



Is the Christian Faith Reasonable?

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Book Cover Design by Christian Furnari

1st Edition 2023

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Why This Booklet?

In our world today, people sometimes claim that faith and reason are at odds, that there is a choice to be made: “Do I follow faith, or do I follow reason?” This booklet will try to demonstrate two things: that faith (rightly understood) and reason (rightly used) are not combatants in an arena for our minds, and that there is excellent evidence for the truth of Christianity.

There are many definitions for the word *belief*, but here we are using it to mean “*the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true.*” The related word “faith,” on the other hand, can be used as a sort of synonym for trust. In other words, faith is trust in what you believe to be true. This definition is how traditional Christianity has used the term since the beginning.

Reason, on the other hand, refers to a process that leads to more certain conclusions. We reason when we draw logical inferences from the information available. When we reason properly, we reduce the use of our feelings and use our minds.

Now that we have cleared up the meaning of the words reason and *faith*, you can more easily see why faith and reason do not truly compete. How can your mind be persuaded to have faith in something that it has already rejected as false? Reason can challenge or supplement faith, but when it is used well, reason is not an antonym for faith. There are certainly people of faith who believe what they do for any number of reasons. Still, people do not honestly believe something to be true if their minds have already rejected the proposition as undoubtedly false.

From this discussion of faith and reason, let's move on to why we believe Christianity is true. We will present a twelve-point case showing the truth of Christianity. We will start with general principles of thought, then move through evidence for God's existence and the Bible's trustworthiness. Finally, we will close with a suggestion. We won't be able to answer every question in a booklet of this size, but we can certainly make a strong evidential and reasonable case for the truth of Christianity.

1. Truth about reality is knowable

Is the truth about reality knowable? How can we know? Before we can decide those mega-questions, we need to break them down into smaller, more manageable parts. Let's start with this question: What is truth?

One of the most contested questions today is, "What is truth?" Is truth just a matter of personal opinion or cultural choice, or does it go beyond the individual and society? Said differently, "Is truth objective or is it relative?" or "Is truth discovered or created?"

On almost any college campus today, you can hear seemingly impressive arguments that truth is created within and by each person. Many people believe they are being profound when saying, "That's true for you but not for me." Is that really the way truth works? Let's take a closer look at this critical issue.

If truth is created within a person, that truth can be said to be personal, subjective (residing in the subject), or relative to that person. Many people think this. They believe that we each have "our truth" and that there is no truth that resides or exists outside of the human mind. In a sense, they are correct, but only in a minimal sense. It is true that truths

reside only in minds, but truth properly refers to a statement or concept outside of the speaker of which the truth speaks. When I say, “My shoes are red,” I am referring to something outside of my mind: my shoes. I could be wrong about the footwear, but the only way to know that is by examining the shoes, not my mind. In other words, my internal view must *match* the outside reality in order for it to be called true.

We are saying here that a statement is true if and only if the statement corresponds to reality. Our test for objective truth is, “Does the statement correspond to reality?” We discover the truth; we don’t create it.

What about those cases that look like an example of a clear, subjective truth? When Anne says, “I feel cold,” and Mark says, “I feel warm,” are those examples of personal, subjective truths? Not really, and here’s why: When Anne said that she feels cold, it is really true for her and everybody else that Anne feels cold. Conversely, it is true for all the people on earth that Mark feels warm. Their relative temperature preferences are subjective, but not the actual temperature.

It is essential to recognize that our feelings about truth do not affect the nature of truth. It may not make me happy to hear that a close friend has died, but how you feel about it does not change the fact that my friend has died and that I

feel sorrow over it. Truth does not depend on feelings, even when we express truths about our feelings.

Now, can we know the truth about the real world? Yes, for we cannot deny it. Those who say that we cannot know the truth about the world believe that they know the truth about the world—namely, that they cannot know it! Their words make a claim about the world that undermines itself. In effect, their claim that the world cannot be known states something about the world that they claim to know. So, on the one hand, they know X (the real world) while denying that anyone can know X. They are contradicting themselves, hence their statement is self-defeating. Their claim, if true, falsifies itself.

Some people will try to get around this by saying, “The ultimate truth is beyond human comprehension.” The problem is that when they say this, they are making a comprehensive statement about reality, claiming that we cannot make any all-inclusive statements about reality. This, too, is self-defeating because their assertion would have to be wrong to be right!

We can know some truths about reality, and what we know to be true corresponds to reality.

**Truth is what corresponds to reality, and
reality is knowable.**

2. The opposite of true is false

The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle clearly articulated the principle of thought called the *law of non-contradiction*. We can paraphrase it this way: *two contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense and at the same time*. If you think about it, this foundational law of thought is impossible to successfully deny. In fact, it is obviously true.

Consider the claim that a circle can be round and yet square at the same time and in the same sense or way. That, of course, is impossible. A figure that has no corners or angles cannot at the same time have corners or angles. A circle can be round, but it cannot be square. Neither can it be triangular. A circle cannot have corners or angles at all and still be a circle. This is just one example of the law of non-contradiction at work.

Now, some people try to deny what is obviously true. The medieval Persian philosopher ibn Sīnā (aka Avicenna

in the West) had particularly harsh advice on how to get an obstinate person to admit the truth of the law of non-contradiction: “Anyone who denies the Law of Non-contradiction should be beaten and burned until he admits that to be beaten is not the same as not to be beaten, and to be burned is not the same as to not be burned.”

A consequence of clear thinking in this way is that many things said about God simply cannot all be true. For if the God that Christians worship exists, then he cannot in the same way and at the same time not exist. The Christian God either exists or does not exist. Those are the only two choices (the law of non-contradiction).

