalism

*Naturalism* is a nuanced term, and many use it ambiguously, referring both to how we practice science and how we use it as a worldview. Such ambiguity might give the impression that the scientific endeavor itself is at odds with faith. That idea assumes that science is atheistic in its methodology and resulting knowledge. The Christian, however, need not conflate the scientific endeavor with naturalism as a worldview. As we saw in the introduction

in the beginning of this book, the scientific revolution emerged in a culture shaped by a Christian worldview. And, in fact, some of the greatest scientific pioneers believed that design could be detected throughout nature. Philosopher Stephen Meyer explains,

As I studied the history of science, I soon discovered, however, that many of these scientists did not just assume or assert by faith that the universe had been designed; they also argued for their hypothesis based on discoveries in their disciplines. Johannes Kepler perceived intelligent design in the mathematical precision of planetary motion and the three laws he discovered that describe that motion. Other scientists perceived design in many of the structures or features of the natural world upon which the laws of nature operated. Louis Agassiz, the leading American naturalist of the nineteenth century, for whom Agassiz Chair is named at Harvard, believed that the patterns of appearance in the fossil record pointed unmistakably to design. Carl Linnaeus argued for design based upon the ease with which plants and animals fell into an orderly groups-within-groups system of classification. Robert Boyle insisted that the intricate clocklike regularity of many physical mechanisms suggested the activity of "a most intelligent and designing agent." Newton, in particular, was noteworthy in this regard . . . he made specific design arguments based upon discoveries in physics, biology, and astronomy. (Meyer, SC, 145)

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**Stephen Meyer**

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## B. Metaphysical Naturalism

Philosophers and apologists J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig provide a helpful definition of metaphysical naturalism:

The term *naturalism* has many different meanings, but a standard use of the term defines it as the view that the [material] universe alone exists. Since most current forms of naturalism are physicalist in flavor, naturalism has come to mean that reality is exhausted by the spatio-temporal world of physical objects accessible in some way to the senses and embraced by our best scientific theories. (Moreland and Craig, PFCW, 184)

By the “universe,” Moreland and Craig mean physical objects that are in some way accessible to the senses and scientific investigation. Thus, the universe includes individual things like rocks, atoms, rivers, flashes of lightning, and processes like osmosis.

Physicist Stephen Barr says that naturalism is the view that “nothing exists except matter, and that everything in the world must therefore be the result of the strict mathematical laws of physics and blind chance.” (Barr, MPAF, 1)

Three important conclusions follow from metaphysical naturalism:

1. *No immaterial entities exist, such as souls, morals, purposes, minds, angels, and God.* Since these objects are not physical, the consistent naturalist concludes that they do not exist.
2. *Scientific investigation becomes the primary (or sole) means of gaining knowledge about the world.* According to philosopher John Cowburn, *scientism* is the view that “only scientific knowledge is valid . . . that science can explain and do everything and that nothing else can explain or do

anything: it is the belief that science and reason, or scientific and rational, are co-extensive terms.” (Cowburn, *Scientism*, 14)

3. *Naturalism shapes how people live.* Philosopher Alvin Plantinga explains,

It [naturalism] isn’t clearly a religion: the term “religion” is vague, and naturalism falls into the vague area of its application. Still, naturalism plays many of the same roles as a religion. In particular, it gives answers to the great human questions: Is there such a person as God? How should we live? Can we look forward to life after death? What is our place in the universe? How are we related to other creatures? Naturalism gives answers here: there is no God, and it makes no sense to hope for life after death. As to our place in the grand scheme of things, we human beings are just another animal with a peculiar way of making a living. Naturalism isn’t clearly a religion; but since it plays some of the same roles as a religion, we could properly call it a *quasi*-religion. (Plantinga, WCRL, ix–x)

## C. Science vs. Metaphysical Naturalism

Metaphysical naturalism in Western culture has posed a significant challenge to Christianity. Because of its appeal to science, both Christians and non-Christians alike have often conflated the discipline of science with metaphysical naturalism. As a result, many well-meaning Christians have unnecessarily viewed science as hostile to the Christian faith. For such believers, science and the Christian faith are diametrically opposed to each other.

If viewed properly, however—that is, if science is held distinct from the worldview of metaphysical naturalism—then science can be of significant service to Christianity, explaining the many wonders of God’s

creation, demonstrating the orderliness of the universe, and confirming the truth of Scripture. On the other hand, metaphysical naturalism is directly opposed to Christianity because it denies the existence of the supernatural.

As a worldview, metaphysical naturalism fails to make sense of certain features of the universe. In the next section, we consider six characteristics of the world that resist a naturalistic explanation but which fit seamlessly within theism: the origin of the universe; the fine-tuning of the universe; the origin of life; consciousness; free will; and morality. We will see that these six features of the world provide good reason to believe we live in a theistic universe.

## IV. Evidence for Theism

### A. The Origin of the Universe

Up until the twentieth century, we had no scientific means to judge whether the universe was eternal or had a beginning. Atheists claimed the universe alone was eternal, which would have meant it was largely static and uniform. Theists countered that God is the ultimate cause of the world and that he alone is infinite and eternal. But this began to change in the early part of the twentieth century—when Einstein developed his general theory of relativity. Einstein's equations suggested that the universe was not static, but that it was either expanding or contracting. An expanding universe (measured by Hubble in 1929) coupled with general relativity strongly implies that the universe began to exist at some point in the past. After Einstein, others have discovered additional, powerful evidence that the universe had a beginning.

This has brought newfound support for an argument known as the *kalam* cosmological argument, popularized today by philosopher

William Lane Craig (see Craig and Sinclair, *KCA*, 101–201). It has three premises:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Craig has ably defended each of these premises. As for the first premise, Craig says,

First and foremost, it's rooted in the metaphysical intuition that something cannot come into being from nothing. To suggest that things could just pop into being uncaused out of nothing is to quit doing serious metaphysics and to resort to magic. Second, if things really could come into being uncaused out of nothing, then it becomes inexplicable why just anything and everything do not come into existence uncaused from nothing. Finally, the first premise is constantly confirmed in our experience (Craig, *RF*, 111–112).

Critics of this argument often respond to the first premise by asking, "What caused God?" (see Dennett, *BS*, 242) But this misconstrues the argument. The first premise does not say that everything needs a cause, but *whatever begins to exist* has a cause. Since God did not begin to exist, he does not need a cause. This criticism also commits the category fallacy, in which things from one category are incorrectly applied to another. For instance, it would be a category mistake to ask, "What does the color red smell like?" or "How much does the musical note 'C' weigh?" Colors and smells, as well as musical notes and weight, are different categories. Similarly, it is a mistake to ask, "What caused God?" because, by definition, God is *uncaused*. God could not be caused and still be God. Asking what caused God is essentially asking a nonsense question,

namely, “What caused the uncaused Creator of the universe?”

Additionally, even critics recognize that the universe beginning to exist requires something uncaused. While denying a personal, loving God, they usually argue that the “laws of physics” just exist, and given the laws of physics, the universe inevitably pops into existence. (Hawking and Mlodinow, *GD*, 142)

As for the second premise, Craig offers both philosophical and scientific arguments. As to scientific arguments, he points to the evidence from the second law of thermodynamics, the success of the Standard Cosmological Model (which implies an expanding universe), and the failure of other cosmological models such as the Steady State Theory and Oscillating Models. Even Vacuum Fluctuation Models, String Scenarios, and Multiverse Models don’t avoid a beginning. However, a final answer to the question will require the right Quantum Gravity Model. He concludes, “The history of twentieth century cosmogony has, in one sense, been a series of failed attempts to craft acceptable non-standard models of the expanding universe in such a way as to avert the absolute beginning predicted by the Standard Model.” (Craig, *RF*, 139)

As for the philosophical support of the second premise, Jonathan Morrow and I (Sean) put one of the arguments this way:

Imagine you went for a walk in the park and stumbled across someone proclaiming aloud, “. . . five, four, three, two, one—there, I finally finished! I just counted down from infinity!” What would be your initial thought? Would you wonder how long the person had been counting? Probably not. More likely, you would be in utter disbelief. Why? Because you know that such a task cannot be done. Just as it’s impossible to count up to infinity from

the present moment, it’s equally impossible to count down from . . . infinity to the present moment. Counting to infinity is impossible because there is always (at least) one more number to count. In fact, every time you count a number, you still have infinite more to go, and thus get no closer to your goal. Similarly, counting down from infinity to the present moment is equally impossible. Such a task can’t even get started! Any point you pick in the past to begin, no matter how remote, would always require (at least) one more number to count before you could start there. Any beginning point would require an infinite number of previous points. Here’s the bottom line: we could never get to the present moment if we had to cross an actual infinite number of moments in the past. Yet, since the present moment is real, it must have been preceded by a finite past that includes a beginning or first event. Therefore, the universe had a beginning. (McDowell and Morrow, *IGJHI*, 75–76)

The reality that the universe had a beginning brings us to the question of cause, the third premise. Flew puts this finding into perspective:

When I first met the big-bang theory as an atheist, it seemed to me the theory made a big difference because it suggested that the universe had a beginning and that the first sentence in Genesis (“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”) was related to an event in the universe. As long as the universe could be comfortably thought to be not only without end but also without beginning, it remained easy to see its existence (and its most fundamental features) as brute facts. And if there had been no reason to think the universe had a beginning, there would be no need to postulate something else that produced the whole thing. But the big-bang theory changed

all that. If the universe had a beginning, it becomes entirely sensible, almost inevitable, to ask what produced this beginning. (Flew and Varghese, TIG, 136)

Even if this argument succeeds, it still does not get us all the way to the Christian God. The *kalam* argument cannot demonstrate that the Bible is reliable, that Jesus is God, or that Christianity is true; it reveals only that the universe was made and that someone made it—in short, that metaphysical naturalism does not fully account for the universe. Further, though, the *kalam* argument helps narrow the range of possible causes to a nonphysical, spaceless, timeless, changeless, and powerful being. William Lane Craig and James Sinclair conclude:

The first premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument is obviously more plausibly true than its contradictory. Similarly, in light of both philosophical argument and scientific evidence, its second premise, although more controversial, is again more plausibly true than its negation. The conclusion of the argument involves no demonstrable incoherence and, when subjected to conceptual analysis, is rich in theological implications. On the basis of the *kalam* cosmological argument, it is therefore plausible that an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe exists, who sams the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful (Craig and Sinclair, KCA, 196).

To be sure, debates continue about the efficacy of the *kalam* cosmological argument. But the argument provides a significant challenge to naturalism and positive support that we live in a theistic universe. Philosopher and mathematician David Berlinski, a secular Jew, concludes:

The universe has *not* proceeded from everlasting to everlasting. The cosmological beginning may be obscure, but the universe is finite in time. This is something that until the twentieth century was not known. When it became known, it astonished the community of physicists—and everyone else. If nothing else, the facts of Big Bang cosmology indicate that one objection to the argument that Thomas Aquinas offered is empirically unfounded: Causes in nature do come to an end. If science has shown that God does not exist, it has not been by appealing to Big Bang cosmology. The hypothesis of God's existence and the facts of contemporary cosmology are *consistent*. (Berlinski, DD, 80, emphasis original)

## B. A Fine-Tuned Universe

One of the most remarkable scientific findings of the twentieth century is the delicate fine-tuning of the laws that govern the universe, which enable the emergence and sustenance of intelligent life. Like the scientific confirmation of the beginning of the universe, fine-tuning poses a significant challenge to naturalism.

