

WHY DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST?

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What if you don't come from a Christian culture? How could it make sense for you even to consider becoming a follower of Christ? On the other hand, what if the Christian influences in your life have given you reason to doubt Christian beliefs? Or what if you believe in Christ but don't think you could give good answers if challenged by a nonbeliever?

Does faith in Christ make sense only if you want it to? Or is the evidence so strong that it doesn't make sense only if you don't want it to?

Our Daily Bread managing editor Kurt De Haan has spent many hours on college campuses listening to the questions of thoughtful skeptics. He has written the following pages to provide answers to those who are looking for evidence.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The official-looking letter announced that I had been selected to serve as a juror. Several weeks later, I dutifully walked into the courtroom and listened as the accused and the accuser argued the case. My job as a member of the jury was to weigh the evidence. What were the facts? Whom could I believe?

The lawyers used logic, presented physical evidence, offered eyewitnesses, and even made emotional appeals. Then it was up to the jurors. We filed out to a back room and discussed the case. Because the evidence was overwhelmingly one-sided, we quickly reached a unanimous decision. We walked into the courtroom and announced the final

verdict. Case closed.

If Christianity were put on trial and you were appointed a juror, what would it take to convince you of its truthfulness? Would you look for convincing logic, thorough documentation, positive impact on society, stirring testimonials? Could a verdict be given?

Before you examine the case, however, you would need to define clearly what's on trial. Otherwise you might prejudge it as true or false based on personal impressions instead of facts.

When you think of Christianity, do you think of:

- an irrational leap of faith?
- an intellectual or emotional crutch?
- something for “losers”?
- superstition?
- a bunch of do's and don'ts?
- a lot of rituals?

- fanatical, narrow-minded people?
- the high moral teachings of Jesus?
- one of many ways to know God?
- the only way to know God?

Dictionaries simply define Christianity as the religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* states, “At the very least, Christianity is the faith tradition that focuses on the figure of Jesus Christ” (Vol.16, p.251). Concisely said. But what are the key elements of that “faith tradition”?

Stripped of cultural additions, the core of Christianity includes beliefs about who Jesus was and what He has done. Christianity holds that Jesus was and is more than a man; He is God in human flesh. As the Second Person

of the triune God, He became a man, born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life, taught us how to please God, died on a cross to take on Himself the penalty for our sin against God, rose

—•—

If Christianity were put on trial, what would it take to convince you of its truthfulness?

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from the grave, appeared to hundreds of people, and then ascended to heaven. He did all this so that we might know God and live for Him now and with Him forever.

A prominent spokesman for Christianity in the first century put it this way:

I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He

was buried, and that He rose again the third day (1 Cor. 15:1,3-4).

The Scriptures and Christ go hand-in-hand. And followers of Christ accept the statements of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. They believe it is more than just a compilation of men's lofty thoughts about God. They believe the Bible to be the record of God speaking through distinct human personalities in a way that resulted in a document that accurately speaks for God.

Christianity claims continuity with the faith of the first man and woman (Adam and Eve), with Abraham and the people of Israel who carried on his faith, with the disciples of Jesus who saw Him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the sacrificial system, and with men and women of faith today who bow at the feet

of Christ as their only Savior and only hope of forgiveness of sins, and the One through whom they can know God.

What about you? Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? Do you agree with the above statements about the core ideas of Christianity? Or do you have serious doubts about whether it is all true? Perhaps you belong to another religious faith and you're curious about what Christians believe and why. Or maybe you have had a lot of Christian influence in your life but you now wonder if what you've been told is really true.

The following pages are for you, no matter how skeptical or how sure you are. I hope you will read these pages thoughtfully, search the Bible firsthand to see what it says, and examine your beliefs. You are the jury.

HOW CAN I KNOW CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE?

How do you know if *anything* is true? How do you know that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit? How do you know that woolly mammoths once trudded across our land? How do you know that cocaine is addictive? How do you know that Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin and died in a theater? How do you know that NASA astronauts walked on the moon and not on a back lot in Hollywood? How do you know that Japan's Emperor Hirohito died of cancer in 1989? How do you know that Julius Caesar ruled the Roman Empire?

In the above examples, the proofs and the methods of confirmation vary greatly. A scientific experiment in a

lab could confirm through repeatable experiments that water freezes at 32 degrees. Fossils and frozen remains are visible evidence that mammoths tramped around on earth. Physical and psychological testing confirms cocaine's addictive quality.