That doesn’t mean that some people won’t try to find a loophole. When a person says (usually with an air of serenity and maybe superiority about them) that “I believe that all religions are true,” they are either ignorant about what all religions teach, or they mean the word *true* to mean “give people a sense of belonging, comfort, or purpose.” Religions may help us feel better (and they are not alone in doing that), but that is not what we mean by “true” here, as you can see from section 1 of this booklet.

Religions disagree about the nature and existence of God, the nature of human beings, the universe, and whether there is an afterlife and what that might be like. All these

contradictory beliefs cannot be true in the same sense and at the same time. It is possible that they are all wrong, but it is not possible that they are all right.

For example, either a theistic (personal) God does or does not exist; either humans are an intentional product of a mind or they are not; either the universe is in some sense the result of purely natural processes or it is not; either people exist in some sense after this life or they don't. If a single religion is correct on these and other important issues, then it is true in the sense that we are trying to defend here.

Though it may not be easy to accept, if one religion is correct on these issues and another religion contradicts these claims, then the first one is right (true) and the second one is wrong (false). That doesn't mean that just because one religion is true that the others are *completely* false. They are false only inasmuch as they contradict the truth. Religions can operate on a spectrum, being somewhat true, mostly true, or completely true. You can examine them and decide for yourself.

Contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense and at the same time.

3. The theistic God exists

Now, if it can be reasonably demonstrated that the theistic God exists, then many possible religions and philosophies can be ruled out as wrong. Of course, this leads us to ask a big question: If God exists, how can we know that this God is the one that Christians worship? In this section we will move closer to that answer.

Almost everyone is aware that there are differing conceptions of God or gods in the religious world. The list of possibilities seems endless, but we can group them into a few categories that will help to simplify our task. The main choices are (1) *theism*: one personal, immaterial God exists; (2) *deism*: one God who created the universe but does not interact with it; (3) *finite godism*: God is the limited forming agent or mind behind an eternal universe; (4) *atheism*: no God exists; (5) *pantheism*: God is all, and all is God; and (6) *polytheism*: many finite gods exist.

Out of these choices, is there a reason to believe in the theistic God of Christianity? There are several very good arguments that a being such as this must exist. We will discuss only a few here.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

This argument goes like this:

- (1) Whatever has a beginning has a cause.
- (2) The universe has a beginning.
- (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The first premise is supported by the *law of causality*, which states that every effect must have a cause. Hence, everything which begins to exist must have a cause. We know this from personal experience, and it is the basis by which the sciences proceed. Without causality, what kind of answers can science give us? Would any reputable scientist just accept “It just happened?” Something cannot just pop into existence or change without a cause.

Understood properly, the law of causality is not controversial.

The second premise is supported by modern science in the form of the *second law of thermodynamics* and the *big bang theory*. The second law of thermodynamics states that in a closed isolated system (such as the whole universe is) the amount of usable energy is decreasing. The big bang theory is the currently accepted model for the origin and growth of the universe.

If the available energy in the universe is running down (which is an implication of the second law of thermodynamics), then the universe must have begun a finite time ago, much as a clock that is running down must have been wound up in the finite past.

The big bang theory (the scientific theory, not the popular television show) supports this premise with an overwhelming amount of evidence that has convinced 99.9 percent of the National Academies of Science members.¹ Only a few fringe people doubt the beginning of the universe. According to this view, matter, space, and time came into existence all at once and at the same time. Before this event, nothing of the universe existed.

Adding the big bang and the second law of thermodynamics together, we have compelling evidence that the universe is not eternal, and that it had a beginning. In other words, the universe is finite (limited) and contingent (it did not have to exist).

¹ Alexis C. Madrigal, “A Majority of Americans Still Aren’t Sure about the Big Bang,” *The Atlantic*, April 21, 2014, theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/04/a-majority-of-americans-question-the-science-of-the-big-bang/360976/.

Since the form of the argument is valid, and the premises are true, the argument is sound. The universe had a cause for its beginning.

Now, since matter, space, and time began with the origin of the universe, whatever caused the beginning of those features cannot be made from any of them. The originating cause must be immaterial, not a form of matter or physical energy; must be spaceless, not spatial; and must be timeless, not temporal.

Moreover, since the universe is finite and contingent, its Maker must be a necessary Being (a must-be being).

To bring the entire universe into existence and have it develop and work as exquisitely as this one does would require a Creator of incredible intelligence and power. Since this Being is infinite (not-finite), its intelligence and power must be infinite too.

Finally, because the universe is contingent and did not have to be, the originating cause had a choice of whether to create it or not. A choice to create implies that the creating power is personal.

All of these attributes—immaterial, spaceless, timeless, infinite, necessary, all-powerful, all-knowing, and personal—form part of the classical description of the God of the Bible.

The Teleological Argument

A second argument for the theistic God is the *teleological argument* (from the Greek word *telos*, meaning reason or purpose). It takes the form of reasoning to the best explanation (known as abduction), which involves reasoning by way of analogy. It basically says, “If this first entity was made by a creative intelligence, and this other entity is identical in concept with the first entity, then it is reasonable to infer that the second entity is the result of a creative intelligence too.” Specifically, the argument goes like this:

- (1) Wherever we observe an entity with encoded information (such as a computer program, book, or DVD), it is the result of the actions of an intelligent cause.
- (2) There is encoded information contained in the DNA of every living cell.
- (3) Therefore, the encoded information contained in DNA is the result of an intelligent cause.