Scientists have been struck by how precisely the laws of physics seem to be calibrated for life. “There are many such examples of the universe’s life-friendly properties,” says science and nature writer Tim Folger in *Discover* magazine, “so many, in fact, that physicists can’t dismiss them all as mere accidents” (Folger, SAIC). British astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked, “A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature.” (Hoyle, quoted in Davies, AU, 118)

Let’s consider some examples.

## 1. The Right Kind of Dimensions in Space and Time

Often, space and time are taken for granted. We live in a 3+1 universe (three large spatial dimensions + 1 time dimension), but scientists recognize that the actual number of dimensions can be fluid. They even contend that our universe contains many extremely small spatial dimensions. However, if those tiny dimensions had grown like the three large spatial ones, no life could exist. Fewer than three spatial dimensions would prohibit the complexity that life requires, but more than three would result in no stable atoms or planets. More or fewer than one time dimension would remove the predictable, reliable order to the universe that life demands. Only a 3+1 dimensional universe permits life. (Tegmark, ODS, 69–75).

## 2. The Right Kind of Space

The universe must expand at the proper rate in order for life's components (atoms, stars, planets, etc.) to form. The initial expansion rate, mass/energy density, and dark energy (also called the cosmological constant or space energy density) all affect the expansion rate. The gravitational attraction of the mass/energy density results in a slowing of the expansion. The dark energy causes the universe to expand more rapidly—and the larger the universe gets, the more the dark energy accelerates the expansion. The mass/energy density contributed the greatest influence earlier in the universe, but dark energy dominates today. The amount of dark energy measured by astronomers falls far below the value expected by scientists—by a factor of  $10^{120}$ ! Imagine dropping millions of planets into a very large pool of water. The expected result would be planet-sized waves. If the surface measured flat down to the atomic level, that would be  $10^{16}$  times

smaller than expected. Not only is the dark energy minuscule compared to its expected value, only a small range of values permit a universe with atoms, planets, and stars (Lightman, AU, 14–18).

## 3. The Fundamental Forces of Nature

Each of the four fundamental forces of nature had to be carefully fine-tuned for life: gravity, electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force, and the weak nuclear force. In particular, the ratio of the electromagnetic force to the gravitational force must be delicately balanced to one part in  $10^{40}$  (that is one part in 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000). If the ratio varied even slightly, then our universe would not have small and large stars, which are both necessary for a planet to sustain life. Large stars produced most of the elements heavier than helium. These stars burn rapidly and end with explosions that scatter the heavier elements into the galaxy for incorporation into future stars. Smaller stars (like the Sun) burn much longer, providing the stability that a life-supporting planet requires. How delicate a balance is this? Imagine covering one billion continents the size of North America with coins. Stack the coins in columns that reach to the moon. Paint one coin red and place it in one of the columns. Blindfold a friend and have her attempt to pick it out. The odds are roughly 1 in  $10^{40}$  that she will. (Ross, CC, 117)

## 4. Rare Conditions on Earth

Recent scientific discoveries confirm that Earth has extremely rare conditions that allow it to support life. The vast majority of the universe is uninhabitable. Let's briefly consider a few:

- *Life must be in the right type of galaxy.*  
Of the three types of galaxies, only

spiral galaxies with the right mass (like the Milky Way) can support life.

- *Life must be in the right location in the galaxy.* We are situated in just the right place in the Milky Way to avoid harmful radiation.
- *Life must have the right type of star.* While most stars are too large, too luminous, or too unstable to support life, our sun is just the right size and age. There is a window of time in which a sun can support complex life. It can't be too young or too old.
- *Life must have the right relationship to its host star.* If Earth were slightly closer to or farther from the sun, water would either freeze or evaporate, rendering Earth uninhabitable for complex life.
- *Life needs surrounding planets for protection.* A habitable planet must have large surrounding bodies such as Jupiter and Saturn. The early motions of Jupiter and Saturn removed most of the asteroids and comets from the solar system with two beneficial effects. First, the removal process also caused many collisions early in Earth's history. These collisions added water, ammonia and other life-essential materials to Earth. Second, the loss of comets and asteroids reduced the subsequent rate of impacts on Earth by a factor of one thousand. (Grazer, "Jupiter," 23–38)
- *Life requires the right type of moon.* If Earth did not have a moon of the right size and distance, it would be

uninhabitable. The moon stabilizes the earth's tilt, preventing extreme temperatures and thus creating a stable, life-friendly environment. (Gonzalez and Richards, PP, 23)

What happens when we try to assign a probability to the fine-tuning of *all* the known constants of nature? Theoretical physicist Lee Smolin calculates a much smaller number: the probability of a universe where stars exist. "Perhaps before going further we should ask just how probable is it that a universe created by randomly choosing the parameters will contain stars. Given what we have already said, it is simple to estimate this probability. For readers who are interested, the arithmetic is in the notes. The answer, in round numbers, comes to about one chance in  $10^{229}$ ." (Smolin, LC, 45) Stated another way, if every proton in the universe represented a universe with different laws of physics, the probability calculated by Smolin means that none of those universes would contain stars!

The evidence for design is so compelling that Paul Davies, an internationally acclaimed physicist at Arizona State University, has concluded that the biofriendly nature of our universe looks like a "fix." In other words, the universe is so uniquely calibrated to support life that it seems to go beyond the reach of coincidence. He writes, "The cliché that 'life is balanced on a knife-edge' is a staggering understatement in this case: no knife in the universe could have an edge

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*The cliché that "life is balanced on a knife-edge" is a staggering understatement in this case: no knife in the universe could have an edge that fine.*

**Paul Davies**

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that fine.” (Davies, CJ, 149) According to Davies, any legitimate scientific explanation must account for this overwhelming appearance of design.

## 5. Objections

### a. *Weak Anthropic Principle*

Some argue that since we could not exist in a universe that was not conducive to our existence (i.e., fine-tuned), we should not be surprised that the universe is fine-tuned.

Philosopher John Leslie expands on this need for explanation in his famous “firing squad” analogy. Suppose fifty trained sharpshooters are lined up to take your life, and they all miss. You could hardly dismiss this occurrence by saying, “If they hadn’t all missed me, then I shouldn’t be contemplating the matter so I mustn’t be surprised that they missed.” (Leslie, *Universes*, 108) You should still be surprised that you are alive given the enormous unlikelihood of all the sharpshooters missing their mark. Your survival demands an explanation. And so does the fine-tuning of the laws of the universe.

### b. *The Multiverse Theory*

Perhaps the most common naturalistic response to the fine-tuning argument is the so-called multiverse theory, or the many worlds hypothesis. According to this theory, there are many universes—perhaps infinite—and each operates according to unique laws and constants. While most universes would not sustain life, inevitably some would. Currently, the scientific community actively debates the validity of multiverse models. Although far from settled, there is scientific support for the existence of a multiverse. The key question remains though: does living in a multiverse undermine the case for God?

Distinguished philosopher Robin Collins provides multiple reasons for God’s existence

in the context of multiverse theory. First, we should prefer the hypothesis that naturally flows from the evidence, and for which we have independent confirmation. Collins observes, “In the case of fine-tuning, we already know that minds often produce fine-tuned devices, such as Swiss watches. Postulating God—a supermind—as the explanation of fine-tuning, therefore, is a natural extrapolation from what we already observe minds to do.” (Collins, SAEG, 61)

Second, a “many universes-generator” would seemingly need to be designed as well: “It stands to reason, therefore, that if these laws were slightly different the generator probably would not be able to produce any universes that could sustain life. After all, even my bread machine has to be made just right in order to work properly, and it only produces loaves of bread, not universes!” (Collins, SAEG, 61)

Third, the multiverse theory cannot explain other features of the universe that exhibit apparent design. Collins explains:

For example, many physicists, such as Albert Einstein, have observed that the basic laws of physics exhibit an extraordinary degree of beauty, elegance, harmony, and ingenuity. Nobel prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg, for instance, devotes a whole chapter in his book *Dreams of a Final Theory* explaining how the criteria of beauty and elegance are commonly used to guide physicists in formulating the right laws. . . . Now such beauty, elegance, and ingenuity make sense if the universe was designed by God. Under the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, however, there is no reason to expect the fundamental laws to be elegant or beautiful. (Collins, SAEG, 62–63)

Astrophysicist Jeffrey Zweerink provides a fair synopsis of the present standing of the

fine-tuning argument in light of the multiverse challenge:

Though some multiverse models appear to undermine the teleological argument, they still exhibit design and fine-tuning. Granted the design argument is more subtle and complex if a multiverse actually exists. However, as with the cosmological argument, studies of the multiverse ultimately make the teleological argument more robust. (Zweerink, WOM, 51)

### C. The Origin of Life

#### 1. The Problem of the Origin of Life

Virtually the entire scientific community agrees: the problem of life's origin is unsolved. The problem of life's beginning has become so difficult that Harvard University launched a \$100 million research program to address it (Origins of Life Initiative, Harvard University, <http://origins.harvard.edu/>). As Harvard biologist Andy Knoll said, "The short answer is we don't really know how life originated on this planet. There have been a variety of experiments that tell us some possible roads, but we remain in substantial ignorance." (Knoll, HDLB)

How deep is the problem of explaining the origin of life? Geneticist Michael Denton explains:

In *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* I wrote, "Between a living cell and the most highly ordered non-biological system . . . there is a chasm as vast and absolute as it is possible to conceive." Thirty years on, the situation is entirely unchanged. Despite a vast increase in knowledge of supramolecular chemistry and of cell and molecular biology; the unexpected discovery of ribozymes; and an enormous effort, both experimental and hypothetical, devoted to providing a gradualistic functionalist account of the origin of life in terms of a

long series of less complex functional replicating systems (e.g., the much touted "RNA world") leading from "chemistry" to the cell, no one has provided even the vaguest outlines of a feasible scenario, let alone a convincing one. A yawning gap still persists—empirical and theoretical. (Denton, ESTC, 121)

#### 2. The Sophistication of the Cell

Life's origin is so difficult to explain because life itself is so remarkably complex and sophisticated. During the time of Darwin, scientists believed life was rather simple. And thus, there would likely emerge an explanation for how it could arise naturally. But the opposite has turned out to be true. The more we learn about the cell, the greater complexity and technological prowess we discover. In fact, nearly every feature of our own advanced technology can be found in the cell.

Biologists today describe the cell using language reminiscent of engineering and computer science. They regularly use terms such as *genetic code*, *information-processing system*, and *signal transduction*. Influential atheist Richard Dawkins writes, "Apart from differences in jargon, the pages of a molecular-biology journal might be interchanged with those of a computer-engineering journal." (Dawkins, ROE, 17)

With the discovery of the structure of DNA in 1953, scientists learned that information is basic to life. The information for organizing proteins is stored in four nucleotide bases: guanine (G), adenine (A), thymine (T), and cytosine (C). These four bases function as letters of an alphabet, creating meaningful arrangements, which is why biologists regularly refer to DNA and RNA as carriers of "information." The amount of information in the human body is outright staggering.