But when it comes to historical information such as Lincoln's birthplace and where he was shot, man walking on the moon, and Caesar's exploits, we cannot perform repeatable experiments. In those cases we have to rely on historical records, eyewitness accounts, and reputable historians who collected data.

Different types of situations require different types of proof. In some cases, scientific experiments are extremely valuable. In other cases, historical research must be used.

When it comes to testing

the claims of competing religious views of life and God, several key areas need to be examined. The following pages take a close look at Christianity according to five criteria. We will see if it presents a reasonable explanation for life as we know it. We will examine the reliability of the key Christian book, the Bible. We will take a look at the leader, Jesus Christ. Then we will study the origin and influence of Christianity. Finally, we will look at the effect that faith in Christ has on individuals.

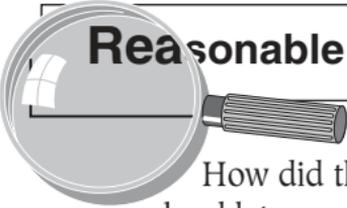
explanation that the booklet simply appeared one day out of thin air and you happened to pick it up? Would you believe that a creature from Mars designed the cover, or that the book was printed by a tribe of aborigines in a hut on the outback of Australia?

Excuse me for getting ridiculous, but I think you get the point. Just as a simple 32-page booklet has a reasonable explanation for its existence, so do our lives, our world, and human history.

Many religions offer explanations for our human

existence, the complexity and order of

the universe, the problem of evil, our religious nature, the purpose of life, our eternal destiny, and much more. Christianity's contention, however, is that it offers an explanation that fits life as we know it,



Reasonable Explanation

How did this booklet you are reading get in front of your eyes? Would you believe me if I said that Colby, my pet guinea pig, wrote it? Would you accept the

human nature as we know it, and God as He has revealed Himself.

Of course, it would take volumes to discuss these matters adequately. But at the risk of sounding simplistic, here's a brief summary of Christianity's answers to some of these issues.

Where did we come from? The Bible tells us that an intelligent, powerful, personal Being was actively involved in creating the universe. Does that fit life as we know it? Does life show design and order? Does human personality reflect a higher Personality?

The naturalistic explanation declares that time plus chance produced the complexity of the universe. But does that provide adequate answers? Even generous estimates of the earth's age do not include enough time for life

to evolve. Too many things had to happen in too precise a manner. Although many scientists propose naturalistic evolution, they do so because of their assumption that no supernatural being was involved.

Eastern religions lump people, animals, and plants into the same category—created by an impersonal god-force that pervades the universe—and minimize the great differences between them. Christianity, however, tells us that human beings are similar yet very different from the animals. People possess personality, self-consciousness, a spirit, and the ability to relate to God on a personal level. Human beings are qualitatively different from animals, plants, and rocks.

Where did evil come from? Some religious faiths describe a type of god who possesses

both good and evil elements. Other explanations have good and evil gods pitted against each other—with the outcome in doubt. Still other religions deal with evil by denying its reality; they say that evil is only an illusion.

Christianity, however, sees evil as an intruder in a good God's good creation. Evil came into the world through Adam and Eve's willing choice to rebel against God. They had that option because God wanted them to freely love Him—not because they were forced to love Him (Gen. 3).

According to Christianity, the choice for evil had a far-reaching and devastating impact on our relationship with God, our relationship with each other, and our relationship to the world. Instead of close fellowship with God, there has been estrangement. Instead of

harmony between people, there has been self-centeredness, conflict, and heartache. Instead of humanity working in harmony with nature, we have exploited our world. It's only by returning to a right relationship with God that our lives can reverse the effects of evil.

***“I believe in
Christianity as
I believe the sun
has risen, not only
because I see it,
but because
by it I see
everything else.”***

—C. S. Lewis

Christianity also offers an explanation for what God is doing about the problem of evil. Jesus Christ is central to the solution. The Bible tells us that Jesus

came to bridge the gap between a perfect God and imperfect people stained by evil (2 Cor. 5:19). God has not been sitting idly by while humanity goes from bad to worse. Jesus came into a world of suffering and evil to suffer and die for us. He came to free us from our personal bondage to evil, and to ensure that one day all evil will face God's perfect justice.

Why do people seek religious

answers? Our heart has a void that cries to be filled. Christians believe that because mankind was created to know and relate to the Creator, people will never be complete without Him.