When we see a menu at a restaurant, we can analyze it in terms of its paper content, the chemical structure of the ink, or other physical properties. Scientists do this sort of

thing all the time. However, there is something else in the menu, something that we often take for granted—namely, the information it contains (information about food, drink items, and probably prices).

Currently, the representation of this information can take various physical forms. It could be on paper, it could be exhibited on some sort of electronic display, or it could be in the form of spoken words. The medium for information transfer is not the most important thing; rather, it is the information itself. Every restaurant we have visited had a menu that was the result of intelligent, human minds conveying information in a usable form. This is true not just for menus but also for books, computer programming, and myriad other things.

DNA is an information-bearing molecule. The purpose of DNA is to be the medium by which information is stored in order to be read and processed to make proteins for other uses. When we reflect on the information contained in DNA, we see a very strong parallel to the language encoded in blueprints or plans. It does not matter that the information is carried in the form of nucleic acids, for information is independent of the medium by which it is conveyed. Though scientists may one day discover a natural, unguided path by which the DNA molecule developed (whether through RNA first or other self-replicating molecules is irrelevant), the

origin of and encoding of the usable functional information is another matter. We are no closer to answering that issue now than we have ever been. We have only ever seen intelligent information come from intelligence.

We are not saying “we don’t know how it happened, therefore God did it.” We *are* saying that in every example of programming for which we know the source of information, it has always originated in a mind. Therefore, it is logical to infer that the information carried in DNA is from a mind. This is an argument from analogy, not ignorance.

Further, DNA has all the characteristics of a language. There are letters: the nucleic acids, abbreviated A, T, C, and G; words: triplets of bases known as codons in the messenger RNA; and, in order to be expressed as functional proteins, a grammar. These characteristics are the same as what we find in human language. There is even a website where you can translate any sentence from any human language into a DNA sequence. As Bill Gates of Microsoft has said, “DNA is like a computer program but far, far more advanced than any software ever created.”² The mind behind DNA must be very advanced. If you could combine the information within DNA with the precise design

² Bill Gates, *The Road Ahead* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 228.

parameters of the universe (that would take a whole book to explain), you might be omniscient.

To clarify one point: this is not an attempt to dismiss the theory of natural evolution out of hand, and we certainly do not deny that there is such a thing as adaptation in nature. Micro-evolution is demonstrably true, even if macro-evolution is still hotly debated. We are only saying that, even if macro-evolution were basically true, an intelligence is necessary to generate information such as DNA. God may have used evolution as a means in his creation activity, but non-intelligent causes cannot account for intelligent information.

The Moral Argument

The third argument for theism moves us from establishing the existence of the Creator of the universe and the Designer of life within the universe to the existence of a moral-law Giver. The *moral argument* for the existence of God reveals this God to be the standard of objective moral values and duties.

- (1) If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.
- (2) Objective moral values and duties do exist.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.

The first premise hinges on us being clear what we mean by “objective moral values and duties.” By *moral values* we mean whether something or some act is good or bad; by *moral duties* we mean obligations on how we should act and which actions are seen as either right or wrong. An example of a moral value is whether a human life has value in and of itself. Examples of moral duties are whether we should tell the truth or help someone in need. To be objective, these values and duties must not depend on our opinions but must have a source that transcends any single person or people group.

The second premise is based on the truth that some moral values are really objective. That is, they do not originate in the individual’s desires or likes but are discovered by thoughtful reflection on human activity. Though we may deny that there really are objective moral values and duties, our reactions to unjust situations demonstrate our deepest beliefs better than our rational discussions.

We may say that morality is subjective or individualistic, but we certainly don’t act that way when someone lies to us or cheats us. We don’t say, “That action

caused me some level of discomfort or unease.” We say, “Stop doing that; it is wrong!” We may say that telling the truth is relative to our needs, but that is until someone lies to us. By our reactions we are recognizing an objective moral law, not simply reacting to something we don’t like.

To take this one step further, if we assert that actions such as child torture are simply something we don’t like, on a par with our distaste for a particular flavor of ice cream, then our reactions to actual examples of child torture put this to a lie. Our reactions show that something really is objectively wrong with torturing children, not just an action that makes us uncomfortable. If one human activity is an example of actual, objective wrong, then we need to discover the source of the distinction between right and wrong.

What if the source of our morality is our DNA, programmed into us by evolutionary survival forces? Wouldn’t that make it seem objective? Those creatures who cooperated and shared survived better than those that were selfish. The sharing hominids passed on their DNA to their offspring, which we have now inherited. The problem with that explanation is, if the source is our DNA and we are biologically determined to believe as we do, then when we change our minds on a moral issue, has our DNA been altered? Certainly not. Isn’t it more likely that we have

moved from a simple reception of the moral norms of our childhood into a discovery of a real, objective moral truth?

If we say that our moral intuitions originate in culture, then by what right do we condemn other cultures for their activities, or even other people in our culture? If the Nazis of World War II were simply following the laws of their nation, by what right do we criticize, much less imprison or execute, some of them? What if they had won WWII? Would that mean that what they were doing was right? Certainly not. There are laws above the laws of any culture or nation. There is an objective moral law.

Therefore, there must be a moral Lawgiver. Now, this Lawgiver must transcend humanity (making the law objective) and must embody goodness and rightness (in order to be himself the standard of morality). This objective Lawgiver must be personal because only persons can have moral intuitions and discern between what is right and wrong. This moral Lawgiver sounds a lot like what we call God.³

³ Now God has no sex, but Christians refer to God as he because that is how he refers to himself in the Bible. We are simply showing respect for God by using the personal pronoun that he uses.