The human body has an average of one hundred trillion cells. In a single cell, the

DNA contains the informational equivalent of roughly eight thousand books. If the DNA from one cell were uncoiled, it would extend to about three meters in length. Thus, if the DNA in an adult human were strung together, it would stretch from Earth to the sun and back roughly seventy times! (Roberts and Whorton, HQGUC, 323)

But DNA does not just store information. In combination with other cellular systems, it also processes information. Bill Gates likens DNA to a computer program, though far more advanced than any software humans have invented. (Gates, RA, 228) This is why Davies says, “Life is more than just complex chemical reactions. The cell is also an information storing, processing and replicating system. We need to explain the origin of this information, and the way in which the information processing machinery came to exist.” (quoted in Flew and Varghese, TIG, 128)

Flew, once an avowed atheist who, following the evidence, came to believe in the existence of God, clearly states the nature of the problem of the origin of life: “How can a universe of mindless matter produce beings with intrinsic ends, self-replicating capabilities, and ‘coded chemistry’?” (Flew and Varghese, TIG, 124)

### 3. Explanations for the Origin of Life

#### a. *Chance*

What are the odds that random interactions of prebiotic soup would generate a single functional protein? Based on the work of Douglas Axe, Meyer concludes:

The calculation can be made by multiplying the three independent probabilities by one another: the probability of incorporating only peptide bonds (1 in  $10^{45}$ ), the probability of incorporating only left-handed amino acids (1 in  $10^{45}$ ), and the probability of achieving correct

amino-acid sequencing (using Axe’s 1 in  $10^{74}$  estimate). Making that calculation (multiplying the separate probabilities by adding their exponents:  $10^{45+45+74}$ ) gives a dramatic answer. The odds of getting even one functional protein of modest length (150 amino acids) by chance from prebiotic soup is no better than 1 chance in  $10^{164}$ . . . . Now consider that there are only  $10^{80}$  protons, neutrons, and electrons in the observable universe. Thus, if the odds of finding a functional protein by chance on the first attempt had been 1 in  $10^{80}$ , we could have said that’s like finding a marked particle—proton, neutron, or electron (a much smaller needle)—among all the particles in the universe (a much larger haystack). Unfortunately, the problem is much worse than that. With odds standing at 1 chance in  $10^{164}$  of finding a functional protein among the possible 150-amino-acid compounds, the probability is 84 orders of magnitude (or powers of ten) *smaller* than the probability of finding the marked particle in the whole universe. Another way to say that is the probability of finding a functional protein by chance alone is a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion times smaller than the odds of finding a single specified particle among all the particles in the universe. (Meyer, SC, 212)

#### b. *Energy and Self-Organization*

Could there be some self-organizational principle that causes life to emerge through laws of nature? The general problem with this approach is that energy and self-organization can generate *order*, but there is no evidence they can generate *information*. Meyer explains,

The astrophysicist Fred Hoyle had a similar way of making the same point. He famously compared the problem of getting life to arise spontaneously from its constituent parts to the problem of getting a 747 airplane to come together from a tornado swirling through a

junk yard. An undifferentiated external force is simply too blunt an instrument to accomplish such a task. Energy might scatter parts around randomly. Energy might sweep parts into an orderly structure such as a vortex or funnel cloud. But energy alone will not assemble a group of parts into a highly differentiated or functionally specified system such as an airplane or cell (or into the informational sequences necessary to build one). (Meyer, SC, 257)

### c. Design

Naturalistic processes are simply incapable of explaining the complex, information rich nature of the cell. But there is a third option, if someone is open to looking beyond nature itself. Biochemist Fazale Rana explains,

Human experience consistently teaches that information emanates from intelligence. Whether written in plain or elegant scripts, messages initiate in a mind. In whatever form information takes, it's not limited to communicating ideas, needs, and desires between human minds. Information has become an integral part of modern technology. Designers and engineers routinely develop and refine information systems. Computer technologies, among many other developing innovations, fundamentally depend upon such constructs. Over the last forty years, biochemists have come to recognize that the cell's biological systems are also, at their essence, information-based. Proteins, DNA, and even oligosaccharides are information-rich molecules. By analogy, these discoveries reinforce the biochemical design argument (Rana, CD, 166).

This is not a God-of-the-gaps argument, using God as an explanation for a phenomenon presently inexplicable. While scientists certainly have an incomplete understanding of life's chemistry, the argument to design

from DNA is based upon *positive* evidence of what we do know about the abilities of intelligent agents to produce information rich systems. As with the origin of the universe, and the fine-tuning of the laws of nature, the origin of life poses a seemingly intractable problem for naturalism.

## D. The Origin of Consciousness

### 1. The Challenge of Consciousness

The existence and reality of consciousness present one of the most pressing challenges to naturalism. As we have said, metaphysical naturalism is the view that only physical things exist. As a result, everything that exists should be describable in physical terminology, including properties such as weight, size, and location. But there are certain *subjective* aspects of the world that resist such explanation.

Analytic philosopher Paul Copan explains the challenge posed by consciousness:

Here's the problem, though: When we consult physics textbooks to understand what matter is, *there's nothing psychological, subjective, or mental about matter*. Matter might be described as having the properties of spatial location, spatial extension, weight, texture, color, shape, size, density, mass, or atomic or chemical composition. But what will always be missing in these textbooks describing matter is *consciousness* as a characteristic or property of matter. The assumption is that matter is different than [*sic*] mind. We're left wondering: how could *matter* produce mind? How could nonconscious material produce consciousness? (Copan, HDYKYNW, 100, emphasis in original)

Even atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel notes how consciousness raises a problem for naturalism:

Consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical science. The existence of consciousness seems to imply that the physical description of the universe, in spite of its richness and explanatory power, is only part of the truth, and that the natural order is far less austere than it would be if physics and chemistry accounted for everything. If we take this problem seriously, and follow out its implications, it threatens to unravel the entire naturalistic world picture. Yet it is very difficult to imagine a viable alternative. (Nagel, MC, 35)

## 2. Naturalistic Explanations for Consciousness

Naturalists have offered a variety of explanations for consciousness. We will consider three popular explanations (although there are *many* more):

### a. Behaviorism

*Definition:* While various behaviorist explanations hope to account for consciousness, they commonly reduce mental attributes to some observable behavior.

*Response:* Nagel observes: “It is certainly true that mental phenomena have behavioral manifestations, which supply our main evidence for them in other creatures. Yet all these theories seem insufficient as analyses of the mental because they leave out something essential that lies beyond the externally observable grounds for attributing mental states to others, namely, the aspect of mental phenomena that is evidence from first-person, inner point of view of the conscious subject: for example, the way sugar tastes to you or the way red looks or anger feels, each of which seems to be something more than the behavioral responses and discriminatory capacities that these

experiences explain. Behaviorism leaves out the inner mental state itself.” (Nagel, MC, 38)

### b. Evolution

*Definition:* Consciousness emerges from the process of natural selection, acting upon random mutation, and offers survival advantages to species.

*Response:* Philosopher Colin McGinn notes, “But in the case of consciousness the Darwinian explanation does not tell us what we need to know, for the simple reason that it is unclear how matter *can* be so organized as to create a conscious being. The problem is in the raw materials. It looks as if with consciousness a new kind of reality has been injected into the universe, instead of just a recombination of the old realities. Even if minds showed no hint of design, the same old problem would exist: How can mere matter originate consciousness? How did evolution convert the water of biological tissue into the wine of consciousness?” (McGinn, MF, 13)

### c. The Mind Is the Brain

*Definition:* This approach claims the mind is the brain. In other words, *mind* and *brain* are simply two different terms that refer to the same physical reality.

*Response:* Copan notes, “The fact that we can’t locate, weigh, or dye thoughts—as we can physical objects—reveals the inadequacy of a view identifying the physical with the mental/soulish—or reducing the mind/soul to the physical. Brains just don’t have the same properties that minds (or souls) have, and minds don’t have the same properties brains do. Therefore, *the mental can’t be identical with the brain—or even produced by the physical brain.*” (Copan, HDYKYNW, 101, emphasis in original)

### 3. Worldview Implications

There are other naturalistic attempts at explaining consciousness beyond what we have explored here. Nevertheless, “The truth is,” says Moreland, “that naturalism has no plausible way to explain the appearance of emergent mental properties in the cosmos.” (Moreland, AC, 340) And yet this leaves naturalism in a bind, as philosopher Richard Swinburne observes: “We cannot describe the world fully if we use only terms denoting physical properties. Any world-view which denies the existence of experienced sensations of blueness or loudness or pain, does not describe how things are—that this is so stares us in the face.” (Swinburne, EG, 165–166)

According to noted neuroscientist Robert Lawrence Kuhn, “Neuroscientists and many philosophers have typically planted themselves firmly on the materialist [naturalist] side. But a growing number of scientists now believe that materialism cannot wholly explain the sense of ‘I am’ that undergirds consciousness.” (Ghose, ME) Given how intractable the problem of consciousness is for naturalism, philosopher and Brown University professor Jaegwon Kim concludes, “But if a whole system of phenomena that are *prima facie* not among basic physical phenomena resists physical explanation, and especially if we don’t even know where or how to begin, it would be time to reexamine one’s physicalist commitments.” (Kim, MPW, 96)

And yet along with the origin of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe, and the origin of life, the existence of consciousness fits naturally within the theistic worldview. If God is a supremely conscious being, and he has created us, then it makes perfect sense for human beings to be conscious agents who experience the world. God has both the power and incentive to create conscious beings.

## E. The Existence of Free Will

### 1. Is Free Will an illusion?

The perception of free will is an unavoidable aspect of human experience. Although influenced by our environment and genes, we believe we make choices that are truly up to us. We condemn terrorists for their immoral actions because we believe they *should* have known better. And we praise individuals who personally sacrifice for the betterment of others because we realize they didn’t have to be selfless. And yet if naturalism were true, our belief in free will would be baseless.

Nagel, an atheist philosopher, asserts, “There is no room for agency in a world of neural impulses, chemical reactions, and bone and muscle movements.” (Nagel, VN, 111) In slight contrast, skeptic Michael Shermer believes free will is ultimately insoluble, and so we might as well just pretend we have it: “*Free will is a useful fiction.* I feel ‘as if’ I have free will, even though I know we live in a determined universe. This fiction is so useful that I act as if I have free will but you don’t. You do the same. Since the problem may be an insoluble one, why not act as if you do have free will, gaining the emotional gratification and social benefits that go along with it?” (Shermer, SGE, 121, emphasis in original)

### 2. The Intuition of Free Will

Belief in free will is an intuition held by people of varying worldviews, including many atheists. Copan notes, “But if this intuition is so common, *maybe there is something to it!* According to the commonsense *principle of credulity*, we should accept the basic reliability of our everyday intuitions—whether about our freedom, the general trustworthiness of our rational faculties and sense perceptions, or our moral intuitions about the wrongness of murder, rape, and theft. The burden of proof is upon the one who would deny these

obvious features of our daily lives.” (Copan, HDYKYNW, 106–107, emphasis in original)

### 3. A Problem for Determinism: Denying Rationality

Recently I (Sean) led a group of high school students to Berkeley to interact with some skeptics, agnostics, and atheists. One evening, for a public conversation about the evidence for and against God, we met with a “free thinking” student group from Cal Berkeley. After the discussion, I met a student who said she had recently converted from believing in free will to being a determinist. I simply asked her why she changed her mind. And she effectively said, “I used to believe in free will until I really examined the evidence. I studied both the philosophy and science behind the issue and have become convinced that free will is an illusion.” After a moment of reflection, I simply asked her another question: “So, you weighed the evidence on both sides of the debate and freely chose to give up belief in free will and become a determinist. Is that right?” She hesitated to respond because she saw the tension. In other words, she claimed to be a determinist (which implies that her beliefs are *not* up to her) but then offered intellectual reasons for her decision, as if she were a free agent who could rationally examine evidence and follow it where it leads. She wanted it both ways, but unfortunately, her naturalistic worldview wouldn’t allow it, leaving her two options: (1) Give up naturalism and adopt a worldview that allows for free will (such as Christianity), or (2) Become a more consistent naturalist and admit that free will is an illusion and that her beliefs really weren’t up to her in the way she thought they were.