So why doesn't everyone turn to the God of the Bible? Why do people turn to other gods instead? Part of the answer is that ever since Adam and Eve chose to go their own way instead

of obeying God, people have continued to choose to run their own lives (Rom. 1). People have created their own gods—deities that they can manipulate through magic or appease through rituals or self-sacrifice.

And Christianity includes another reason that so many religions exist—a spirit-being named Satan who is more than happy to offer substitute religions. He is called the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), the one who has blinded the minds of people to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4). He offers counterfeit spiritual experiences to those who choose false gods.

What is the purpose of life?

Christians believe that because man has lost his anchor in God, he has lost his sense of purpose. The author of the Old Testament book of

Ecclesiastes described the different ways that people try to find happiness. He was an expert on the topic because he had tried them all. That person was King Solomon, a man known for his wisdom, but who had tried many dead-end pursuits in life. He sought fulfillment through education, but all his learning left him empty. He sought pleasure through food, wine, sex, music, and things of beauty, but again he never got beyond superficial happiness. He tried finding the joy of life through hard work and materialism, but he realized they could not fill the void in his heart. Solomon filled his palace with 700 wives and 300 concubines, but they could not replace the Lord. Solomon concluded that a life that does not center around a relationship with God is empty.

Does it sound logical to you? Is

Christianity a reasonable explanation for the realities of life? Faith in Christ offers relief from the universal problem of sin and guilt.

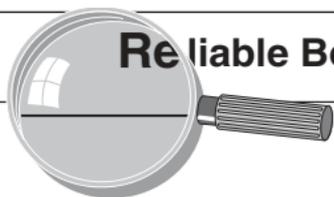
Jesus Christ offers to fill the God-shaped void in our hearts with Himself.

Christianity offers a basis for values and morality, and for knowing right from wrong. The biblical view of human history describes the moral deterioration of society (while allowing for much good), and the eventual return of Jesus to execute justice on the living and the dead.

But even the best-sounding and most reasonable human explanation is foolishness if it lacks a basis in spiritual reality. Christianity stands or falls on the credibility of its holy Book (the Bible), its leader (Jesus Christ), its community (the church),

and its practicality (as seen in the lives of individual believers). The next several pages will explore these issues.

(For more information on the biblical description of life's origin and purpose, ask for the RBC booklets: *How Can I Know There's A God?* and *Why In The World Am I Here?*).



Reliable Book

Supermarket tabloids do not have a glowing reputation for being reliable sources of factual information. For example, I remember seeing the headline: AMELIA EARHART FOUND ALIVE! The truth, of course, is that Amelia attempted a solo plane crossing of the Pacific in 1937 but disappeared. She was lost at sea and presumed dead. The

tabloid's story was probably interesting to read, but was it true? Highly unlikely.

What about the daily newspaper? Much more credible perhaps, but not infallible. What is printed one day may be (and sometimes is) corrected or retracted the next.

How can we test the reliability of the Bible?

What kinds of criteria can we use to

evaluate whether it's true? After all, if the Bible is not reliable, then how do we know what to believe about what Christ said or did?

The science of archaeology can give us a lot of valuable evidence, which will either confirm or contradict the biblical record. One hundred years ago, many Bible critics were trying to dismiss much of its history as the work of creative storytellers. But in this century, archaeological

finds have overwhelmingly supported the biblical data.

One case of archaeological evidence is a recent study of ancient Jericho, which concluded that the walls did tumble down as the Bible indicates. Archaeologist Bryant G. Wood of the University of Toronto said, "When we compare the archaeological evidence at Jericho with the biblical narrative describing the Israelite destruction of Jericho, we find remarkable agreement" (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, March/April 1990).

Sir William Ramsay, a noted archaeologist, was once skeptical of the New Testament book of Acts. He set out to prove the inaccuracy of the book but instead came away as an ardent believer in its great historical value. Ramsay concluded, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his

statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians" (*The Bearing Of Recent Discovery On The Trustworthiness Of The New Testament*, p.222).

This perception matches what Luke himself said about his methods. In the introduction to his record of the life of Jesus (Lk. 1:1-4), the author mentions his reliance on eyewitness testimony and his concern to present "an orderly account."

When were the Gospels written? It was once popular to assign the Gospels to the second century and charge that they were later compilations of oral tradition. Thus they were considered historically unreliable. But careful scholarship has pointed to early dates for the writing of

the entire New Testament.