We have demonstrated in this section that there is a personal, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, necessary, all-powerful, all-knowing, infinite, transcendent Creator of the universe and all that is in it, and that this Creator is the source of moral goodness. This is another way to describe the God of the Bible, but it also includes the God of other theistic religions, such as Judaism and Islam. Still, to conclude that there is a transcendent, infinite, personal God is a critical step toward establishing the truth of Christianity.

After considering the question from several angles, it appears that the theistic God exists.

4. Miracles are possible

While the evidence offered so far supports theism, it can also support deism—the worldview that posits the existence of one God beyond the universe while denying that this God intervenes into the world through miracles. So to more firmly establish the truth of theism, we need to deal with the subject of miracles.

What is a miracle? Many people believe that the Scottish philosopher David Hume proved that miracles are not even possible. Let's start our discussion of miracles by

defining what we mean when we speak of miracles, and then examine what David Hume actually said.

The biblical description of a miracle is of an event which is not a natural event (supernatural), usually spectacular, which has the purpose of giving witness that a person is a prophet of God, or that a certain message is from God. A miracle, however, is not magic. Miracles differ from magic in at least two ways:

1. Magic (if it exists) would be a natural force, a hidden aspect of the physical universe that is accessed by a person through words or talismans for that person's use, while a miracle is a supernatural event caused by God for God's purposes.
2. Magic as a natural force does not have a purpose, while a miracle is an act of God to confirm a message or a messenger from God.

Here is David Hume's argument *against* miracles:

- (1) A miracle, by definition, violates the laws of nature.
- (2) The laws of nature have been established by "firm and unalterable [human] experience."

- (3) Therefore, “the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”

Let’s look at this syllogism a little more closely.

In his first premise, Hume has given a definition of miracles with which no traditional theist would agree. This is due to a distinction that theists make between God’s ordinary or regular activity in the natural order and his extraordinary or rare activity in the natural order. To theists, God not only created the universe but also maintains it in existence. That is, in each moment that the universe exists, God is holding it in existence. This is part of his ordinary or regular activity. You can think of it this way. Imagine a chandelier hanging from a golden chain. If you asked what is holding that chandelier up, I might answer, “The golden link that is attached to the chandelier.” Naturally, you would ask, “What is holding that link up?” and I could answer, “The link above it.” At some point, if the links are not tethered to something solid, something final, the whole apparatus would come crashing down. The chain cannot be infinite—it cannot go on forever without something holding it up, something anchoring it in some way.

In the same way, if each object in the universe did not cause its own existence, we must eventually reach an unmoved foundation, something that gives existence to everything else. The Ground of all existence we call God.

Since God is upholding the universe in existence from moment to moment, a miracle is not a violation of natural laws. After all, natural laws are simply a description of how the universe normally works—a universe that God brought into existence and designed. Miracles, then, are simply God taking a purposeful action in the world in a different way. Miracles are part of his extraordinary activity in the world. Therefore miracles are not violations of natural law. Hume's definition is incorrect.

Hume's second premise is that the laws of nature have been established by "firm and unalterable [human] experience." Of course, we usually see the universe proceeding in a routine way, but that is not always the case. There has only been one beginning of the universe and one origin of life. If we followed Hume's dictum too closely, we would have to deny those events! Such singularities are unrepeatable, and no human witnessed them, much less witnessed them over and over again so we could say we have a "firm and unalterable experience" that they always occur. And yet, we have plenty of evidence for their reality.

In addition, since humanity has only existed in the universe for the briefest of time, then how can an honest person call human experience “firm and unalterable experience?” Surely there is more in this universe than has been dreamt of in Hume’s philosophy.

Finally, Hume’s argument only works if we ignore the evidence for miracles, of which there is an abundance. There have been miracles attested by people of every education level or socio-economic status throughout the world. There have been several books written examining the evidence for miracles (especially biblical miracles) that you can consult before making your mind up, but in general remember this:

If the theistic God exists, then miracles are not only possible but likely.

5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God

Can miracles confirm a message from God? Let's look a little more closely at this issue. How can we know that a miracle is truly from God and not from another source?

In order for a miracle to be used to confirm a message from God, it must meet five criteria:

1. **The event must be truly supernatural.** No anomalies, magic, purely providential acts (that involve no supernatural intervention), or psychosomatic cures qualify as true miracles.
2. **There must be multiple miracles.** There should be at least two or more miracles. This is based on the valid legal principle that “the mouth of two or three witnesses” is necessary to confirm important matters (Deuteronomy 17:6).
3. **The miraculous events must relate to some truth claim in the name of God.** Biblically speaking, miracles usually happen in connection to some truth claim. Miracles do not happen for no reason, nor to merely produce terror or wonder.

4. **The miraculous events must be unique.** Similar unusual events associated with conflicting truth claims are self-cancelling. David Hume correctly argued that conflicting miracle claims of differing religions cannot all be from God. Hence, if one religion is to be confirmed as the true religion, then other opposing religions cannot have the same kind of alleged miracles in connection with their truth claims.
5. **A predictive element is helpful in confirming a divine claim.** Predictions made in connection with truth claims are helpful in confirming the supernatural nature of those truth claims. They eliminate charges from critics that the unusual event was not truly supernatural or that it might be false. A genuine miracle is not a fake or a fluke but a real event caused by God that occurs in the real world.