Influential atheist Sam Harris, after rightly emphasizing the importance of the question of free will, also concludes that free will is an illusion. In his book *Free Will*,

Harris claims we are not the conscious source of our actions and could not have behaved differently in the past from how we did. He says, “I, as the conscious witness of my experience, no more initiate events in my pre-frontal cortex than I cause my heart to beat.” (Harris, FW, 9) Harris explains: “The brain is a physical system, entirely beholden to the laws of nature—and there is every reason to believe that changes in its functional state and material structure entirely dictate our thoughts and actions” (Harris, FW, 11–12).

Harris rightly points out that there are three main approaches to the problem of free will: *determinism*, *libertarianism*, and *compatibilism*. He then says, “Today, the only philosophically respectable way to endorse free will is to be a compatibilist.” (Harris, FW, 16) But if determinism were true, as Harris’s view seems to imply, why would *any* position be philosophically respectable or unrespectable? After all, on his view, people are determined to hold their beliefs—whether compatibilist, libertarian, or determinist—by forces outside of their control. If the people who hold beliefs couldn’t have believed differently, there is no need to critique or praise another’s position. If his critique results merely from chemicals moving in his brain, nothing could make his chemicals more respectable than others.

Furthermore, Harris argues that giving up free will (and becoming more aware of the background causes of our feelings) allows people to have greater creative control over their lives. “Getting behind our conscious thoughts and feelings,” says Harris, “can allow us to steer a more intelligent course through our lives.” (Harris, FW, 47) However, clearly the idea of “steering” a more intelligent course through life seems to imply an agent view of causation—that there is a “self” beyond the physical world of cause and effect. According

to naturalism, however, the belief that we can steer our lives is an illusion. All of our beliefs and behavior are *entirely* the result of forces outside our control. In one breath Harris says all our beliefs are determined, but then in another he seems to speak as if we really *should* take control over the course of our lives.

Determinists might push back and suggest that minds can be changed with the right stimuli of forces and counterforces, which are part of the larger cause-effect realm. Thus, we *feel* as if we are making free choices, but in reality, these feelings are explainable by prior physical states and interactions. This is an important objection, which comes at a high cost—the undermining of rationality. According to J. P. Moreland, rationality seems to require an agent view of the human person, which involves these four theses:

1. I must be able to deliberate, to reflect about what I am going to do. I deliberate about my behavior and not that of others, future events and not past ones, courses of action which I have not already settled. These facts of deliberation make sense only if I assumed that my actions are ‘up to me’ to perform or not perform.
2. I must have free will; that is, given choices *a* and *b*, I can genuinely do both. If I do *a*, I could have done otherwise. I could have chosen *b*. The past and present do not physically determine only one future. The future is open and depends, to some extent, on my free choices.
3. I am an agent. My acts are often self-caused. I am the absolute origin of my acts. My prior mental or physical states are not sufficient to determine what I will do. I must act as an agent.
4. Free will is incompatible with physical determinism. They cannot both be true at the same time (Moreland, STSC, 95).

Of course, this doesn’t prove that free will is real and that naturalism is false. Free will may ultimately be an illusion, as determinists such as Harris suggest. But embracing determinism comes at a cost that undermines our common sense understanding of free will and rationality.

#### 4. Conclusion

We recognize that we have only scratched the surface of the issue of free will. We have not considered many objections to the existence of free will, nor their responses. For a helpful resource that considers various attempts to explain free will using naturalistic explanations, and why these explanations fall short, see *God’s Crime Scene* by J. Warner Wallace. (141–158, 250–259)

For the sake of our discussion, we simply note that the experience of free will is inexplicable for naturalists, which they themselves often admit. Consistent naturalists must either admit that free will is an illusion or hope that someday an explanation emerges. Naturalism cannot account for our deep-seated, common sense, and daily experience that we are agents who make decisions that are up to us. Theists, though, have no such problem. After all, if God is a personal, free being who can choose to act, and has created us in his image, then we have good reason to believe we genuinely experience free will.

### F. The Existence of Objective Morality

#### 1. Universal Morality

Like the issue of consciousness and free will, humans have a universal belief in right and wrong. While people do vary over specific *behaviors* they consider right or wrong, there is universal agreement on the underlying *principles* of objective morality. C. S. Lewis explains,

If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own. . . . I need only ask the reader to think what a totally different morality would mean. Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two made five. Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to—whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired.\* Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked. (Lewis, MC, 19)

Which worldview *best* explains the existence of objective morality? The question is not whether naturalists can be moral—or even whether they can know morality—but whether naturalism as a worldview can adequately account for the existence of objective morality.

## 2. Denying Objective Morality

Some naturalists may recognize the implications of their God-less worldview and claim they don't believe in objective morality.

But again, Lewis points out the inconsistency of such a view:

Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a

moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining, "It's not fair" before you can say Jack Robinson. A nation may say treaties do not matter; but then, next minute, they spoil their case by saying that the particular treaty they want to break was an unfair one. But if treaties do not matter, and if there is no such thing as Right and Wrong—in other words, if there is no Law of Nature—what is the difference between a fair treaty and an unfair one? Have they not let the cat out of the bag and show that, whatever they say, they really know the Law of Nature just like anyone else? (Lewis, MC, 19–20)

## 3. Can Science Explain Morality?

In his book *The Moral Landscape*, Sam Harris claims science can provide a basis for objective morality. But apologist speaker and author Frank Turek notes that Harris smuggles in presuppositions his worldview cannot provide:

Science might be able to tell you *if* an action may hurt someone—like giving a man cyanide will kill him—but science can't tell you whether or not you *ought* to hurt someone. Who said it's wrong to harm people? Sam Harris? Does he have authority over the rest of humanity? Is his nature the standard of Good? To get his system to work, Sam Harris must smuggle in what he claims is an objective moral standard: "well being." As William Lane Craig pointed out in his debate with Harris, that's not the fail-safe criterion of what's right. But even if it was, what objective, unchanging, moral authority establishes it as right? . . . Only an unchanging authoritative being, who can

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\* There are some exceptions to Lewis's statement, "Selfishness has never been admired." One is Nietzsche; another is the objectivism of Ayn Rand. Both have garnered many followers. A third appears in the admiration for betrayal that Don Richardson encountered in Irian Jaya and related in his book *Peace Child*. But in defense of Lewis, we can point out that in the BBC talks that became *Mere Christianity*, he is referring to the consensus of society rather than to individual thinkers or groups within a large historic culture.

prescribe and enforce objective morality here and beyond the grave, is an adequate standard. (Turek, SG, 100)

In *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis points out that logic cannot obtain “ought” from mere descriptions of “is,” that is, of the way things are. (Lewis, AOM, 12)

#### 4. Can Evolution Explain Morality?

A few years ago, I (Sean) participated in a public debate with a skeptic about whether or not God is the best explanation for moral values (McDowell and Corbett, IGBE). My opponent appealed to evolution in his attempt to ground objective morality apart from God. But this explanation falls short. Apologists Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl explain,

Darwinists opt for an evolutionary explanation for morality without sufficient justification. To make their naturalistic explanation work, morality must reside in the genes. Good and beneficial tendencies can then be chosen by natural selection. Nature, through the mechanics of genetic chemistry, cultivates behavior we call morality. (Beckwith and Koukl, *Relativism*, 163)

Beckwith and Koukl note that this creates two problems:

First, evolution doesn’t explain what it’s meant to explain. It can only account for preprogrammed behavior, not moral choices. Moral choices, by their nature, are made by free agents. They are not determined by internal mechanics. Second, the Darwinist explanation reduces morality to mere descriptions of behavior. The morality

that evolution needs to account for, however, entails much more than conduct. Minimally, it involves motive and intent as well. Both are nonphysical elements that can’t, even in principle, evolve in a Darwinian sense. Further, this assessment of morality, being descriptive only, ignores the most important moral question of all: Why should I be moral *tomorrow*? Evolution cannot answer that question. Morality dictates what future behavior ought to be. Darwinism can only attempt to describe why humans acted in a certain way in the past. (Beckwith and Koukl, *Relativism*, 164)

#### 5. God Best Explains Objective Morality

The argument from objective morality to God has two simple premises and a conclusion: (1) If objective moral values exist, God must exist; (2) Objective moral values exist; (3) Therefore, God must exist. In terms of support for the first premise, we have seen that humans have a universal belief in objective morality. And as Lewis noted, those who deny objective morality will inevitably end up in contradiction. The existence of objective morality is certainly reasonable and better accounts for common human experience than its denial.\*

As for the second premise, Copan notes:

Just think about it: Intrinsically valuable, thinking persons do not come from impersonal, nonconscious, unguided, valueless processes over time. A personal, self-aware, purposeful, good God provides the natural and necessary context for the existence of valuable, rights-bearing, morally responsible human persons. That is, personhood and morality are necessarily connected; moral values are rooted in personhood. Without God (a personal being), no persons—and thus no moral

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\* In *The Abolition of Man* (the publication of lectures delivered at the University of Durham), C. S. Lewis presents an extensive argument for the unreasonableness of denying moral objectivity—and for the ultimately destructive outcome for humanity if we try to base individual behavior and social polity upon that denial. (Lewis, AOM, 12, 22–24, 33, 46)

values—would exist at all: *no personhood, no moral values*. Only if God exists can moral properties be realized. (Copan, MAGE, 22, emphasis in original)

If these two premises are true, then it follows that God must exist. Even some atheists have noted the connection between God and morality. The late atheist philosopher J. L. Mackie said, “If there are objective moral values, they make the existence of a god more probable than it would have been without them. Thus we have a defensible argument from morality to the existence of a god.” (Mackie, MT, 115–116) And agnostic Paul Draper noted, “A moral world is . . . very probable on theism.” (quoted in Copan, MAGE, 23)

As with the origin and fine-tuning of the universe, the origin of life, the existence of consciousness, and the nature of free will, naturalism fails adequately to explain objective morality. Conversely, objective moral values provide positive support for the theistic worldview.

## V. Conclusion

Naturalism permeates Western culture, claiming not only that only physical things exist but also that all phenomena can ultimately be explained by the combination of chance and natural laws. This worldview underlies much rejection of supernatural phenomena such as the deity of Christ and the resurrection.

And yet, as we have seen, naturalism cannot account for the origin of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe, the origin of life, the existence of consciousness, the nature of free will, and objective morality. These are universal human experiences. We have argued that any worldview (such as naturalism) that cannot account for these phenomena ultimately fails to describe reality. And yet each of these phenomena also provides *positive* evidence for theism. We agree with Flew: given these features of the world, “the occurrence of the resurrection does become enormously more likely.”



