

Why God? Week 2

Last week: I took you through why I believe in God...

- Cosmological argument: The universe had a beginning, and there is design in the universe.
- Biological design on the earth.
- Consciousness: the biological parts of the human machine do not explain consciousness.
- The moral argument: There is a common core of morality in human beings that cannot be explained.

Observations:

- Remember, if Darwinian evolution is a fact, then why is most every part of it debated?
- Natural, accidental, random processes cannot explain the complexity of life (the probability argument).
- Evolutionists do believe in miracles: the miracle of the origin of the universe, the miracle of the origin of life, the miracle of the origin of consciousness. Many do believe in miracles: the source, in their mind, cannot be God.

Sir Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA, wrote in *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, “An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going.”

I believe that what we learn in science can actually help us discern which god is God.

- The universe reveals: power, intelligence, morality, and spiritual consciousness.
 - If God is outside of time, space, matter, etc., then a pantheistic god (identifies God with/as the universe) cannot be accurate. That would eliminate Buddhism, Hinduism... any religion that espouses moral relativity.
 - If God has given us such design, such intricate detail as consciousness and morality, as well as a desire for the spiritual in our make up, then the deistic God cannot be accurate (a God that started life and then stepped back from it and doesn't care or get involved). The God Gene study, as well as, shows we are hardwired to connect (Dartmouth Medical School and book by Dean Hamer).
 - If God is a designer with order involved, as well as one who is spiritual and can do the miraculous, then a God of miracles is not only possible, but probable.
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Glossary of Terms (from Google Dictionary unless otherwise indicated)

- Theism: a belief in the existence of God or gods.
- “A”theism: a lack of belief in the existence of a God or gods.
- Agnostic: a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.
- Pantheism: a doctrine that identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God.
- Miracle: an event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency. (Webster's Dictionary)
 - “Although English speakers regularly use ‘miracle’ to refer to a broad range of wondrous events, the biblical concept is limited to those not explainable solely by natural processes but which require the direct causal agency of a supernatural being, usually God.” (Baker's Evangelical Dictionary)

This week: Why I believe in the God of the Bible.

The common challenges and responses concerning Jesus:

1. The attack from the culture: Jesus wasn't a real person.

The Christ Myth: Jesus didn't really exist but was a conglomerate of earlier mythological stories that were adapted and modified to make Jesus into a real religious figure.

- “Believers in the idea attempt to demonstrate that Horus, Mithras, Dionysus, and many others figures of ancient mythology have precise parallels with Christ, making his claims illegitimate.” -*The Problem of God* by Mark Clark
 - **Response A:** There are few or no parallels with most of these stories, and Mithras emerged in Rome after Jesus and clearly is a story based on the New Testament account.
 - **Response B:** At least ten first century writers outside the Bible (that lived at or near that time) verify the existence of Jesus and verify parts of the story.
 - Examples of non-Christian writers verifying the historicity of Jesus (they lived at that time):
 - Tacitus, Roman historian, wrote in *Annals*:
“Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.”
 - Josephus, Jewish and Roman historian, wrote in *Antiquities of the Jews*:
“Ananias convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.”
 - Josephus also wrote in the same manuscript:
“About this time there lived Jesus a wise man if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standings among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians so called after him, has still to this day, not disappeared.”
 - The Pharisee, the Jewish leaders, wrote in the *Talmud*:
“On the eve of the Passover they hanged Yeshua (Hebrew for Jesus). And an announcer went out, in front of him for forty days saying ‘He is going to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor come and plead in his behalf.’ But not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of the Passover...”
 - F.F. Bruce, Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Manchester, wrote in *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?*: “Some writers may toy with the fancy of a ‘Christ Myth’ but they do not do so on the grounds of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the Christ myth stories.”
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2. The attack from culture: The early disciples were not the real authors of our scriptural account.

- **Response A:** The New Testament is a real story that has been passed down accurately by the real witnesses of real events.

- **Response B:** Early believers said they wrote it and then *died* because they believed what they wrote.
 - Papias (60-130A.D.), early author and bishop, wrote in *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*:
The elder used to say this also Mark having been the interpreter of Peter wrote down accurately all that he mentioned whether sayings of doings of Christ not however in order for he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord but after words as I said he accompanied Peter who adapted his teaching as a necessity required not as though he were making a compilation of the sayings of the Lord so them Mark make no mistake writing down in this way some things as Peter mentioned them for he paid attention to this one thing not to omit anything that he had heard not to include any false statement among them.
 - Papias also wrote, “Matthew recorded the oracles in the Hebrew tongue.”
 - Irenaeus (~115-202 A.D), early bishop and martyr, wrote in *Against Heresies*: “So firm is the ground upon which these gospels rest that the heretics themselves bear witness to them and starting from these each one of them endeavors to establish his own particular doctrine.”
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3. The attack from culture: Jesus is real, but the story developed and changed over time.