With these criteria in place, we can see that most miracle claims do not make the cut. Though there is a possibility that there are other miracles (and we do believe that there is good evidence for miracles outside of those recorded in the Bible), they are not what we are looking for in using a miracle to establish the truth of a religion. In the

Bible, Jesus performed many miracles and used those miracles as evidence that he told the truth about his mission. When challenged to prove that he had the authority to forgive sins, “Jesus said, ‘that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’” Jesus used miracles to attest to the truth of his statements.

Miracles are used to support the idea that a message from God could be from no other source.

6. The New Testament documents are reliable

Since we are talking about the truth of Christianity, the documents that record the origins of Christianity—namely, the New Testament—are important. Are the New Testament books a collection of fables? Are they even capable of being studied as a record of the real history of the time? Is there any evidence to support their essential accuracy? These are the important questions we will deal with now.

In order to be confident of the essential accuracy of the New Testament (NT) documents, we need to demonstrate that the earliest copies (manuscripts) are both plentiful and as near the time of original composition as possible. So how do the NT documents compare with other ancient documents? You might be surprised.

First, the scholarly consensus is that the NT documents were written between AD 40 and 95. When we look at the oldest existing manuscript copy from the NT, which is known as the John Rylands papyrus, it is dated from about AD 120. This fragment is from the Gospel of John, often dated to have first been written around the year 90 and considered to be the last of the four Gospels composed. This gap is fewer than forty years! No extant copies of books from the ancient world comes close to matching this short gap between their original composition and the copies we have found.

What about the sheer number of ancient manuscripts of the NT? In museums and other collections around the world there are kept more than 24,000 ancient manuscript copies of the NT. Of those, over 6,000 are in the original Greek—the language of the NT books.

How do these numbers compare with other ancient writings? Let's look at a table of the results:

Manuscript Evidence for Ancient Literature

Author and Book	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Gap	# of Copies
Thucydides (History)	460-400 B.C.	200 B.C.	200 yrs.	96
Herodotus (History)	480-425 B.C.	100 A.D.	500 yrs.	109
Aristotle's Writings	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	49
Homer (Iliad)	700s B.C.	400 B.C.	300 yrs.	1797
New Testament	40-95 A.D.	120 A.D.	30-50 yrs.	23,986

As you can see, there is really no comparison. The NT has far more documentary evidence than any other ancient

writing. The incredible number of copies and their close proximity to the originals provide abundant evidence that the NT documents in the Bible are reliable copies of the originals.

Of course, all copyists make errors from time to time, and not all copies agree with one another. These errors and differences are called variants, and they appear in copies of the NT. So, do they show that the NT is untrustworthy? No, they don't.

A variant is any difference between one manuscript and another. A variant can be a misspelling, the use of another word or another phrase, a change in word order, or even another sentence. It has been widely quoted that there are millions of variant readings among the many thousands of NT copies. How can we have any confidence that what we have now is what the writers originally wrote?

First, the numbers of variants can be very misleading. If a word is different in an older text, each copy of that difference in newer texts is counted as one variant. In other words, if the original text recorded "they went," and the variant says that "the apostles went," and this change is copied one thousand times into subsequent manuscripts, to a scholar that counts as a thousand variants. When we compare the older manuscripts to the newer, we can edit out

the errors that crept into the text. In this way, we can be very confident that our NT is a very accurate reproduction of the original writings. Some scholars have calculated that the NT copies are 97 percent accurate, meaning that just 3 percent of the entire NT is in question as to what the original actually said.⁴ Further, if we discount slight variations that don't change the meaning of any text, we possess at least 98 percent of the original NT documents.⁵

Furthermore, we can be certain that, just looking at the four Gospels and the apostle Paul's writings, we have at least 75 percent of those parts of the NT copied word for word in the letters of the early church fathers up to AD 325 when the church council of Nicaea convened. If we go out twenty-five years to 350, about 300 years after the first NT books were composed, then we have the entire NT in the works of the church fathers. In other words, if every NT copy suddenly disappeared, we would be able to reconstruct the whole NT just from quotations from other writers.

⁴ Christian Debater, "Bible Query from NT Manuscripts," November 2022, muslimhope.com/BibleAnswers/ntmss.html.

⁵ Christian Debater, "The Daughters of Allah," July 2010, muslimhope.com/ComparingTheReliabilityOfTheNewTestamentAndTheQuran.html#_Toc114381003.

What do the scholars say? Greek language scholar D. A. Carson said of the NT: “The purity of text is of such a substantial nature that nothing we believe to be true, and nothing we are commanded to do, is in any way jeopardized by the variants.”

NT expert Bruce Metzger reviewed the NT quotes in ancient church lectionaries and the writings of the early church fathers (patristics) and said: “if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, [the patristic quotations] would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.”

NT scholar and noted skeptic Bart Ehrman said in an interview about his differences with Metzger: “we are in complete agreement on a number of very important historical and textual questions. If he and I were put in a room and asked to hammer out a consensus statement on what we think the original text of the NT probably looked like, there would be very few points of disagreement—maybe one or two dozen places out of many thousands. The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Metzger’s position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”⁶

The New Testament we have now has been accurately preserved since the origins of the church.

7. In the New Testament Jesus claimed to be God

Christians have been worshiping Jesus as the Son of God for two millennia, but why? Did Jesus claim to be God? Did he ever say, “I am God, worship me?” Let’s take a closer look at what the Bible says on this fascinating subject.

The name of God as given to Moses by God in Exodus 3:14 is “I am that I am.” This means that God is the only being whose nature is to exist. Every other being has received existence, but God *is* existence. He is the uncreated fullness of being. It is from him that all else receives its existence, its being. God alone is self-existent. In the Greek

⁶ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), 51, 126.

translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint) in common use in the first century, that phrase from Exodus would be transliterated as “*Ēgó Ēimi*” or “I Am.”