**PART I**

**EVIDENCE FOR  
THE BIBLE**

# THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

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## OVERVIEW

### I. Introduction

#### II. Unique in Character

- Unique in Its Time Span
- Unique in Its Geographical Production
- Unique in Its Authorship
- Unique in Its Literary Genres
- Unique in Its Languages
- Unique in Its Teachings

### III. Unique in Impact

- Unique in Its Circulation and Translation
- Unique in Its Survival and Resiliency
- Unique in Its Impact on Western Civilization

### IV. Concluding Remarks

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## I. Introduction

People often say to us, “Oh, you don’t read the Bible, do you?” Or they say, “The Bible is just another book. You really ought to read . . .” Then they name some of their favorite books. Others have a Bible in their library, describing how it sits on the shelf next to other “greats,” such as Homer’s *Odyssey*, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, or Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Their Bible may be dusty, not broken in, but they still recognize its historical influence, thinking of it as one of the classics. Still others make degrading comments about the Bible because they are surprised that anyone might take it seriously enough to spend

time reading it. I (Josh) was once like them. I even tried to refute the Bible as God’s Word to humanity. I finally concluded, however, that not accepting the Bible must result from being either biased, prejudiced, or simply unread.

Voices like those above brought up many issues with which I grappled. As a result of all my research about the Bible, I concluded that the best word to describe the Bible is the word *unique*.

This chapter focuses exclusively on the unique origin and nature of the Bible, the profound impact it has had on western civilization, and its responsibility for much of the progress of human history. This chapter will not attempt to demonstrate the validity

or truth of the Bible, nor its claims to inspiration, infallibility, or inerrancy, which will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

## II. Unique in Character

There are several uncommon and distinctive features of the Bible's history, composition, and content. F. F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, summarizes these characteristics:

The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature—mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years. The writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possibly Persia in the east. The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles but belonging to the most diverse walks of life. In their ranks we have kings, herdsmen, soldiers, legislators, fishermen, statesmen, courtiers, priests and prophets, a tentmaking rabbi and a Gentile physician, not to speak of others of whom we know nothing apart from the writings they have left us. The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic. (Bruce, BP, 79)

Now let us look in more detail into some of these specific characteristics.

### A. Unique in Its Time Span

While most scholars agree that all the books of the New Testament were completed by the second half of the first century AD (Kitchen, OROT, 500), there is sufficient evidence to confirm that the earliest forms of the Bible were written during the time of the Hebrew exodus out of Egypt (c. 1400–1200 BC). This means that the composition of the biblical writings, from the earliest book of the Bible to the last of the New Testament writings, spans a period of 1,300 to 1,500 years. In comparison to other literary and historical works, the Bible is exceptional in that it was written and assembled over a vast number of generations.

### B. Unique in Its Geographical Production

Unlike most other literary works, the composition and transmission of the biblical books did not emerge from a homogenous community located in a single region of the ancient world. Rather, these works were written by peoples in areas as diverse as Rome in the West, Egypt in the South, and Mesopotamia in the East. This amazing geographical and ethnic diversity distinguishes the Bible's origins from that of all other books.

### C. Unique in Its Authorship

The Bible is as diverse in its authorship as it is in its production over a long period of time and the multiple geographical regions in which it originated. Authored by approximately forty different people (some known, some unknown) and edited and preserved by countless scribal schools and communities, the Bible preserves for us the writings of a vast array of different personalities from widely divergent social circumstances. We discover kings surrounded by power and wealth (e.g., Solomon) on the one hand, to lower class Galilean fishermen (e.g., Peter and John) on the other. Between these two socioeconomic extremes

one finds an exiled prince (Moses), military leaders (e.g., Joshua and David), trained philosophers (e.g., the authors of Job and Ecclesiastes), a tax collector (Matthew), a historian (Luke), and a zealous Pharisee (Paul). These authors recorded the stories of all kinds of people. Professor Mary Ellen Chase remarks:

The story-tellers of the Bible . . . understood men and women of all sorts and in all conditions. There is literally no type of person whom they have neglected. All are here: the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the faithful and the treacherous, the designing and the generous, the pitiful and the prosperous, the innocent and the guilty, the spendthrift and the miser, the players of practical jokes and their discomfited victims, the sorry, the tired, the old, the exasperated young, misled and impetuous girls, young men who lusted and young men who loved, friends who counted no cost for friendship, bad-mannered children and children well brought up, a little boy who had a headache in a hay-field, a little servant girl who wanted so much her master's health that she dared to give him good, if unpalatable, advice. Once one discovers such persons as these, still alive after many centuries, they become not only fascinating in themselves but typical of persons whom we know today. (Chase, BCR, 5)

#### D. Unique in Its Literary Genres

The Bible is also unique in that a multitude of distinct literary forms and genres can be found within its pages, as complete compositions consisting of a single genre (e.g., Song of Songs) or complete compositions imbued with multiple genres (e.g., Exodus). Gerd Theissen, professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, highlights the importance of biblical genres:

Biblical texts are of various sorts. Treatment of one sort of text provides practice in dealing

with all texts of the same sort. Narrative, poetic, legal, and argumentative texts of the Bible can therefore be treated as exemplary, as well as the various biblical genres identified by that area of biblical scholarship called form criticism. In principle no single sort of text is privileged. Central themes appear in all forms: creation is recorded as *narrative*; trust is expressed in *prayer* (Psalm 23); monotheism is mandated in a *commandment* (Exod. 20:2); justification is expounded in a *disputatious letter* (Romans); theodicy—the question of God's justice—is examined in *wisdom dialogue* (Job). The Bible is not a homogenous text but a compendium of different forms and genres. Each must be appreciated on its own terms. (Theissen, BCC, 30–31)

Other ancient literary works utilize a multiplicity of literary genres, but the biblical authors use them in order to focus their audience's attention on one supreme metanarrative. Alison Jack, professor of Bible and Literature at the University of Edinburgh, illustrates the interplay between this unifying biblical motif and the multiplicity of literary forms:

While one overarching story may be discerned, involving the central character of the one God, creator and sustainer of the earth, and his relationship with those who accept a relationship with him, and those who do not, there are many different voices behind the books of the Bible. A multitude of literary genres are found here, from long and short narratives to poetry and song, genealogies and historical accounts, biography, letters and apocalyptic writing. These voices tell different versions of the story, from a variety of perspectives. (Jack, BL, 6)

#### E. Unique in Its Languages

The Bible is written in three different languages (two Semitic and one Indo-European),

each with a unique character and essence. Larry Walker, former professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, outlines each of the biblical languages:

Hebrew is actually one of several Canaanite dialects which included Phoenician, Ugaritic, and Moabite. Other Canaanite dialects (for example, Ammonite) existed but have left insufficient inscriptions for scholarly investigation. Such dialects were already present in the land of Canaan before its conquest by the Israelites. . . . Hebrew belongs to the Semitic family of languages; these languages were used from the Mediterranean Sea to the mountains east of the Euphrates River valley, and from Armenia (Turkey) in the north to the southern extremity of the Arabian peninsula. . . . Hebrew, like the other early Semitic languages, concentrates on observation more than reflection. That is, things that are generally observed according to their appearance as phenomena, not analyzed as to their inward being or essence. Effects are observed but not traced through a series of causes. Hebrew's vividness, conciseness, and simplicity make the language difficult to translate fully. It is amazingly concise and direct. For example, Psalm 23 contains fifty-five words; most translations require about twice that many to translate it. . . . Hebrew is a pictorial language in which the past is not merely described but verbally painted. Not just a landscape is presented but a moving panorama. The course of events is reenacted in the mind's sight. . . . Many profound theological expressions of the Old Testament are tightly bound up with Hebrew language and grammar. Even the most sacred name of God himself, "the LORD" (Jehovah or Yahweh), is directly related to the Hebrew verb "to be" (or perhaps "to cause to be"). (Walker, BL, 218–221)

Walker also explains:

Aramaic is linguistically very close to Hebrew and similar in structure. Aramaic texts in the Bible are written in the same script as Hebrew. In contrast to Hebrew, Aramaic uses a larger vocabulary, including many loan words, and a greater variety of connectives. It also contains an elaborate system of tenses, developed through the use of participles with pronouns or with various forms of the verb "to be." Although Aramaic is less euphonious and poetical than Hebrew, it is probably superior as a vehicle of exact expression. Aramaic has perhaps the longest continuous living history of any language known. It was used during the Bible's patriarchal period and is still spoken by a few people today. Aramaic and its cognate, Syriac, evolved into many dialects in different places and periods. Characterized by simplicity, clarity, and precision, it adapted easily to the various needs of everyday life. It could serve equally well as a language for scholars, pupils, lawyers, or merchants. Some have described it as the Semitic equivalent of English. . . . Gradually, especially after the Babylonian exile, Aramaic influence pervaded the land of Palestine. Nehemiah complained that children from mixed marriages were unable to speak Hebrew (Neh. 13:24). The Jews seem to have continued using Aramaic widely during the Persian, Greek, and Roman periods. Eventually the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Aramaic paraphrases, called Targums, some of which have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. . . . Aramaic served as a transition from Hebrew to Greek as the language spoken by Jews in Jesus' day. In that sense Aramaic connects Old Testament Hebrew with New Testament Greek. (Walker, BL, 228–230)

Walker continues:

The Greek language is beautiful, rich, and harmonious as an instrument of communication. It is a fitting tool both for vigorous thought and for religious devotion. During its classic period, Greek was the language of one of the world's greatest cultures. During that cultural period, language, literature, and art flourished more than war. The Greek mind was preoccupied with ideals of beauty. The Greek language reflected artistry in its philosophical dialogues, its poetry, and its stately orations. The Greek language was also characterized by strength and vigor. It was capable of variety and striking effects. Greek was a language of argument, with a vocabulary and style that could penetrate and clarify phenomena rather than simply tell stories. . . . The conquests of Alexander the Great encouraged the spread of Greek language and culture. Regional dialects were largely replaced by "Hellenistic" or "koine" (common) Greek. Koine Greek is a dialect preserved and known through thousands of inscriptions reflecting all aspects of daily life. The koine dialect added many vernacular expressions to Attic Greek, thus making it more cosmopolitan. Simplifying the grammar also better adapted it to a worldwide culture. . . . Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek was an epochal event. The Septuagint (the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament) later had a strong influence on Christian thought. . . . The New Testament epistles blend the wisdom of Hebrew and the dialectic philosophy of Greek. Sermons recorded in the New Testament combine the Hebrew prophetic message with Greek oratorical force. (Walker, BL, 230–234)

## F. Unique in Its Teachings

Not only is its historical background and development unique, but the Bible's message is also unique. This is what distinguishes

Christianity from all other religious and secular worldviews. Kenneth R. Samples, adjunct professor of apologetics at Biola University, and senior research scholar for Reasons to Believe, illustrates how many of the claims made by biblical Christianity fly in the face of all other worldviews:

Much of society today knows so little about the specific beliefs of classical Christianity. Therefore, many people are unaware of historic Christianity's unique perspective on God, Christ, the world, humankind, values, death, and suffering. . . . Historic Christianity embodies numerous beliefs that are theologically and philosophically volatile (in the best sense of the term). The Christian faith contains powerful truth-claims that have transformed the church and turned the world upside down. Christianity's initial dangerous ideas started with twelve men (Jesus' apostles) and within three hundred years came to dominate the ancient Roman world. And for more than a thousand years after that, the historic faith dominated all aspects of Western civilization. . . . The advance and entrenchment of secularism over the last couple hundred years make these Christian ideas fresh and explosive. Not safe, but good. . . . The historic Christian truth-claims presented in this book can, then, be viewed as having a renewed sense of danger. (Samples, 7T, 10)

In the following we focus on three essential (i.e., necessary or indispensable) Christian teachings, without which one would no longer be speaking of biblical Christianity.