Because of archaeological evidence and manuscript discoveries, we now have good reason to believe that most of the New Testament was completed between AD 47 and AD 70, and that all of it was completed by AD 95.

“It is my serious conclusion that we have here in the New Testament, words that bear the hallmark of reality and the ring of truth.”

—J. B. Phillips

An example of a manuscript find that has affected dating of the New Testament is the Rylands Fragment. This portion of John 18 was found in Egypt and has been dated about

AD 125. This find supports the view that the last gospel to be written had already been in circulation for many years.

Have biblical prophecies come true?

Christians say yes! The RBC booklet *Can I Really Trust The Bible?* states, “Some of the most dramatic examples of fulfilled Bible prophecy are those concerning Jesus Christ. Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 and Psalm 22, for instance, record specific details about death by crucifixion hundreds of years before this terrible form of execution was ever practiced. . . . Another example of fulfilled prophecy was the destruction of the city of Tyre. Hundreds of years earlier, Ezekiel had predicted that the city would be destroyed and the ruins scraped off and dumped into the sea, never

to be rebuilt (Ezek. 26). It happened exactly as predicted. . . . The predictions of the judgment of God against Nineveh (Nah. 1–3), Ammon and Moab (Jer. 48–49), Babylon (Isa. 13–14; Jer. 51), and Edom (Isa. 34; Jer. 49; Ezek. 25,35) were all fulfilled” (pp.22-24).

Does the Bible hold together? That is, does a collection of writings by 40 different authors from many different backgrounds and occupations, over about 1,600 years, in three different languages, and written on different continents, have a consistent message? Or is it a confusing jumble of ideas?

From start to finish, the Bible tells how God has been working out His plan to rescue people from the penalty and power of sin. He revealed Himself to the patriarchs, then to the

nation of Israel. He worked out His plan in Christ, in His disciples, and in the early church. And the last book in the Bible, Revelation, tells how God will complete His plan. From the symbolic sacrificial system of the Old Testament to the reality of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the cross, from the first chapters to the last, God is consistently described. This incredible unity points to the Bible’s supernatural origin.

Why is the Bible so consistent and reliable? For the answer to that question, let’s look at the Bible itself. Peter wrote, “Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). And to Timothy, Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16).

According to the Bible itself, therefore, it is not a compilation of men's ideas but God's. Even though God used men and their individual personalities to reveal His truth, the Bible professes to have but one author—God. That is why the Bible is so consistent and reliable from start to finish.

How do we know we have the Bible as it was originally written? Can we be sure that the book we read today has been passed along without tampering by special-interest groups, or without serious mistakes in copying? Textual scholars say that we can be sure we have a reliable copy.

The 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls (some dating back to before the time of Christ) gave dramatic evidence that the Old Testament has been meticulously and accurately copied for centuries. And

regarding the New Testament, Sir Frederic Kenyon, an authority in the field of textual criticism, stated:

The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world (*Our Bible And The Ancient Manuscripts*, p.23).

How have people and society been affected by the Bible? No other book has come close to making the impact that the Scriptures have. This number one bestseller for years has been looked to for guidance, comfort,

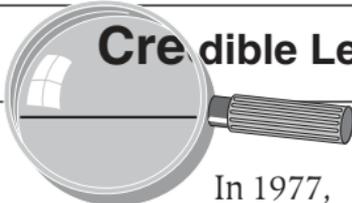
challenge, judicial equity, and wisdom. Its principles are timeless. Even those who don't want to believe its supernatural elements recognize it as great literature. The Bible's power has been recognized by tyrannical rulers, who banned it and sought to destroy every copy. Yet the Bible continues to pervade our world, in hundreds of languages, in nearly every society.

(For more on the Bible's reliability, ask for the RBC booklet *Can I Really Trust The Bible?*)

November 18, 1978, Jim Jones ordered all the people who lived on his commune to drink cyanide-laced punch. That day 913 people died, including 276 children.

Why do people follow leaders like Jones? How could they have known that their personable leader was mentally unstable—a wolf in sheep's clothing? For that matter, of all the world's religious leaders, how do we know whom to follow? Do Christians have any legitimate basis for saying that Jesus Christ has more

to offer than Muhammad, Maharishi



Credible Leader

In 1977, a self-proclaimed messiah and leader of the People's Temple in San Francisco led his loyal followers from California to a jungle settlement in Guyana, South America. On

Mahesh Yogi, or Sun Myung Moon? How can we know that Jesus told us the truth about God?