In the NT when Jesus was questioned by a crowd to confirm his source of authority, one that could rival that of the patriarch Abraham, Jesus responded in a way that the crowd could not mistake as a claim to be deity. Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that before Abraham was, I Am!” The crowd’s reaction was to gather stones with which to stone him. This was because of Jesus’s blasphemy of claiming to be God almighty, the great I Am revealed in Exodus 3.

There are a multitude of verses where the attributes reserved for God alone in the Old Testament are applied to Jesus in the New. For instance, Isaiah 44:6 reads, “Thus says the LORD ... ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’” Yet in Revelation 22:13 Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.” The Bible affirms over thirty times that there is only one God. The only logical conclusion is that Jesus claimed to be the one and only God.

Isaiah 44:24 records God saying of himself, “I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.” Yet in

Colossians 1:16 we read of Jesus, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

John 1:1–3 and 14 clearly claim that Jesus is God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The divine Word became incarnate, deity enfleshed in humanity. And this Word was and is Jesus Christ.

A short table of Old Testament (OT) verses that describe some attribute of God, compared to NT verses that say the same thing about Jesus, further verifies the identity of Jesus with God:

Old Testament Verse	Attribute	New Testament Verse
Psalms 23:1	Shepherd	John 10:11
Joel 3:12	Judge	Matthew 25:31
Psalms 27:1	Light	John 8:12
Isaiah 43:11	Savior	John 4:42
Isaiah 42:8	God's Glory	John 17:5
1 Samuel 2:6	Giver of Life	John 5:21

As if further evidence were needed, on multiple occasions Jesus accepted worship—something only due to God (e.g., Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; John 9:38). These and so many other verses attest to the deity of Jesus, the unique Son of God.

The earliest Christians also recognized Jesus’s divine identity. In the early second century, Pliny, the governor of Bithynia (in modern-day Turkey), condemned Christians for offering worship to Jesus “as if to a god.” Ignatius, bishop of Antioch who was martyred around AD 107–110, said Jesus is the “the mind of the Father” and should properly be called “our God.” From this sampling, it is clear Jesus was understood to be God by Jesus’s own self-understanding, the witnesses to his life, and the earliest Christians.

Jesus claimed to be God!

8. Jesus’s claim to be God was confirmed by the resurrection

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Is there any evidence to support this Christian belief? In this section, we will examine some of the evidence for the death and supernatural resurrection of Jesus.

1. **Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection.** He did this on numerous occasions and said that his prediction was a sign or proof that he was telling the truth about his mission on earth (Matthew 12:40; 17:22–23, 20:18–19; John 2:19–22). Jesus said, “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).
2. **Jesus really died on the cross.** Though there is little controversy on this issue, there are still some who think that perhaps Jesus only swooned on the cross and then revived in the cool of the tomb. However, this theory fails for many reasons. First, the Romans were experts at death. The penalty for the guards who let a criminal survive a death sentence was severe, up to the forfeiture of their own lives. Second, the spear thrust into Jesus’s side and the blood and water flowing out ensured his death (John 19:34). There was a study of the crucifixion done in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1986 that confirmed the

certainty of Jesus's death.⁷ Finally, the idea that the apostles saw a crippled and emaciated Jesus after his recovery and called him the Lord resurrected in power is simply silly.

3. **The tomb was found empty.** There is little controversy on this matter as well. The vast majority of NT scholars accept the historicity of the empty tomb. Additionally, if there was still a body in the grave, then all the authorities who were trying to put down the new movement had to do was to point to his dead body. There is no evidence that ever happened.
4. **The apostles said that they had seen the risen Jesus.** The apostles said that they had seen the risen Jesus and had spoken to him and even eaten with him over many days and at different times. This could be taken as an expression of simple faith, but that fails to take into account how the apostles' lives changed. Before Jesus's crucifixion, the apostles were frightened, hiding to avoid punishment or death (cf. John 20:19 with Acts 17:6).

⁷ William D. Edwards et al, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255 (1986): 1455–63, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/403315>.

After they had seen the resurrected Jesus, they were willing to endure immense suffering and even death for their conviction of the truth of the new movement. Many of the apostles were executed over the next thirty years for their unwavering belief in what they had seen with their own eyes. The conspiracy of the Watergate scandal in 1972 in the US fell apart after only a few weeks because of the threat of prison, whereas the apostles of Jesus never recanted their stories no matter how much they were persecuted. *People will suffer and even die for a belief that they think is true, but there are no recorded examples of people dying for what they know is false.*

5. **James and Saul changed after their encounter with the risen Jesus.** James, the brother of Jesus, was a skeptic during the life of Jesus (Mark 3:21; John 7:5), but he eventually became the head of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; 21:17–18; Galatians 2:9). He even died for refusing to recant his testimony of encountering Jesus alive again after the crucifixion (1 Corinthians 15:7; Acts 12:1–2). Saul, later renamed Paul, actively persecuted the new movement of Christianity, which he saw as a dangerous cult. After his meeting

with the resurrected Jesus, his whole life changed (Acts 9:1–30). Paul also died refusing to change his account of the resurrected Jesus. Some critics have claimed that the original apostles had some psychological need or expectation to see the risen Jesus, but not these two skeptics.

As you can see, there are many strong reasons to accept the resurrection narratives of Jesus as historically accurate accounts of events in the first century.

If you are looking for an explanation that best explains all these facts, only the actual death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus fits.