### 1. The Trinity

Rooted deeply in the pages of Scripture, later formalized at councils such as Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), and professed in confessions such as *The Articles of Religion* (1571) and *The Westminster Confession of*

*Faith* (1643–1646), is the understanding of the ontology of God that can only be described as unique. Wayne Grudem, research professor of theology and biblical studies at Phoenix Seminary, gives a simple definition of the Trinity: “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.” (Grudem, ST, 226) Another way of stating this view of God is that there is one divine nature (essence) existing as three eternal persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While this description could increase in linguistic complexity and qualification, these simple formulations are sufficient to distinguish Trinitarian Christianity from unitarian religions (e.g., Judaism and Islam) and non-theistic religions (e.g., Buddhism). Nancy Pearcey, professor of apologetics at Houston Baptist University, captures one existential implication of this unique biblical teaching:

The balance of unity and diversity in the Trinity gives a model for human social life, because it implies that both individuality and relationship exist within the Godhead itself. God is being-in-communion. Humans are made in the image of a God who is a tri-unity—whose very nature consists in reciprocal love and communication among the Persons of the Trinity. This model provides a solution to the age-old opposition between collectivism and individualism. Over against collectivism, the Trinity implies the dignity and uniqueness of individual persons. Over against radical individualism, the Trinity implies that relationships are not created by sheer choice but are built into the very essence of human nature. We are not atomistic individuals but are created for relationships. (Pearcey, TT, 132)

Some religious systems (e.g., fourth-century Arians, Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah’s

Witnesses) have attempted throughout history to show that the Trinity is nowhere to be found in the pages of Scripture. However, careful analysis of three categories of Scripture demonstrates that this opposition is exegetically unsound and groundless. These three categories consist of Scripture that attests to: (1) God’s essential oneness (i.e., monotheism); (2) the divinity of each Person (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); and (3) the simultaneous distinction of each Person.

1. *God’s essential oneness (monotheism).* Both the Old Testament and New Testament confirm that there is only one God. (Throughout this chapter, Scripture quotes are taken from the NIV, unless other noted)
  - OT: Deuteronomy 6:4—“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (cf. Deut. 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 43:10; 44:6; 45:5, 6, 21, 22)
  - NT: 1 Corinthians 8:6—“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” (cf. Mark 12:29; John 17:3; Rom. 3:30; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19)
2. *The divinity of each person.* Both the Old Testament and New Testament confirm that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully divine.
  - The Father: 2 Corinthians 1:2—“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (cf. Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:2)
  - The Son: John 1:1, 14—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his

glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (cf. Isa. 9:6; John 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28; Phil. 2:5–6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3, 10; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; Rev. 1:8; 22:12, 13, 16, 20)

- The Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:10–11—“These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (cf. Ps. 139:7, 8; John 3:5–7; Acts 5:3–4; 13:2; 2 Cor. 3:17–18; 1 John 3:9)

3. *The simultaneous distinction of each person.* The New Testament confirms that the persons of the Trinity are distinct. Example: Matthew 28:19—“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (cf. Matt. 3:16, 17; 17:5; John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:13, 14; 17:1; Acts 10:38)

Considered in their entirety, these passages of Scripture proclaim one God, eternally existing as three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), each being fully divine.

## 2. Incarnation and Atonement

Erwin Lutzer, senior pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, poses a provocative question to contemporary western culture: “Does Christ belong on the same shelf with Buddha, Krishna, Bahá’úlláh, and Zoroaster? Like Christ, such leaders (and others) have taught some rather lofty ethical ideas. Even if we say He stands taller than the rest, have we given Him His due? Or is He to be placed on an entirely different shelf altogether?” (Lutzer,

CAOG, 13) In answer to Lutzer’s question, the Bible clearly proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is to be placed in a separate category reserved for Him alone, that of a God-man, who enters into creation to pay the penalty for the sins we have all committed.

Grudem lays out the fundamental teaching of the incarnation as “the act of God the Son whereby he took to himself a human nature.” (Grudem, ST, 543) Samples highlights this extraordinary Christian teaching:

Of all the world’s religions, only Christianity proclaims that God has become embodied as a human being. Of all the founders of the world’s great religious traditions, only Jesus Christ claims to be God. Only the historic Christian faith proclaims that to encounter Jesus Christ is to directly and personally encounter God himself. Indeed at the very heart of historic Christianity is a truly astounding—one may say *dangerous*—truth-claim. This central article of the Christian faith is the incarnation: *God became man in Jesus of Nazareth.* This truth is a distinctive feature of the Christian faith, for it is unique to Christianity to discover a God who not only takes the initiative in becoming flesh but also does so in order to redeem sinful human beings. (Samples, 7T, 61)

One radical, or, as Samples states, “dangerous” implication (among others) of this teaching is that God would humiliate himself by condescending to the level of humanity with all its frailties, weaknesses, and temptations. For many religions, the image of the Almighty God being born like every other human child seems so objectionable that it is blasphemous. For the Christian, however, this act of the infinite Son of God forever uniting himself to a human nature (body, soul, and spirit) is the most profound sacrificial and costly expression of divine love in history.

Throughout history, however, varying groups have taught from opposite sides of the spectrum, some rejecting the deity of Jesus (e.g., Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses) and some rejecting his humanity (e.g., early Apollinarians and Docetists). However, a proper examination of the biblical data, once again, reveals the correct teaching that (1) Jesus is truly God and (2) Jesus is truly human.

(1) *Jesus is truly God.* As seen in the previous section, there are numerous passages of Scripture that attest to Jesus' divinity. These lead Lutzer to answer his original question when he states, "The divinity of Christ sharply divides Christianity from all of the other religions of the world. This is the great divide, the unbridgeable chasm, a gulf that extends from here to eternity." (Lutzer, CAOG, 103)

(2) *Jesus is truly human.* Luke 2:7—"And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." Many other passages of Scripture clearly demonstrate Jesus' true humanity as he experienced physical limitations (Matt. 8:24; 21:18; Mark 5:30–32; Luke 22:44; John 4:6), experienced pain and death (Mark 14:33–36; Luke 17:25; 23:33; John 19:30), experienced human emotions (Matt. 26:37; Mark 3:5; 10:14; 14:32–42; Luke 7:9; 10:21; John 11:5, 35), and possessed essential human qualities (Matt. 26:12, 28; Luke 24:39; John 5:30; 11:33).

We cannot separate this unique biblical teaching of God becoming man from its ultimate purpose, the final reconciliation of man to his Creator, which was accomplished through the atonement, defined as "the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation." (Grudem, ST, 568) As is shown in the New Testament writings (e.g., Rom. 3:25; 5:8; Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:13, 14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 1 John 2:2) the concept of God paying the price

for the sins of mankind is an indispensable truth of the Christian faith. It is this work of God that sets biblical Christianity apart from all other religious systems that are grounded in the moral actions (works) of people.

### 3. Faith vs. Works

C. S. Lewis once said, "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." (Lewis, MC rev. ed., 178) While other religious systems have offered theories for how man can achieve atonement for his own wickedness, Christianity alone proclaims that God himself offers all people the salvation that they absolutely cannot achieve on their own. Craig J. Hazen, founder and director of the Biola University Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics program, states:

Christianity is unique in its offer of salvation by grace alone, a free gift from God to anyone who will receive it. In the history of religion, there have only been a couple of instances of a religious movement that considered salvation or enlightenment to be a free gift from a deity. But even in those cases (such as in *Amida* Buddhism or a certain form of *Bhakti* Hinduism), it is not a no-strings-attached kind of gift. There is still work to be done on the part of the devotees. Hence, the Christian tradition stands in a solitary spot in the spectrum of world religions when the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8–9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Hazen, CWR, 146)

Samples demonstrates how a nearly identical view of humankind's salvation (based on meritorious works) arises out of dissimilar worldviews (i.e., traditional Islam and the contemporary individual spirituality of the average Westerner):

Though claiming to be heirs of the biblical tradition, Islam is not a religion of grace and redemption. Muslims believe that paradise is a just reward and hell is a rightful punishment. . . . It is a common Islamic belief that two angels follow each Muslim throughout life. The angel on the person's right records his or her good deeds, while the angel on the left records his or her bad deeds. A Muslim's destiny hinges on the preponderance of his actions as measured on a scale. Generally speaking, Muslims have no assurance that they will earn paradise, but this dilemma is often understood as an incentive to strive for greater submission to Allah's requirements. . . . In this manner, this influential world religion affirms what many religions teach: that paradise is a reward for moral goodness expressed in this life and that hell is punishment for a lack of sufficient ethical accomplishment. . . . Many people think God will grade on a curve and cut the virtuous among us some slack when it comes to assigning heaven and hell. Why? Because current culture says that at their core, most people are good. In other words, if their life's deeds were placed on a scale, the good would outweigh the bad. (Samples, 7T, 135–136)

Against these two worldviews (which are otherwise categorically opposed to each other, yet unified on this principle), Samples presents the teaching of biblical Christianity regarding God's grace:

Against the backdrop of a near-global consensus that God sees humankind as being basically good and, therefore, worthy of heaven stands historic Christianity's . . . revolutionary notion that . . . in the eyes of God no one is or becomes morally acceptable by his or her own merit. In fact, it is fair to say that sin (moral transgression) is a much bigger problem than most people (including many Christians) realize. But the *good news* (Gospel) is that God's grace is deeper and

Jesus Christ is a much greater Savior than most people (including Christians) realize. . . . Christianity at its heart is a religion not of self-help but of divine rescue. According to the Gospels, what human beings need most is not moral guidance but rather a Savior. (Samples, 7T, 136–137)

These unique Christian teachings suggest a radical departure from all other religious and secular thought. The biblical teaching about the Trinitarian nature of God clearly explains why human beings really need both (1) individual expression (each member of the Trinity is distinct and relates to humanity uniquely) and (2) relationship in community (the same three Persons exist in an eternally loving relationship with one another). The nature of the Trinity not only explains why humans long for both individuality and community, but it also provides an example for our relationships with one another. Furthermore, God affirms the intrinsic worth of every person who has ever lived by the incarnation of Jesus and his atoning sacrifice, as recorded in the Bible. Every one of us is fashioned in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:27; 9:6). Beyond this, however, the intrinsic moral worth of every human person and the divine sacrifice highlight a provocative dissimilarity between Christianity and all other religious systems. That is, a person's value is found in her very being, not in her behavior. So it follows that even those persons considered by many to be irredeemable (e.g., Osama bin Laden, Adolf Eichmann, or Kim Jong-Il) remain valuable in the eyes of God. In his uniquely narrative style, Lewis illustrates what this divine love (a love not contingent upon human behavior) would look like if ever truly applied:

I remember Christian teachers telling me long ago that I must hate a bad man's actions, but not hate the bad man: or, as they would say, hate

the sin but not the sinner. For a long time I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life—namely myself. However much I might dislike my own cowardice or conceit or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it. In fact the very reason why I hated the things was that I loved the man. Just because I loved myself, I was sorry to find that I was the sort of man who did those things. Consequently, Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them. Not one word of what we have said about them needs to be unsaid. But it does want us to hate them in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves: being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere he can be cured and made human again. . . . I admit that this means loving people who have nothing lovable about them. But then, has oneself anything lovable about it? You love it simply because it is yourself. God intends us to love all selves in the same way and for the same reason: but He has given us the sum ready worked out in our own case to show us how it works. We have then to go on and apply the rule to all the other selves. Perhaps it makes it easier if we remember that that is how He loves us. Not for any nice, attractive qualities we think we have, but just because we are the things called selves. For really there is nothing else in us to love. (Lewis, MC, rev. ed., 117, 120)

### III. Unique in Impact

Clearly, the Bible has influenced civilization more than any other literary work in history. This section will not only provide evidence that the Bible is the most widely distributed

work ever written, but will also highlight its resilient history and demonstrate its foundational role in the advent of western civilization.