What do people say about Jesus? Most people, even if they are not willing to acknowledge Him as the Son of God, would say that

Jesus was a great moral teacher. Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948), for example, a Hindu and the father of modern India, wrote:

I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept (*Gandhi: An Autobiography*, p.113).

The heart of Jesus' message, however, was His claim to be the Son of God who took on human flesh to be our Savior. John Warwick Montgomery writes:

The earliest records we have of the life and ministry of Jesus give the overwhelming impression that this man went

around not so much "doing good" but making a decided nuisance of Himself. . . . Jesus alienated His contemporaries by continually forcing them to think through their attitude to Him personally. "Who do men say that I the Son of man am? . . . Who do you say that I am?" (*History & Christianity*, p.12).

When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" they answered, "John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again." When He then asked for their opinion, Peter spoke up and said, "The Christ of God." (See Lk. 9:18-20.)

Peter's statement was remarkable in light of the Jews' prevailing hope for a Messiah who would throw off Roman rule and

reestablish the greatness of Israel. The people were not expecting a meek and humble man who was more concerned with rescuing sinners than restoring a state.

Jesus drew followers, however, with what He said and did. Matthew said that “the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority” (7:28-29). The Bible also tells us that Jesus performed many miracles. These included healings, controlling nature, and raising people from the dead. Christ’s followers point to these remarkable demonstrations of power as support of His claims to be the Son of God.

Why did Jesus die?

Was He simply a martyr? Was He misunderstood? Was it a case of mistaken identity? Was He suicidal? Did He orchestrate His own death? Could He have

accomplished more if He had lived to a ripe old age and died naturally?

Jesus’ biographers tell us the reasons behind His execution. Matthew recorded that Jesus said,

—◆—
“I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. . . . In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?”

—John Stott
—◆—

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (20:28). His life was given as a sacrifice for us. Such a sacrifice was needed because all people have sinned, broken God’s moral

laws in action and in thought (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). And because God is holy and just, He cannot ignore our sin. But God stepped into history to rescue us from certain judgment. Jesus, God's Son, became human so that He could, as the God-man, take the penalty for our sin (Heb. 10:10). He did for us what we could not do for ourselves (Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 2:8-9). This may be hard to understand, but it's what Jesus and His followers claimed He was doing.

Some people respond to all this by saying, "Interesting claims—but how do you know it's true? How do you know that the death of Jesus on a Roman cross really made our rescue from sin possible?" For the answer, we must examine the resurrection of Christ.

Did Jesus rise from the dead? The apostle

Paul summed up the importance of the resurrection in

1 Corinthians 15. He said:

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (vv.17,19).

Obviously, however, Paul believed that Jesus did rise from the dead. In fact, he mentioned that hundreds of people saw the risen Christ. He wrote:

He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once . . . After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

The Gospel accounts tell us of the shocked response of Jesus' followers—even

though He had told them ahead of time that He would die and be resurrected. The reaction of one disciple in particular is worth special mention. After Jesus rose from the tomb and appeared to the other disciples, they told Thomas, but he didn't believe it. He said to them:

Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe (Jn. 20:25).

A week later, Thomas was with the disciples when Jesus came into the room. He turned to Thomas and encouraged him to touch Him. He said, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." To that, Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!" (20:27-28).

One very important evidence for the resurrection is the empty tomb. The enemies of

Christ could not produce a body to silence the claims. And it wouldn't have made any sense for Christ's followers to steal the body and then devote their lives to proclaiming a risen Lord—even if they could have gotten past the Roman guards!

The dramatic change in the disciples from hiding to boldly proclaiming Christ as a risen Savior, even dying for their convictions, has no other reasonable explanation than that they had seen the risen Christ.

What are our choices? Who was Jesus? If you don't accept Him as the truth, you must conclude that He was a phony, a madman, or that His disciples started the greatest hoax on earth.

Could He have been a deceitful phony? Could He have been merely trying to gain a following for some unknown reason? Think

about it. If He was, He certainly wasn't very successful—if you gauge success by power or financial gain. He turned many away by His high standards, and His unwillingness to overlook hypocrisy and halfheartedness. He didn't preach a popular message or promise instant fame and fortune. And He certainly wasn't tricking people to get their money. The evidence does not support the possibility that He was a charlatan.