9. Therefore, Jesus is God in human flesh

Since Jesus claimed to be God and proved it with his resurrection, he is God in human flesh. What does that even mean? How can a man be God? How can the infinite God be human? Let's look at these issues now.

John 1:1 it tells us that the Word of God was with God and is God. In verse 14, we find that God “tabernacled” among us, that is, God “pitched tent” or put on humanity to live among us. Now God cannot stop being God, as God’s nature is to exist. However, what God did do was to add a human nature to his own divine nature. In essence, Jesus is one person with two natures, one divine and one human.

In addition to the other passages we discussed earlier about the deity of Jesus, we should also remember that Jesus said all men should “honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (John 5:23). For a first-century Jewish man to claim that he should be honored the same way that God is honored is blasphemy—unless he is God incarnate. But what does the incarnation mean?

The incarnation (putting on of flesh) means that, as God, Jesus can perform miracles, raise the dead, and even forgive sins (John 11:38–44; Mark 2:1–12). But as a man, Jesus grew up (Luke 2:40, 52), got tired and thirsty (John 4:6; 19:28) and hungry (Matthew 4:2). Though Jesus was God, he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7), and even chose to suffer and die.

The Son of God voluntarily gave up the prerogatives of deity while on earth, humbling himself for our sake. The conclusion that Jesus is God is loaded with implications.

10. Everything that Jesus (who is God) teaches is true

Earlier we demonstrated that the God who exists must be timeless, omniscient (knows everything that there is to know), and morally perfect. This means that God must not only know what is to be but is incapable of lying or making errors of fact. Indeed, we read in Hebrews 6:18 that “it is impossible for God to lie.”

This makes logical sense. God, who is a perfect being, cannot change. This is because in order for a perfect being to change, he must lack something that he needs to gain or lose something that he has. But God is perfect. There is nothing that anyone can add to or subtract from him to make him better, much less worse.

This discussion leads us to the nature of evil. First, when the ancients discussed good and evil, they used the words in a slightly different way than we typically do. For them, something is good if it is what it is meant to be. Hence, to call your lunch a good cheeseburger means that the cheeseburger instantiates most closely to what a cheeseburger should be. If it is missing something—such as cheese or bread—then it cannot be a really good cheeseburger. It is lacking something it should have. This lack is referred to classically as a “privation.”

A shirt should have several holes in it for your arms, your head, and maybe for buttons. But if the shirt gets a new hole in it, such as a tear, it is no longer a good shirt. The extra hole is a privation in a good thing, and such a privation is evil. A privation is something missing that should be there or some malformation in an otherwise good thing. Notice, a privation cannot exist apart from a good thing. This means that evil cannot exist on its own, for existence or being itself is good.

Now let's return to God and truth-telling. God is perfectly and infinitely good and perfectly and infinitely all-knowing. In order for God to lie or make a mistake, he would cease to be a perfect being. He would have a privation—a lack of something (in knowledge or honesty)—and would

no longer deserve to be called God or even good. Therefore, by his very nature, God cannot lie.

Since Jesus is God and God cannot lie, whatever Jesus taught must be true. This being the case, we can now ask what Jesus taught about the Bible. For up to this point, we have only used the NT as a historically reliable source (based on good evidence) of what Jesus said and did. And as such, it informs us that he was confirmed to be God in human flesh. Now that we know who Jesus is and that his words do not err, we can ask what he taught about the Bible. Was it, according to Jesus, more than a historically reliable book? Was it the very word of God? We learn the answer to this next.

Since Jesus is God and God cannot lie, whatever Jesus taught must be true.

11. Jesus affirmed that the Bible is the word of God

In more than ninety cases in the NT, Jesus affirms that the OT is the word of God. He said “it is written” when

referring to the OT, which was a shorthand way to inform his audience that the OT is the word of God and therefore cannot contain errors. This is not to say that every copy and translation is perfect, only that the original manuscripts are without error.

In Matthew 5:17–18, Jesus explicitly says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the OT]; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law” (NIV).

Jesus also affirmed the OT in other places, such as Matthew 23:35 and Luke 24:27 where He says that the OT scriptures were written to point to Him. When speaking to the people, Jesus said, “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40). There can be little doubt that Jesus considered the OT the word of God which he fulfilled. But he did not stop there.

Not only did Jesus affirm the OT, but he promised the NT. In John 14:26, Jesus told his disciples, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of

everything I have said to you” (NIV). Here Jesus was promising that God would provide the means by which they would be able to accurately remember his words.

Jesus taught that the Bible is divinely authoritative (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). In John 10:35, he said, “Scripture cannot be broken.” Thus, Jesus taught that the Bible is infallible in the original manuscripts. It is historically reliable (John 12:40; 24:37–38), and it has ultimate supremacy over our lives (15:3, 6).

While our understanding of either the natural order or scripture may be in error, we know the two will never conflict because the Bible is the word of God, and God cannot be in error or untruthful; therefore, the Bible cannot err. Although the Bible records people telling lies and doing evil, it does not condone, much less advocate, for bad behavior. Jesus taught that the word of God is to be obeyed in all that it affirms.

The divinely inspired authors of the promised NT agreed. For instance, Peter called the writings of Paul scripture in 2 Peter 3:16. Paul concludes in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

Jesus affirmed that the Bible is the word of God.

12. Since the Bible is the word of God, anything that contradicts its teachings must be false

Though this statement is the logical conclusion of the rest of this booklet, it is not without controversy. In our day and age, to say that one religion is right and the others wrong smacks of judgmentalism and a superior attitude. In an age where religious choices are often made based on personal desires and psychological needs, the idea that one religion is right and the rest are wrong is almost hard to understand. Let's look a little closer at this divisive issue.