- **Response A:** The New Testament has more evidence supporting its accurate transmission than any other book in history.
 - Homer’s *Iliad*: 500 year time span between the original and first copy, with 643 early copies.
 - Plato’s *Dialogues*: 1200 year gap between the original and first copy, with just 7 early copies.
 - The New Testament: 25 years between the events and the first writings discovered, with over 24,000 early copies that line up with one another *all around the world*.
 - **Response B:** The non-believers in the first century tell the same story about Jesus that we have today. See Attack One—Josephus tells the story we see in scripture.
 - **Response C:** The early church Fathers (disciples of the disciples) wrote excerpts of the New Testament (copied scripture) in their own writings. We can use their writings to reconstruct the New Testament. They kept it, believed it, passed it on, and died for it.
 - Pliny the Younger, lawyer, author, and magistrate of Ancient Rome, wrote in a letter to emperor Trajan:
In the meantime, the method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were in fact Christians; if they confessed it, I repeated the question twice, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their beliefs might be, I could at least feel no doubt that determined contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement. There were others also possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be taken to Rome for trial...
 - Norman Geisler wrote in *A General Introduction to the Bible*, “The quotations are so numerous and widespread that if no manuscripts of the New Testament were extant, the New Testament could be reproduced from the wrings of the Early Fathers alone.” -p.430
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- **Response D:** Scholars agree that we have the same story.
 - “Millar Burrows of Yale says: ‘Another result of comparing New Testament Greek with the language of the papyri is an increase of confidence in the accurate transmission of the text of the New Testament itself.’ Burrows also says that the texts ‘have been transmitted with remarkable fidelity, so that there need be no doubt whatever regarding the teaching conveyed by them.’ I believe one can logically conclude from the perspective of literary evidence that the New Testament’s reliability is far greater than any other record of antiquity.” -Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*

- o John Warwick Montgomery, Christian apologist, wrote in *History and Christianity*, “To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”
 - o “Professor William F. Albright [Yale], an outstanding biblical archaeologist, concluded in 1955, ‘We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book in the New Testament after Circa A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today.’” -Grant Jeffrey, *The Handwriting of God*, p.214
 - o Eight years later, after further study, Albright then said, “I believe the entire New Testament was completed no later than 75 A.D.” -“Towards a More Conservative View,” *Christianity Today*, Jan 18, 1963, p.3
 - o Dr. John T. Robinson, Cambridge University, is quoted by Josh McDowell in *Evidence for the Resurrection* as saying, “owing to scholarly ‘sloth,’ the ‘tyranny of unexamined assumptions’ and ‘almost willful blindness’ by previous scholars and authors, much of the past reasoning...was untenable. He concluded that The New Testament is the work of the apostles themselves, or of contemporaries who worked with them, and that all the New Testament books including John were written before 64 A.D.” -p.181
 - o Sir Fredrick G. Kenyon, Chief Librarian British Museum, wrote in *The Bible and Archaeology*, “The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.” -cited by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 1999, p.35
 - o Kenyon also wrote, “The net result of this discovery—by far the most important since the discovery of the Sinaiticus—is, in fact, to reduce the gap between the earlier manuscripts and the traditional dates of the New Testament books so far that it becomes negligible in any discussion of their authenticity. No other ancient book has anything like such early and plentiful to it’s text, and no unbiased scholar would deny that the text that has come to us is substantially sound.” -cited by Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 1979
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4. The attack from culture: the founders of Christianity created religion to gain power, fame, influence, etc.

- **Response A:** The witnesses had no motivation to lie. They gave up their lives for this story.

What does the New Testament teach about worldly reward and lifestyle?

- o Don’t store up treasure on earth. (**Matthew 6:19-20**)
 - o Be a servant and don’t use your authority for self. (**Galatians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 10:24**; and more)
 - o Marriage is between one man and one woman for life. (**1 Corinthians 7:2; 1 Timothy 3:2**; and more)
 - o It’s better to give than receive. (**Acts 20:35**)
 - o If you gain your life in this life, you will lose it for eternity. (**Matthew 16:25**)
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What did the writers of the New Testament get in life?

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 (NIV84) ⁹For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. ... You are honored, we are dishonored! ¹¹To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹²We work hard with our own hands, When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³when we are slandered we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 (NIV84) ²³Are they servants of Christ? ... I am more, I have worked much harder, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

What was the final cost?

- Luke: **hung** on an olive tree by the priest of a pagan religion in Greece.
 - James the Great, sons of thunder, brother of John: **beheaded** in 44 A.D.
 - Philip: scourged, thrown into prison, then **crucified** in 54 A.D.
 - Matthew: run through with a **sword** in 60 A.D.
 - James the Less, brother of Jesus: he was beaten with a club, then stoned, then finished off by having his **brains beaten in with a fullers club**.
 - Mathias: stoned and then **beheaded**.
 - Andrew, brother of Peter: **crucified**.
 - Mark: **dragged to pieces** by horse under the Alexandrian idol.
 - Peter: **crucified upside down**; some history reports his wife was killed as well.
 - Jude: **crucified** in Edessa in 72 A.D.
 - Bartholomew: beaten, then **crucified**.
 - Thomas: run through with a **spear**.
 - Simon: **crucified** in 74 A.D.
 - Barnabas: **hung** in 73 A.D.
 - John: **banished**.
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Conclusion

- Christian Martyrs are different than most martyrs from other religions: they were in a position to know whether the story was true or not. The early eye-witnesses of other religions were not killed for their beliefs.
- People will die for what they know to be true, but they will not die for something they know to be a lie.
- The Witnesses died, but also led their families and many others to death—without fear. Why?
- What would cause a sane person to give up everything, as well as the lives of those they love, and even their own lives? They saw something that changed them. What was it?

So why do I believe in the God of the Bible?

- The Bible is unique historically. It's based on real events with real witnesses.
- The miraculous is present, but verified.
- It fits in my mind with what we see in science.
- It fulfills prophecy.
- It is verifiable with archaeology.
- It explains where humans came from, who God is, evil, (next week) the spiritual consciousness, morality, and it leads to order (the rules actually lead to life).
- It changed my life and so many others'.