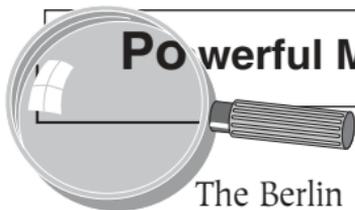
Could He have been a madman? Self-deceived? Sincere but deluded about His own identity? His words and actions do not reflect the behavior of a person who is mentally unstable. Such a charge against Him does not explain the miracles, the brilliance of His teaching, nor His resurrection.

Could the disciples have

been guilty of painting a picture of Jesus that was far bigger than life? It doesn't make sense that all the disciples would conspire to create a monstrous lie that would contradict what they knew to be true. Would you die for what you knew was a lie? The disciples wouldn't have either, yet most of them died as martyrs.

We have good reason to believe that the Bible presents an accurate picture of Jesus Christ. His fulfillment of prophecy, His impact on history, His life and teachings, and the response of His disciples all point to a conclusion that He was and is all that He claimed to be—the Son of God.

(For more information about Jesus, ask for the RBC booklets: *Who Is This Man Who Says He's God?* *Why Did Christ Have To Die?* and *Did Christ Really Rise From The Dead?*)



Powerful Movement

Christianity have such an explosive

The Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Its demolition was hailed as being symbolic of the failure of communism and the strength of a movement toward economic and social reforms. The movement against the repressive political system swept through Eastern Europe. In Romania, for example, the army joined the people in overthrowing a cruel dictatorship. Citizens spoke and acted powerfully.

Christianity is not a political or economic system, yet it has profoundly affected all segments of society. From its tiny beginnings in Jerusalem, it has swept throughout the world. Christianity continues to be a major movement today.

Why is that? Why did

beginning, and why did it sweep like a tidal wave across the earth? Why were the first disciples so bold? Why were people willing to die for their beliefs? Why has this faith affected present-day life so much? Let's examine these issues.

Where did Christianity come from? It was not a totally new movement. It didn't just pop up out of a vast void. Its roots penetrate deep into Old Testament history.

Christians see their beliefs extending as far back as the first man and woman, and continuing with the great men of faith in the early chapters of Genesis and with the Old Testament people of Israel. Jesus came to solve the problem created by Adam and Eve. He came to fulfill the prophetic symbolism of Old Testament

sacrifices. He came to offer forgiveness for our failure to measure up to God's commandments. He came to fulfill the prophecies of a coming Messiah who would take care of mankind's sin and usher in the kingdom of God. Jesus Himself spoke of fulfilling the Old Testament law and prophets (Mt. 5:17).

The apostle Paul spoke eloquently of this continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, as did the author of the letter to the Hebrews. But they also saw that with Christ came a dramatic shift. Jesus established the church, in which both Jew and non-Jew were united by their faith in Jesus the Savior-Messiah.

What does the church's existence tell us about the truth of Christianity? The church would not have begun if Christ were not credible. So much hinged on the

resurrection that if He had not really risen, the disciples would have walked away from it all. Their leader would have been a major disappointment. If He could not keep His word on the matter of His resurrection, then nothing He said about God could be trusted.

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*The church would
not have begun
if Christ were
not credible.*

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The church began only because the first followers of Christ believed their Founder was all He claimed to be. His early disciples would not have died for what they knew to be a lie. And they were too fearful and skeptical before they saw the risen Christ to concoct some crazy story

about a resurrection.

The church's continued existence down through the centuries serves to confirm Jesus' promise that nothing could destroy it (Mt. 16:18). The church's growth demonstrates reality, power, and believability. The church's indestructibility demonstrates the deep convictions of its followers and the power of God to preserve His church even when spiritual opposition attempts to overthrow it.

How has the church fulfilled its purpose for existing? Has the world benefited from it? Admittedly, individuals and segments within the church have not always followed or sought to fulfill the ideals of Christ. Such phony and hypocritical Christians are an embarrassment to the cause of Christ. Yet even the existence of hypocrites and self-serving professing Christians stand in stark

contrast to the real thing—believers with heartfelt devotion to Christ and His commands. Loyal followers of Christ have made a tremendous positive impact on our world.