First, it needs to be said that the idea that the Bible is true and anything that contradicts it is false is not the result of the *attitude* of Christian believers. Though some may be haughty or arrogant, that is a condemnation of the attitude of the person, not the truth of their beliefs. Someone can be very kind and still wrong, or they may be very arrogant and still right. If your mom tells you that taking a certain home

remedy will lead to good health, she may love you with all of her heart, but she may still be wrong about the remedy.

As we have discussed, the Bible is the word of God and should be followed in all that it teaches. Any book or person who contradicts the Bible must be wrong.

A Friendly Suggestion

As we mentioned at the beginning of this booklet, we will close with a suggestion. Please think over what you have read, think deeply about those very challenging big questions of life. If you have found this booklet compelling, then please ask God for help in leading you to the next step. Perhaps you will read the Bible, find a pastor with which you can interact, or visit the websites or read the books listed at the back of this booklet. Many excellent resources are available that can help you overcome some nagging doubts or find sound answers to your serious questions.

As a final word: if we have convinced you that the Bible truly is the word of God, you must honestly read it to find what God is communicating there. Reason alone can only carry each of us so far. Biblical faith is not just knowing that God exists; it is an active trust in God and the authority of what he says. He says we are sinners deserving of

separation from him (this is spiritual death, the end of which is hell; Romans 3:23). We cannot reason our way to a right relationship with God. He must reveal the way to that restored relationship, and gratefully he has done that in the Bible. We must take him at his word. Jesus, the God-man, came to pay our sin penalty for us (Romans 5:6–11; 6:23) as the only means of reconciliation to God (John 14:6). By trusting in Jesus, we will be saved (Ephesians 2:8).

That is the gospel, the “good news.” It is true, and it is the greatest news of all (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). The God of all creation is sustaining you in existence at this moment to give you a choice. We know he is love and goodness, and he offers to restore your broken relationship with him so that you will one day know him as he is and enjoy him forever (1 John 3:2; Psalm 23:6). That is life’s true purpose. We come to God by trusting in Jesus’s death as payment for our sins and his resurrection as proof that we will forever live with him (John 3:16; Romans 10:9–13; 1 Corinthians 15:12–22). God takes us just as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way. From where we started, we can give God our lives to use for his glory (Matthew 16:25).

To summarize the gospel message, we must remember five biblical points⁸ that are planks in our bridge to our journey to faith in Christ:

1. I am accountable to my Creator in some way (Romans 14:12).
2. I not only don't measure up to God's standards (Matthew 5:48; James 2:10), I don't even measure up to my own standard (Isaiah 64:6).
3. I am a sinner (Romans 3:23).
4. I need an outside source for help (Ephesians 2:8 - 9).
5. I need what only Jesus can give (Romans 5:8, 19).

⁸ These five points (Five Planks) are part of the training materials for witnessing in David and Norm Geisler's book, *Conversational Evangelism*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2014).

If you haven't taken that step of faith previously, ask yourself, *What is keeping me from taking that step of faith right now?* Jesus reminds us to “seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). To go deeper in building an unshakable foundation for your faith, read Norm Geisler's book, *Twelve Points That Show Christianity Is True*, published by Norm Geisler International Ministries (ngim.org).

To learn more, read:

Twelve Points That Show Christianity Is True,
by Dr. Norman Geisler

A Prayer

Personal relationships involve communication. God has already broken the silence and reached out to us. We urge you to turn your heart toward him and talk to him. As you begin communicating with God, consider praying along the following lines in your own words. Please keep a few things in mind while praying this prayer. This prayer is not itself repentance, and praying it will not save you. Repentance from sin and trust in Christ must be lived out. Further, the validity of the prayer is not dependent on how you may feel while or after praying it. Lastly, this prayer is merely a model on which you can start communicating with God.

Dear God, I know you created this world and have made us in your image. But we have sinned and rebelled against you. Despite this, you loved each one of us—even me. You sent your Son to die for my sins. You raised him from the dead and will raise me from the dead someday too. I hereby repent of my sins and trust Christ alone for my righteousness, forgiveness, and salvation. Thank you for your great gift. I thank you in Jesus's name.

Please help me to know you better. And please teach me from your word, guide me in your work, and help me walk in your way. Amen.

Websites

Norman Geisler International Ministries

ngim.org

The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts

csntm.org

Cold-Case Christianity

coldcasechristianity.com

Cross-Examined

crossexamined.org

Stand to Reason

str.org

Bastion Books

bastionbooks.com

Norm Geisler Institute

ngim.thinkific.com

Norm Geisler Institute App

ngim.org/app

Books

- *Twelve Points That Show Christianity Is True*, by Dr. Norman Geisler
- *Risen Indeed: A Historical Investigation into the Resurrection of Jesus*, by Dr. Gary Habermas
- *The Case for Miracles*, by Lee Strobel
- *Cold-Case Christianity*, by J. Warner Wallace
- *Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis

12 Points that Show Christianity is True

1. Truth about reality is knowable
2. The opposite of true is false
3. The theistic God exists
4. Miracles are possible
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God
6. The New Testament documents are historically reliable
7. In the New Testament documents Jesus claimed to be God
8. Jesus' claim to be God was confirmed by the Resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God in human flesh
10. Everything that Jesus (who is God) teaches is true
11. Jesus affirmed that the Bible is the Word of God
12. Since the Bible is the Word of God, anything that contradicts its teachings must be false