#### A. Unique in Its Circulation and Translation

From the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint (LXX; see chapter 4) in the mid-third century BC, to the rise of biblical literacy with the invention of Gutenberg's printing press, to the surprising number of translations and its mass circulation, to its worldwide availability today via digital and electronic media, the Bible has registered an unparalleled history. Rodney Stark, Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University, recounts one portion of this history:

In about 1455 Johannes Gutenberg (1397–1468) printed the first Bible. It was soon followed by a flood of printed books, many of them Bibles, most of them religious. The invention of printing stimulated a very rapid expansion of literacy in Europe. Suddenly, people had something to read, and in their own language. Where once readers had numbered in the thousands, soon there were tens of thousands of readers, then hundreds of thousands. By 1500 at least 3 percent of Germans, about 400,000 people, could read. To serve this rapidly growing audience, printers opened shops in every sizable town. Soon peddlers traveled the countryside selling books and pamphlets, with the result that huge numbers of Europeans began not only to read the Bible for themselves but to read commentaries and tracts. Sales totals were incredibly high, given the size of the literate populations. (Stark, FGG, 74–75)

Today, as in the time of Gutenberg, the Bible continues to surpass all other literary works in production and circulation. While we commonly hear about books on the

bestseller list, selling a few hundred thousand copies, rarely do we come across books that have sold more than a million copies. Even more rarely do we find books that have passed the ten-million mark in sales. However, the number of Bibles sold reaches into the billions, and when one considers the freely distributed copies of biblical literature, the numbers likely reach into the tens of billions. According to the United Bible Societies' 2012 statistics, in that year alone member organizations were responsible for distributing 405 million Bibles or portions thereof (of which 32.1 million were full Bibles). One interesting fact to note is that in 2012 (a year in which a record number of full Bibles was distributed), there was a dramatic increase in the distribution of Bibles or portions of the Bible in countries where persecution of Christians is widespread.

The numbers of translations of the Bible are every bit as impressive as its distribution numbers. Most books are never translated into another language. If a book is translated, it is normally published in just two or three languages at the most. Very few books are available in more than ten languages. But according to the Wycliffe Global Alliance's 2014 Scripture and Language Statistics, the

Bible or portions of it have been translated into 2,883 languages! (SLS) Although this is only about 42 percent of the world's 6,901 known languages, these languages represent the primary vehicle of communication for about 80 percent (5.8 billion) of the estimated 7.26 billion people worldwide. Several languages were first committed to writing solely to transmit Scripture, including Gothic, Armenian, and Georgian. (SLS; USWPC) Perhaps more astounding was the work of the monk brothers, Cyril and Methodius, to create the Cyrillic alphabet in the ninth century AD; as a result, they extended the gospel message to the empire of the Moravians. This alphabet provided the basis for contemporary languages such as Russian, Ukrainian, Serbo-Croatian, and Bulgarian. (Geisler and Nix, GIB, 519–522)

In addition to the printed copies of biblical literature, the Internet and digital media expose even more people to the Bible. Two examples of these are directly downloadable digital texts and audio versions of every book of the Bible. One example of a digital text is YouVersion, a Bible app that has been translated into 799 languages and downloaded over 200 million times at the time of this writing. Another example: *Faith Comes by*

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### DISTRIBUTION OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Country	Rank	2011 Distribution	2012 Distribution	% Increase
Syria	4	19,000	163,105	758%
Laos	28	7,985	20,743	159%
Iraq	3	28,518	66,175	132%
Egypt	23	2,261,236	2,824,504	25%
India	21	22,790,001	27,220,467	19%
Nigeria	10	7,695,853	8,121,452	5%

Chart information adapted from WWL; SDIPH

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*Hearing* provides audio versions of the Bible with “Bible recordings in 915 languages spoken by nearly 6 billion people. Over 334 million people in virtually every country have been reached through our wide range of programs.” (SOS)

Clearly, no other book comes even close to the Bible in its distribution and translation.

## **B. Unique in Its Survival and Resiliency**

No other written work has been so attacked, scrutinized, and persecuted as have the canonical books of the Bible. From emperors, monarchs, and dictators who tried to destroy the words of Scripture (e.g., the persecutions under Diocletian in the fourth century, Communist Russia, and Socialist China), to intellectual attempts to discredit the content of Scripture (e.g., eighteenth to nineteenth century rationalism and twenty-first-century postmodernism), the Bible has withstood all forms of opposition.

### **1. Through Persecution**

Two examples of attempts to destroy the Bible, one ancient and one recent, demonstrate the ferocity of Christianity’s opponents. Rochunga Pudaite, founder of Bibles For The World, highlights the extreme measures to which some societies will go:

Diocletian became Caesar in the year 284. For the first 19 years of his reign Christians had rest from persecution. . . . Then, under the influence of his cruel son-in-law, Diocletian issued four harsh edicts. The first called for the destruction of all places of Christian worship and the burning of all Christian books. This order also stripped Christians of all honors and civic rights. The second called for the imprisonment in chains of pastors and church officers. The third, issued on the eve of Diocletian’s 20th anniversary as emperor, offered a cruel kind

of amnesty. The Christian prisoners would be released if they would sacrifice to the Emperor and other Roman gods. The fourth, issued in AD 304, ordered every person in the Empire to sacrifice and make offerings to heathen gods, or suffer torture and death. Churches were destroyed all over the Empire. All Bibles and writings of the church fathers that could be found were burned in public gatherings. Christian men, women, and children were tortured, thrown to wild beasts, and burned to death. Diocletian had a monument erected at the site of one Bible burning, bearing the inscription, *Extincto nomine Christianorum*—“Extinct is the Name of Christians.” . . .

Communism came to dwarf all other foes of the Bible. Lenin and Marx both predicted that the Bible would become only a relic in a new classless, atheistic society. Adjoining countries were annexed into the Soviet Empire, religious freedom denied, missionaries banished, Bibles confiscated, and churches turned into museums or closed. Millions of citizens, including many Christians, died in Stalinistic blood purges in the 1920s and ’30s. In village after village, residents were called to mass meetings and asked, “Are you with the Marxists or the believers?” Those who said “believers” were shoved into cattle cars for shipment to Siberia. . . . Millions perished in Communist countries other than the Soviet Union. Here too, Bibles were destroyed. It was a rerun of the hate-filled persecutions under the old Roman emperors, except that many, many more have died for the Christian faith and an authoritative Bible in the 20th century than in all of the bloody vendettas by the Caesars of Imperial Rome. (Pudaite and Hefley, *GBEW*, 47–48, 55–56)

Other examples of persecution could be cited from history to document the persistent antagonism against the Bible, yet there is no indication that the desire for or distribution

of the Bible is waning (see Section III. A. above). However, the greatest current threat to the Bible is the intellectual challenge to its content and relevance.

## 2. Through Criticism

In spite of the intellectual skepticism that began to spread in the seventeenth century and still permeates culture today, the Bible (and its view of reality) continues to be as intellectually viable now as during the time of its composition. Bernard Ramm, former professor of religion at Baylor University, highlights the resiliency of the Bible in the face of rampant criticism:

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and the committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or *belles lettres* of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? with such venom and skepticism? with such thoroughness and erudition? upon every chapter, line and tenet? (Ramm, PCE, 232–233)

The Bible has not only withstood these attacks from a skeptical world, but the Christian worldview that it champions has experienced a revitalization in recent years through a resurgence of scholarship in various disciplines, such as textual criticism, archaeology, anthropology, the natural sciences, and philosophy.

## C. Unique in Its Impact on Western Civilization

No other book has influenced western civilization as much as the Bible. From its

historical narratives, moral teachings, and existential claims, the Bible has laid the groundwork for democratic forms of government and law, the rational exploration of the natural world, movements in both art and literature, societal morals and values. Pudaite provides a sampling of the areas that have been affected by the Bible:

Almost all of the good things of life that we take for granted bear the stamp of the Bible's influence—marriage, family, names, calendar, institutions of caring, social agencies, education, benefits from science, uplifting books, magnificent works of art and music, freedom, justice, equal rights, the work ethic, the virtues of self-reliance and self-discipline. (Pudaite and Hefley, GBEW, 114)

## 1. Government and Law

In the area of human governance and law, the Bible has contributed significantly to three developments that have shaped the consciousness and conscience of western civilization: (1) individual autonomy and the democratic process, (2) a separation of secular government from the religious institution, and (3) the maintaining of a system of justice. Ronald J. Sider, Distinguished Professor of Theology at Eastern University, highlights basic biblical principles that have become normative assumptions within democratic societies, showing how the biblical understanding of human nature is determinative in establishing societies that are appropriately free for the individual and that protect against totalitarian overreach:

This biblical story shapes the Christian approach to public life in profound ways. For example, persons are not merely complex machines to be programmed for the good of the state. They are immeasurably valuable

beings, so loved by their Creator that he suffered the hell of Roman crucifixion for them, free beings called to shape history along with God and neighbor, immortal beings whose ultimate destiny far transcends any passing political system. Public life is important because it shapes the social context in which people respond to God's invitation to live in right relationship with both himself and neighbor. . . . Probably the best protection against political totalitarianism is the recognition that the state is not the ultimate source of value and law. If people in a society believe strongly that there exists a higher law grounded in God the Creator to which current legislation ought to conform and which citizens ought to obey even if that entails civil disobedience, totalitarianism will be held in check. . . . Decentralized decision making, even if it means a certain loss of efficiency, is in keeping with the biblical vision of persons as coshapers under God of their own history. . . . The democratic political process . . . is the political system most compatible with biblical values about the importance of the individual and the pervasiveness of sin. Genuine political democracy decentralizes political power more completely than any other form of government. As Reinhold Niebuhr never tired of pointing out, democracy is necessary precisely because people are sinful. At the same time, it is because each individual is of inestimable worth to God that every person should be free to help shape his or her political destiny. . . . The state should not promote or establish any religion or denomination. Nor is the separation of church and state merely a pragmatic necessity in a pluralistic society. Religious faith by its very nature is a free response to God. It cannot be coerced. Throughout biblical history, we see a sovereign God constantly inviting persons into free dialogue with himself. He invites obedience but is astonishingly patient

with those who decline the invitation. If the history of Israel tells us anything, it discloses how much space God gives people to reject his will and still continue to enjoy the created gifts of food, health, and life. Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24ff.) makes it clear that God chooses to allow believers and nonbelievers to live and enjoy the world together until the end of history. Since God intends history to be the place where people have the freedom to respond or not respond to him, the state should not promote or hinder religious belief. (Sider, EVAD, 38, 41-43)

The Bible has also informed both the substance and framework of modern legal structures. Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach demonstrate how the biblical principle of retributive justice is still the only form of jurisprudence that is truly "just":

The principle of retribution guarantees that only *guilty* people are punished. Retribution is based on the premise that the appropriate authority should impose a punishment if, and only if, an offence has actually been committed. Retribution therefore ensures that no one is punished if he or she does not *deserve* it. Similarly, the principle of retribution also ensures a given punishment is *proportional* to its crime. It recognizes that serious crimes deserve severe punishments, whereas more trivial offences warrant milder sanctions. Finally, the principle of retribution also safeguards the principle of *equity*, for the only factors allowed to affect the severity of a punishment are those that affect the nature of the crime. Irrelevant differences such as the race, gender or social class of the offender should have no impact on sentencing. It is clear, therefore, that the principle of retribution secures those elements of a system of punishment both required by Scripture and

in accord with our natural sense of right and wrong. Retribution may be combined with the elements of deterrence or correction, but by itself safeguards these biblical principles. (Jeffery et al., POT, 256)

While the quotation above explains the principle of retribution, we acknowledge that human error may fail to administer it accurately. Though space limitations do not allow us to describe the intrinsic flaws of other legal theories, we can safely say that alternative theories have often led to gross abuses.