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Loyal followers of Christ have made a tremendous impact on our world.
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Kenneth Scott
Latourette, a historian at
Yale University, wrote:

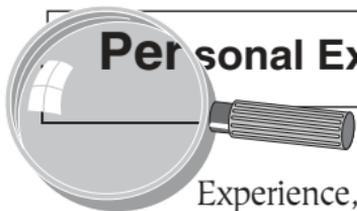
Across the centuries Christianity has been the means of reducing more languages to writing than have all other factors combined. It has created more schools, more theories of education, and more systems than has any other one force. More than any other power in history, it has impelled men to fight suffering It has built

thousands of hospitals, inspired the emergence of nursing and medical professions, and furthered movements for public health and the relief and prevention of famine. . . . Wars have often been waged in the name of Christianity. . . . Yet from no other source have there come as many and as strong movements to eliminate or regulate war and to ease the suffering brought by war. . . . The list might go on indefinitely. It includes many other humanitarian projects and movements, ideals in government, the reform of prisons and the emergence of criminology, great art and architecture, and outstanding literature” (*A History Of Christianity*, Vol. II, pp.1470,1471).

Another author added:

The obvious contributions of Christianity are only the tip of the iceberg. The real miracles are less visible but more widespread: the work of forgiveness and renewal that God does in hearts, families, and communities in countless unknown places and unremembered times. Renewal is possible because Christians believe God has started something in history that He will carry to conclusion, a mighty climax that will settle all debts and right all injustices (William Dyrness, *Christian Apologetics In A World Community*, p.82).

The powerful movement that has been labeled Christianity has profoundly changed human history. Such a movement points to the credibility of the Christian message.



Personal Experience

theory but don't work in practice?

Experience, all by itself, doesn't prove anything. A warm feeling in your heart, an ecstatic sensation, or a deep sense of peace and joy are not conclusive evidence. That is one reason this section is last. People from various religious groups claim to have significant experiences. Any experience, however, must be confirmed by other supporting data. But that is not to say that experience is unimportant. It's crucial when testing the truthfulness of the claims of any religious faith. What you believe should have confirmation in what you experience in life.

What good is a faith that doesn't make a difference in your life, a religion that doesn't work in everyday situations? What good are beliefs that sound right in

What good are beliefs that leave you feeling empty, joyless, anxious, unchanged in thinking and action?

What is the basis of Christian experience?

Jesus spoke of being "born again," but what does that mean? Does a person who chooses to put his trust in Christ feel and act like a new person? Are all his problems solved? Does he become perfect?

In John 3, Jesus talked about this issue with a religious leader by the name of Nicodemus. This man knew his Old Testament, and he had heard a lot about what Jesus was saying and doing. Out of curiosity, he visited Jesus one night. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v.3).

Nicodemus was

understandably puzzled by Christ's remark. He wondered aloud if being born again meant another physical birth, a sort of reincarnation. Jesus explained that He wasn't talking about a physical body but about being spiritually renewed by the Spirit of God. Man's problem is that he is spiritually dead, separated

—*“Christianity fails if it is not applicable to life on this earth.”*
—Josh McDowell

from God, because of sinful rebellion against God. A person who does not accept Christ's claims is on “death row” awaiting God's justice. (See Jn. 3:4-21.)

What every person needs is the forgiveness and new spiritual life that Jesus made

possible through His life and His death on the cross. Spiritual rebirth occurs when a person expresses heartfelt belief, trust, reliance on Christ as Savior and Lord (Jn. 3:16-18).

What changes occur when a person believes in Christ?

According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

A believer in Christ experiences a radical transformation at the very core of his being.

This transformation of spirit does not mean that a Christian suddenly becomes perfect in everyday life, or that he will never have any more problems. What it does mean is that when God looks at him, He sees a forgiven child of God who will one day be like Christ.

The many books and letters of the New Testament contain challenges to Christians to live out their faith. Christianity was never intended to be merely a “fire escape” from hell. By reaching out to Christ, we are rescued from the coming judgment. But being born again is only the beginning of a whole new life. Children of God are to grow up into mature men and women of faith. That process is often difficult, costly, and unrewarding by this world’s standards.

At the very least, then, Christian experience has at its foundation a life-changing, personal encounter with God through Christ. It involves a recognition that we need a Savior, acceptance of God’s gift of forgiveness (Eph. 2:8-9), and active trust in Christ alone as our only hope of being right with God now and living with Him forever.

How did the early believers experience the truth of Christianity?

The New Testament tells about people whose lives were transformed by their relationship with Christ. Here are just a few of the more prominent examples:

- Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Lk. 19:1-10)
- Nicodemus, a religious leader (Jn. 3; 19:39)
- an immoral woman (Jn. 4)
- a blind man (Jn. 9)
- the 12 disciples
- 3,000 people in one day (Acts 2:41)
- an Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-40)
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9)
- Cornelius (Acts 10)
- the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-35)
- several citizens of Rome (Rom. 1:8)
- idolaters, sexual pervers, thieves, drunks, slanderers, and swindlers (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

- Onesimus, a runaway slave (Philemon)

Is Christ still changing lives? Since the time Christ walked on this earth, millions of people have testified to the life-changing reality of Christianity. As we saw earlier, such experiences do not prove truth, but they certainly are strong support.

For many years, Paul Little was a spokesman for Christianity on college campuses in the U.S. and in many other countries. He wrote about the place of experience in his own life. He said:

Occasionally I ask myself, as I walk down the street, 'Little, how do you know you haven't been taken in by a colossal propaganda program? After all, you can't see God, touch Him, taste Him, or feel Him.' And then I go on to ask myself how I

know the gospel is true. I always come back to two basic factors: the objective, external, historical facts of the resurrection, and the subjective, internal, personal experience of Christ that I have known (*Know Why You Believe*, p.29).

Christians like Paul Little speak of the peace and fulfillment they sense when they have put their trust in Christ. They talk of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit of God, a subjective sense of the presence of the Spirit within (Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; 1 Jn. 3:24; 5:8-10). The common testimony of believer after believer points to the reality of what they are talking about.

What kind of Christian experience speaks most powerfully to nonbelievers? In John 13:35, Jesus said:

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

And in John 17:21, He stated:

That they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

These verses point to the importance of Christians showing love and unity.

If Christians are unloving, uncompassionate, selfish, argumentative, and divided, they contradict the Lord they say they serve. Nonbelievers won't be convinced of Christianity's claim to truth.

Apologist Francis Schaeffer wrote:

In John 13, the point was that if an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he is not a Christian. [In John 17] Jesus is stating

something else which is much more cutting, much more profound: We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians (*The Church At The End Of The Twentieth Century*, pp.138-139).

What about you?

Have you experienced what Christ can do for you? Read the next page for more on how you can know Him as your Savior and Lord.

(For more information on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, ask for the RBC booklets: *What Is A Personal Relationship With God?* and *Do I Have The Right Kind Of Faith?*)

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

No one can make you believe. The choice is yours and yours alone. Your parents can't decide for you, nor can your closest friends. A church leader or an evangelist is powerless to coerce a decision that must come from deep within your heart.

Belief in Jesus is more than just mentally acknowledging the truth that He is the Savior, the Son of God who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died as a sacrifice for our sins, and rose triumphantly from the grave. Belief involves entrusting our souls and lives to Jesus Christ. That happens when we accept God's free gift of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). To receive it, we must tell Him we need and want His forgiveness

and the new spiritual life He offers.

Take the step of faith—a step based on good reason—and tell God that you believe in His Son. Tell Him that you want the salvation He offers, and that you now acknowledge Him as Savior and Lord.

—●—

Belief in Jesus is more than just acknowledging the truth that He is the Savior.

—●—

If you want to know more about the person named Jesus, find a Bible and read one of the New Testament Gospel accounts of His life (such as the Gospel of John). See for yourself what it says about Him—what people thought of Him, who He claimed to be, what He did on earth, and what He can do for you.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

Archaeology: the study of ancient remains to learn about past history.

Bible: the collection of writings (from Genesis to Revelation) that is considered to be the words of God written down by men of His choosing.

Church: the sum of all believers in Christ, as well as a local group of believers.

Christians: people who recognize Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, who place their only hope of salvation on Christ's sacrificial death, and who trust Him to live His resurrected life through them.

Christianity: the system of beliefs based on the words and works of Jesus Christ.

Faith: an expression of trust in a person or object.

Gospel: the basic truths about Jesus and salvation.

Historical Proof: testimonies and documents that give a basis for conclusion.

Israel: the descendants of Abraham; also, the nation which is made up of his descendants.

Jesus: the Second Person of the triune God who became human in order to reveal God to mankind and provide a basis for forgiveness of sin.

Resurrection: the act of returning to life after death; the rising of Jesus from the dead.

Salvation: rescue from God's judgment.

Scientific Method: the process of studying the natural world and coming to conclusions based on repeatable experimentation.

Sin: disobedience, violation of God's moral laws.

Truth: that which corresponds to reality; facts.



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