Finally, Barbara Armacost and Peter Enns, in their close examination of the biblical prophets, describe the context within which this system of retributive justice should work:

First, biblical justice is procedural as well as substantive. It requires fair and unbiased adjudication as well as fair and principled laws. Second, justice is largely relational and has particular claims on those who are in positions of power or authority over others. Third, biblical justice requires special attention to the way laws and legal institutions treat the most vulnerable individuals in our communities. Fourth, there is a sense in which modern lawyers should see themselves as having a prophetic role in their communities, either as insiders working for justice in law and legal institutions or as outsiders who bring to light injustice and call for its eradication. (Armacost and Enns, COJ, 134–135)

## 2. Science and Education

In his sobering essay on how monotheism affected the shape of western civilization, Stark effectively counters many revisionist narratives that have become popular in contemporary culture. One of the biggest myths that Stark exposes is the inflated, if not totally fabricated, idea that religion (particularly

Christianity) was somehow an obstacle to, rather than a catalyst for, the advent of science and the rise of higher education:

There was no “scientific revolution” that finally burst through the superstitious barriers of faith, but that the flowering of science that took place in the sixteenth century was the normal, gradual, and direct outgrowth of Scholasticism and the medieval universities. Indeed, theological assumptions unique to Christianity explain why science was born only in Christian Europe. Contrary to the received wisdom, religion and science not only were compatible; they were inseparable. . . . The reason we didn’t know the truth concerning these matters is that the claim of an inevitable and bitter warfare between religion and science has, for more than three centuries, been the primary polemical device used in the atheist attack on faith. From Thomas Hobbes through Carl Sagan and Richard Dawkins, false claims about religion and science have been used as weapons in the battle to “free” the human mind from the “fetters of faith.” . . . I argue not only that there is no inherent conflict between religion and science, but that *Christian theology was essential for the rise of science.* (Stark, FGG, 3, 123)

Stark summarizes the reasons for the truth of this thesis (the italicized portion above):

Christianity depicted God as a rational, responsive, dependable, and omnipotent being and the universe as his personal creation, thus having a rational, lawful, stable structure, awaiting human comprehension. . . . The rise of science was not an extension of classical learning. It was the natural outgrowth of Christian doctrine: Nature exists because it was created by God. To love and honor God, one must fully appreciate the wonders of his

handiwork. Moreover, because God is perfect, his handiwork functions in accord with *immutable principles*. By the full use of our God-given powers of reason and observation, we ought to be able to discover these principles. (Stark, FGG, 157)

Both the understanding of a rational Creator of the universe and the inseparability of Christian theism from scientific truths led Sir Isaac Newton to ground his views of absolute time and space on the eternity and omnipresence of God. In his *Principia*, Newton states:

The supreme God is an eternal, infinite, and absolutely perfect being . . . , He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient, that is, he endures from eternity to eternity, and he is present from infinity to infinity; he rules all things, and he knows all things that happen or can happen. He is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration and space, but he endures and is present. He endures always and is present everywhere, and by existing always and everywhere he constitutes duration and space. Since each and every particle of space is *always*, and each and every indivisible moment of duration is *everywhere*, certainly the maker and lord of all things will not be *never* or *nowhere*. . . . It is agreed that the supreme God necessarily exists, and by the same necessity he is *always* and *everywhere*. (Newton, INPW, 111–112)

Finally, Stark illustrates that Christian theism provided the proper context for the flourishing of science and the humanities:

The university was a Christian invention that evolved from cathedral schools established to train monks and priests. The first two universities appeared in Paris (where both Albertus

Magnus and Thomas Aquinas taught) and Bologna, in the middle of the twelfth century. Oxford and Cambridge were founded around 1200, and then came a flood of new institutions during the remainder of the thirteenth century. . . . The university was something new under the sun—an institution devoted exclusively to “higher learning.” It was not a monastery or place for meditation. . . . The medieval universities were unlike Chinese academies for training Mandarins or a Zen master’s school. They were not primarily concerned with imparting the received wisdom. Rather, just as is the case today, faculty gained fame and invitations to join faculties elsewhere by *innovation*. (Stark, FGG, 62–63)

### 3. Art, Literature, and Music

The Bible has been a fundamental source for nearly every genre of art and literature, and has provided inspiration for innumerable visionaries who have elevated the artistic endeavor to its highest form. Pudaite provides some examples of areas in which the Bible has left its mark on the arts:

Since the beginning of the Christian era, the Bible has inspired great works of art. The frescoes of the Roman catacombs reveal Biblical concepts of faith and hope. When Christianity became a legal religion in the Roman Empire, Christian art blossomed in the churches and on monuments. Through the 19th century, the greatest sculptures and paintings were based on characters or incidents in the Bible. The greatest artists—Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and others—are most remembered and appreciated for their biblical masterpieces. (Pudaite and Hefley, GBEW, 123)

T. R. Henn, former president of St. Catharine’s College, Cambridge, distinguishes the Bible from all other great works

of antiquity and shows the Bible's formational impact on the literature of the western world:

As "literature" it [the Bible] is, in many ways, remote from our present consciousness. There is no single work of comparable quality and intention (still less of current availability) with which we may compare it. We may read the Koran, or the Granth Sahib, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Babylonian Epic of Creation, the Law Code of Hammurabi; and these, together with various anthologies, provide some material for comparisons, throw some oblique and broken light; but little more. In its range, its unity, its diversity, its two major symphonic movements of promise and fulfilment, in its avoidance (in general) of arid and now pointless narrative or gnomic reflections that are of little relevance to the West, the Bible is unique. . . . How far, then, can the Bible be considered as literature, in any coherent sense? It is clear that it has been burned deeply into the fabric of the life and literature of the English-speaking peoples. . . . Its proverbs and its parables, its episodes sacred or profane, have been expounded in drama and poetry from the earliest written English. It has supplied the themes or framework for epic, satire, tragedy, comedy, farce, ballet; above all, its dramatic and choric potential make it specially suitable for oratorio. It has furnished allusions or depth-images to an incalculably great mass of writing. Its rhythms have been engrafted historically into much of our prose. (Henn, BAL, 21, 9–10)

Chase further emphasizes how the Bible has impacted some of history's greatest minds:

The language of the Bible, now simple and direct in its homely vigour, now sonorous and

stately in its richness, has placed its indelible stamp upon our best writers from Bacon to Lincoln and even to the present day. Without it there would be no *Paradise Lost*, no *Samson Agonistes*, no *Pilgrim's Progress*; no William Blake, or Whittier, or T. S. Eliot as we know them; no Emerson or Thoreau, no negro Spirituals, no Address at Gettysburg. Without it the words of Burke and Washington, Patrick Henry and Winston Churchill would miss alike their eloquence and their meaning. Without a knowledge of it the best of our literature remains obscure, and many of the characteristic features and qualities of our spoken language are threatened with extinction. (Chase, BCR, 9)

Pudaite illustrates how the Bible has affected some of the greatest musical composers:

The creators of the greatest oratorios, anthems, symphonies, hymns, and other classics were inspired by the Bible. Bach's "Jesus Joy of Man's Desiring," Mendelssohn's "Elijah," Handel's "Messiah," Brahms's "Requiem," Beethoven's "Mount of Olives," and Haydn's "Creation" are some of the best known works inspired by the Bible. After hearing his magnificent work, Haydn said, "Not I, but a power from above created that." Bach often wrote I.N.J. for the Latin words meaning "In the Name of Jesus" on his manuscripts. (Pudaite and Hefley, GBEW, 123)

Influential theologian, philosopher, and author Francis Schaeffer provides even greater insight into how the Bible influenced the work of a genius like Bach:

His music was a direct result of the Reformation culture and the biblical Christianity of the time, which was so much a part of Bach himself. There would have been no Bach had

there been no Luther. . . . It was appropriate that the last thing Bach the Christian wrote was “Before Thy Throne I Now Appear.” Bach consciously related both the form and the words of his music to biblical truth. . . . This rested on the fact that the Bible gives unity to the universal and the particulars, and therefore the particulars have meaning. Expressed musically, there can be endless variety and diversity without chaos. There is variety yet resolution. (Schaeffer, HSWTL, 92)

#### 4. Societal Norms and Values

The Bible has shaped social morality more than any other book. One glaring example where a biblically informed Christianity drastically changed a commonly held societal norm that has existed in nearly every culture throughout history is that of slavery. Stark illustrates how Christian theology, grounded in biblical principles, led fervent believers to the conclusion that slavery was morally reprehensible and therefore required organized action:

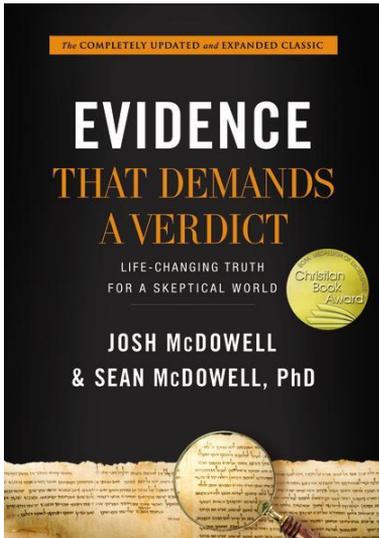
Of all the world’s religions, including the three great monotheisms, only in Christianity did the idea develop that slavery was sinful and must be abolished. Although it has been fashionable to deny it, antislavery doctrines began to appear in Christian theology soon after the decline of Rome and were accompanied by the eventual disappearance of slavery in all but the fringes of Christian Europe. When Europeans subsequently instituted slavery in the New World, they did so over strenuous papal opposition, a

fact that was conveniently “lost” from history until recently. Finally, the abolition of New World slavery was initiated and achieved by Christian activists. (Stark, FGG, 291)

There are many more examples of when, where, and how the Bible has positively impacted the course of human events and thinking, but these few seem sufficient to establish the unique presence that the Bible commands in our world today.

### IV. Concluding Remarks

At the time of this writing, a new museum is being constructed at a cost of nearly one billion dollars in the heart of Washington, D.C. dedicated to making accessible to the public the text, history, and legacy of the Bible. This museum will house more than forty thousand artifacts that relate to both the history told in the Bible and the history of the Bible itself. While neither this chapter nor this 430,000-square-foot museum in any way proves the claims of the Bible or certain doctrines concerning the Bible (e.g., inspiration and inerrancy), they certainly underscore the conclusion that the Bible is a central piece of humanity’s shared history and that it is worthy of continued investigation, critical engagement, and appreciation. Indeed, anyone sincerely seeking truth would consider the ongoing impact of a book that, although it reached completion nearly 2,000 years ago, continues to have a range of appeal and influence that is unique.



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